



## New data shows little change in number of minority attorneys

*Data shows disconnect between employment, law school enrollment*

By: Thomas Franz in News Stories September 6, 2017

A recent survey of more than 300 law firms nationwide indicated that there has been minimal change in the number of minority attorneys in law firms.

The American Bar Association cited the results of a Law360 survey which showed that nearly 85 percent of lawyers in law firms are white.



It showed that 15.3 percent of lawyers and 8.8 percent of partners identify as a minority.

Among minorities, African-Americans are the least represented group with only 3 percent of lawyers, while 3.6 percent identify as Hispanic and 6.8 percent as Asian-American.

At the same time, the ABA has reported that minority law school enrollment is now more than 30 percent, and African-Americans made up nearly 9 percent of law students last year.

Those figures have caused law schools and firms to analyze why there remains a disconnect between enrollment and employment for minorities.

### Law firm perspective

Damali A. Sahu is a member at Bodman PLC in Detroit. She also co-chairs Bodman's Diversity Committee.

Sahu said that especially in Detroit, there is plenty of potential for diverse candidate pools, but the main issue impacting the number of minorities in law firms is retention.

"I think part of the issue may be longer-term retention. I don't know if the turnover is just related to attorneys of color. I think retention is an issue across the board for all law firms, but I think if there's been a reason for the disconnect, it is looking down the line at the retention issue," Sahu said.

Sahu said Bodman typically has diverse classes of summer associates each year, and the firm also partners with the Wolverine Bar Association program which pairs law students of color who just finished their first year of law school with law firms for summer positions.

"We have pretty diverse classes, and we hire a pretty diverse group of law students every year," Sahu said. "I think the long-term issue is one of retention, which cuts across the different groups of attorneys."

As for reasons for retention being an issue for minority lawyers, Sahu said there isn't a singular answer.

"I think it's a question that we all struggle with. I don't know if there's one answer. Sometimes it's changes in family structure or sometimes it's the desire to practice in a smaller environment. It's hard to categorize the reasons why people leave, but I think it's important for us to make sure that we're always doing the things that we can do to create an inclusive environment," Sahu said.

To promote inclusiveness, Sahu said Bodman offers diversity inclusion workshops twice a year, in addition to several other events.

"We have an active diversity committee, and we're always thinking of ways to create an environment that everyone feels comfortable in. We throw a lot of ideas against the wall and see what sticks," Sahu said. "We try to think of ways to do things differently."

## Law school perspective

At the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, the 2017 incoming class is much more diverse than the 30-percent national average.

Just less than 54 percent of incoming students are white, while 24.8 percent identified as Arab-American, 7.4 percent as African-American, 5 percent as Asian, and 5.8 percent as two or more races.

Jennifer Rumschlag, the assistant dean of career services and outreach at UDM, said progress has been slow in getting more diversity in firms, but they continue to strive for improvement.

“It’s not enough to admit and hire minorities. The whole organization must be committed to their long-term success, as minorities encounter more barriers, including a higher likelihood of lack of prior exposure to the legal profession, bias and isolation,” Rumschlag said.

Rumschlag said promoting diversity in law firms begins with the school’s work before students start law school.

“We are the first gatekeeper to the legal profession,” Rumschlag said. “We partner with pipeline programs to increase engagement among minority students from an early age. For students who we identify as having strong potential for success, we offer a summer program aimed to allow them to enter law school well-prepared and on equal footing with their peers.”

Rumschlag added the school’s leadership team has prioritized diversity in faculty and administrative hires, and has reached out to many branches of the Detroit community for advice on increasing diversity in the legal profession.

“Because we recognize that changing the face of a profession requires input from all members of the profession, our dean has utilized her advisory board, for counsel on how we can best contribute to this effort,” Rumschlag said. “Our dean has also prioritized diversity in our recent hires and adjunct recruiting, so that our students see their diversity reflected in our faculty.”

*If you would like to comment on this story, email Thomas Franz at [tfranz@mi.lawyersweekly.com](mailto:tfranz@mi.lawyersweekly.com).*

Tagged with: AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY LAW FIRMS

## ABOUT THOMAS FRANZ

---



**WEEKLY LITIGATION & CORPORATE LEGAL NEWSLETTERS**  
Best Practices • Trends • Industry News & More  
Sign up to get them here.  BRIDGETOWER MEDIA™

Copyright © 2017 Michigan Lawyers Weekly

P.O. Box 70388

Rochester, MI 48307

(800) 678-5297 fax: (248) 865-3117

