Mitigating the Disparate Impact of COVID-19: Global Law Firm DLA Piper Partners with Ascend to Make a Difference Through Enhanced Pro-Bono Work and Diversity Initiatives

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- Law Office Management
- Coronavirus News
- All Federal

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While the COVID-19 pandemic dominates the news and devastates the economy worldwide, the impacts have inarguably been disproportionate. Minority communities are suffering higher rates of infection and hospitalization and greater economic impact, as well as a lessened ability to access the loans and other aid designed to assist in this unprecedented crisis. DLA Piper, a global law firm with offices in over 40 countries across the globe, has joined a group of over 100 corporations and partners, taking steps in a coordinated way to provide assistance to those hit hardest by COVID-19 and its ancillary effects.

In an effort to counter this disparate impact on minority communities, Ascend, the largest, non-profit Pan-Asian organization for business professionals in North America, has joined with 10 groups with diversity and inclusion missions to create and promote a 5-Point Action Agenda encouraging companies to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19. DLA Piper has signed on to support this
For participating companies, Ascend’s 5 point action agenda includes the following foundational principles:

- **Promote Inclusion:** Advocate for a diverse and inclusive workplace and society
- **Raise Awareness:** Highlight the unique impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups
- **Denounce Bias:** Encourage individuals to report virus-linked discriminatory acts against Pan-Asians and others in the workplace and in public
- **Support Community:** Volunteer time and knowledge to aid frontline and COVID-19 victims and families
- **Donate:** Contribute funds to support vulnerable communities and businesses negatively impacted

**Fenimore Fisher,** Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer with DLA Piper, points to media reports on the unequal impact COVID-19 is having on minority groups and underserved communities as a major motivator for DLA Piper to get involved. He says, “DLA Piper, like many in the legal profession and across other sectors, must learn from the disproportionate impact that the recession had on diversity gains in the workplace. We believe there is a need right now to stand with the more than 100 corporations and organizations to communicate this commitment.”

DLA Piper is working to support the 5-Point initiative in a variety of ways. Through pro-bono efforts, the firm is working to support the greater community. Fisher says:

We are helping our long-term partner, the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, D.C., to facilitate new partnerships with local businesses and government to procure food and help the food bank to apply for the Payroll Protection Act. In Chicago, DLA Piper is working with The Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing (LCBH) to provide free legal and supportive services to lower-income renters and those who are struggling to deal with renter's rights at this uncertain time, particularly in circumstances of lost employment.

DLA Piper has a strong track record when it comes to the first action item on the agenda--supporting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Last year, the firm announced it achieved Mansfield 2.0 Certified Plus status by considering a diverse pool of candidates (at least 30% from a diverse category) and by achieving 30% actual representation of women, lawyers of color and LGBTQ+ lawyers in key leadership roles, partner promotions and lateral hires. **DLA Piper was one of 51 law firms across the country to attain this status and has recently registered as a Mansfield 2021 participating firm.**

Fisher indicates DLA Piper will keep its commitment to the D&I initiatives important to DLA Piper’s culture, throughout the storm that is COVID-19. Through a partnership with **NYU’s Center for Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging,** DLA Piper is training attorneys to address bias in the workplace to support inclusion and
allyship. To date, more than 2,000 attorneys have participated in the training led by Professor Kenji Yoshino. Additionally, DLA Piper supports the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity’s LCLD pipeline programs and Charting your Own Course’s CYOC mentoring efforts for associate attorneys. DLA Piper has also developed partnerships with diverse bar associations and professional organizations as a way to denounce bias in the industry.

DLA Piper, through the support of the 5 Point Action Agenda, hopes to mitigate in some part the negative impact of COVID-19. Fisher says, “As the virus and its effects evolve, we will continue to support vulnerable communities using our resources and expertise to ease the burden it has caused.”

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