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Promoting Diversity and Embracing Inclusion

At Bricker & Eckler, we characterize the real value of diversity and inclusion as the unique ability to think differently. We know diversity in backgrounds, experiences and perspectives enriches the quality of our work. Our differences enable us to evaluate problems in our clients’ industries from a fresh viewpoint and to be creative and collaborative in our approach.

In hiring and promoting people who are diverse, our firm has a strong history of groundbreaking diversity. Once people are here, we have always strived to cultivate a culture where they are valued for their contributions to the firm and its clients. We are committed to the proactive behaviors and culture that make every attorney and staff member in the firm feel welcomed, engaged and appreciated for their contributions.

It is these efforts and accomplishments we highlight in this report.

Bricker & Eckler’s Diversity & Inclusion Policy

At Bricker & Eckler, we believe our commitment to excellence is synonymous with our commitment to diversity and inclusion in all its forms.

This commitment requires thoughtful, deliberate and sustained action: If we are to maximize our abilities as a law firm, we must be more diverse and inclusive. Our commitment must be more than stated, it must be demonstrated in our work with one another, with our clients, and with our community.

We believe our people, and all the differences among us, are a tremendous asset that is the core of our success. We seek to treat people fairly and equally no matter what makes them unique, such as their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression; we seek to embrace multiple perspectives, backgrounds and interests in all facets of our community; we seek to cultivate an environment in which each individual feels safe, respected and valued.
Building a Diverse and Inclusive Culture

Bricker & Eckler has a long history of embracing different perspectives, experiences and talents. We recognize that an inclusive culture is the best way to serve our clients.

We believe that people who feel comfortable, appreciated and valued in their workplace tend to perform better and feel more connected to the goals of the organization.

In this report, we have highlighted the internal programs that help us create a welcoming, inclusive culture within our firm and the external partnerships through which we engage and support the community and share with others the value of diversity and inclusion. It is our goal to effect change, not only within our firm, but also in the legal profession, in our communities and across the country.

There’s always more work to do, but we are proud of the foundation we have built here. We hope you’ll read through this snapshot of our initiatives and let us know how we’re doing.

Diana Brown, Chair

Diversity & Inclusion Committee
Our Diversity & Inclusion Committee

Building a diverse and inclusive culture requires innovative leaders who have a collaborative spirit. Our Diversity & Inclusion Committee members understand the importance of raising awareness, informing and empowering our people, and creating connections with external organizations to encourage diversity and inclusion.
Our Affinity Groups

Walker Link Leadership Group

Bricker & Eckler was the first Columbus-based majority law firm to hire an African American lawyer, as well as the first to elect an African American to the partnership (Charles Walker). We were also the first to elect an African American woman to the partnership (Joyce Link). These two critical hiring decisions inspired the creation of the firm's Walker Link Leadership Group, an affinity initiative that strives to promote opportunities and improve the quality of work life for African American lawyers at Bricker & Eckler and throughout the broader legal community.

This group has been responsible for:

- Our annual Corporate Counsel Summit, a day-long forum for more than 75 in-house counsel to share best practices and hear from colleagues on diversity and inclusion in the profession
- Support of community organizations such as the John Mercer Langston Bar Association, the David D. White Scholarship of Capital University Law School, the Columbus Urban League, and the King Arts Complex

Women in Networking Group

The Women in Networking (WIN) group celebrates and encourages the talents, attributes and experiences that our women attorneys bring to the firm. WIN also provides opportunities for professional women to network and learn from each other in mutually beneficial ways and to support the needs of women and families in our communities.

This group has been responsible for:

- Periodic community-awareness charitable events allowing lawyers, clients and friends of the firm to participate in philanthropic activities and foster professional relationships with other local women
  - Educational opportunities including a “Breaking Down Barriers” program on cyber bullying, relationship violence and body image concerns, and “ROX on the Green” self-defense instruction
  - Support for the involvement of women lawyers on boards and community organizations
  - Support of community organizations such as the Ohio Women’s Bar Association and Foundation, Women for Economic and Leadership Development (WELD), and the Women’s Fund of Central Ohio
Leadership Opportunities

Corner Office Conversations

Corner Office Conversations is a quarterly series in which we host diverse and dynamic leaders from around the state to talk to our attorneys about their perspectives on leadership and their business. These events help our attorneys broaden their perspectives and enhance our ability to serve our clients.

During these intimate and informal conversations, our lawyers gather to hear general counsel, CEOs, other C-suite executives, and public officials share their stories, personal challenges and professional lessons learned during their careers.

Empowering Leaders

In 2018, our people have been recognized for their efforts in promoting diversity in the profession and their community, as well as for achieving excellence in their careers:

• Ali Haque, a partner in our Litigation group, is a board member and the current president of the Asian Pacific American Bar Association’s Central Ohio Chapter (APABA-CO). He is also the firm’s current fellow in the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) program.

• Pramila Kamath, a Litigation associate, is creating an exploratory group to establish a Southern Ohio Chapter of APABA. She was also elected co-chair/vice president of the Greater Cincinnati Minority Counsel Program (GCMCP) for 2019.

• Melissa Martinez Bondy, a partner in our Education Law group, is helping to lead a group exploring the establishment of a Central Ohio chapter of the Hispanic Bar Association.

• Lisa Kathumbi served as the first-ever African-American leader of the Ohio Women’s Bar Association in 2017.

• Sommer Sheely served as the president of the Ohio Women’s Bar Foundation and created the organization’s first-ever gala.

• Jason Stuckey is serving as the firm’s Pathfinder for the LCLD.

“Bricker has supported me in developing my reputation throughout my community, including encouraging me to participate in the Greater Cincinnati Minority Counsel Program (GCMCP). This organization has been a great platform for me to highlight my professional network and reputation in the Cincinnati legal community. I have interacted with general counsels and assistant general counsels of national and multinational corporations. Participating in the GCMCP has given me drive and confidence.”

– Pramila Kamath, Associate, Litigation Group
Our Talent Retention and Recruitment Efforts

At Bricker & Eckler, we are taking action to create an inclusive culture that values and celebrates the viewpoints and diverse backgrounds of our lawyers and professionals. As a firm, we participate in and offer a variety of mentoring and training, work/life balance, and recruitment and pipeline programs to ensure the culture within our firm and the legal community as a whole promotes diversity and embraces inclusion.

Work/Life Balance

Our attorneys have a number of alternative work arrangements to help lawyers with better balancing their career and personal lives. We offer job-share arrangements, schedule alternatives, a Part-Time Partner Track Associate policy, and one of the legal profession’s most generous parental leave policies, including a ramp-up, ramp-down component.

Recruitment and Pipeline Programs

Participating in pipeline initiatives allows us to help aspiring law students from all backgrounds fulfill their career goals. Our efforts in 2018 include:

- Our Charles H. Walker Fellowship Award for one law student each year.
- Participation in the Columbus Bar Association’s Minority Clerkship Program and the American Bar Association’s Business Law Section mentoring program.
- Recruiting from a variety of career fairs that attract diverse candidates.
- Hosting two interns through the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Law and Leadership Institute to help increase minority law school enrollment.
- Hosting an intern through the Summer Work Experience in Law (SWEL) program in Cincinnati.
Spreading Diversity & Inclusion
Our Community Involvement/Engagement

We collaborate with a broad range of community organizations that value diversity and inclusion as much as we do.

The Bricker & Eckler Diversity & Inclusion Committee actively participates in many associations and organizations including:

• The Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), an organization of more than 200 corporate chief legal officers and law firm managing partners who have dedicated themselves to creating a truly diverse U.S. legal profession, including the LCLD Fellows program. Bricker was awarded a 2018 Compass Award for outstanding members supporting the LCLD’s mission and programs.

• The Greater Cincinnati Minority Counsel Program (GCMCP) as it increases the amount, value and significance of corporate legal work performed by minority lawyers.

• The Asian Pacific Bar Association of Central Ohio (APABA-CO) in its efforts to promote professional development, leadership, advocacy and community involvement by and among Asian Pacific lawyers and law students in Central Ohio.

• The firm’s Diversity & Inclusion Committee hosted “Visions of Hope,” an art exhibit curated by Southeast Healthcare Services’ Fresh Air Gallery (Artists in Recovery) especially for Bricker & Eckler. The two-month exhibit at the firm’s Columbus office featured works created by individuals affected by mental illness and substance use disorders.

Bricker & Eckler is one of the original participating firms in the Columbus Bar Association’s Managing Partners’ Diversity Initiative, a unique collaboration launched in 2001 by 22 law firms, the Columbus Bar Association, the John Mercer Langston Bar Association, the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, and Capital University Law School.
Looking Ahead
Building Strategies for Inclusion

While diversity and inclusion go hand-in-hand, inclusiveness embraces the behavioral and structural changes needed to make everyone in the organization not only feel valued and appreciated, but also to engage with and contribute to the progress of the firm.

While we have steadily improved our diversity retention and recruitment strategies over the years, we have more work to do. At Bricker & Eckler, we realize that promoting diversity and achieving an inclusive culture is an ongoing effort that requires support from our firm’s leadership and an unwavering commitment from our lawyers and staff to promote diversity and embrace inclusion. As we look ahead, we remain confident in our ability to move beyond the traditional diversity strategies and develop innovative and forward-thinking initiatives to achieve inclusiveness.

Think. Live. Engage.
Bricker & Eckler is a leading Midwest law firm with offices throughout Ohio and clients across the country. We have a strong focus on our clients' industries, particularly Health Care, Energy & Public Utilities, Financial Services & Insurance and the Public Sector. Bricker attorneys are client-focused and understand the client's business, industry and measures of success, earning a strong reputation for exceptional service. We address our clients’ aspirational goals and needs with multi-disciplinary teams of attorneys including the sophisticated litigators, transactional and government/regulatory attorneys our clients rely on.