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## "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion"—Catchy Slogans and Buzzwords with Little Proof That They Matter to the Legal Profession in Massachusetts!

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# “DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION”— CATCHY SLOGANS AND BUZZWORDS WITH LITTLE PROOF THAT THEY MATTER TO THE LEGAL PROFESSION IN MASSACHUSETTS!

SHERIECE M. PERRY\*

**Abstract:** Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants dedicated his life and much of his work on the bench of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court to racial equity and justice. Sheriece Perry credits the late Chief Justice with his support of the Supreme Judicial Court’s Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being, and discusses the work this committee has done since his passing. Principally, the committee issued a Town Hall Report in February 2021 that revealed a disappointing underrepresentation of women and people of color among Massachusetts attorneys. Diversity, equity, and inclusion, Perry explains, have become buzzwords in society and the workplace, but the Town Hall Report proves that these slogans do not guarantee meaningful change. Perry uses her own story to illustrate the particular challenges women of color face as attorneys. She tethers her personal narrative and the current crisis of racial inequity to the ongoing legacy of Chief Justice Gants, who believed in real, practicable reform to attack injustice—not just lip service.

## INTRODUCTION

So much of who we are is defined by our physical traits, our beliefs, our identities, our ideologies, our upbringings, and our accomplishments. For years, I have seen “diversity, equity, and inclusion” all over websites, in news articles, and promoted by employers. But when I start to dig deeper into the data, there has only been incremental changes in diversity statistics, organizations are still largely white male dominated, attorneys from underrepresented populations are still feeling overlooked, undervalued and unincluded, and it begins to become clearer to me that the “check-the-box” model is still the measure of accountability. All of this causes me to wonder, do the very institutions that profess a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion actually know what this means, practically speaking? When will we come to a point

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where the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is no longer performative lip service and people are moved to action? When will leadership engage in the hard work of doing what is right, and not what is easy and comfortable? It is 2021, and it is baffling to me that so little has changed since I was a teenager on the mock trial team in the 1990s, thinking about becoming a lawyer. Although I am grateful for the many steps forward, twenty-one years since I embarked on a journey to be the change I wished to see, I still have feelings of hopelessness when I think about equity and the legal profession.

## I. LACK OF DIVERSITY IN THE MASSACHUSETTS BAR

In February 2021, the Supreme Judicial Court's Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being issued a Town Hall Meeting Report (Town Hall Report).<sup>1</sup> This report was a telling reminder that despite employers in the legal profession's use and promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, the experience of attorneys from underrepresented populations is still strikingly different than those of their white heterosexual counterparts. I believe the Town Hall Report also provides experiential documentation that the Massachusetts legal profession is still light years away from creating equity in this profession. It also raises the question of how much diversity, equity, and inclusion really matters to the Massachusetts legal community. In the absence of documented transformative culture change within these institutions, it appears that diversity, equity, and inclusion (does not) matter to the legal profession in Massachusetts. This assessment is based on incremental changes in percentages of women and ethnic minority associates and partners at firms, low percentages of non-white male judges and clerks, and *still* overwhelmingly white male dominated bar associations.

The National Association of Law Placement's *2020 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms* shows that women and people of color continued to make incremental progress in representation at major U.S. law firms. The report shows the painful truth is that both women and partners of color remain substantially underrepresented in the partnership ranks nationwide:

Women grew from 46.8% of all associates in 2019 to 47.5% in 2020 and associates of color grew from 25.4% of all associates in 2019 to 26.5% in 2020. At the partnership level, the share of women grew

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<sup>1</sup> MASS. SUPREME JUD. CT. STANDING COMM. ON LAW. WELL-BEING, REPORT SUMMARIZING AFFINITY BAR TOWN HALL MEETINGS (2021), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e6d105ff4b7d15cf766c1e1/t/601c1f4150b47a206f84de37/1612455745353/Affinity+Bar+Town+Hall+Report+2021.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/K799-9G2Q>].

from 24.2% in 2019 to 25.1% in 2020 and partners of color increased from 9.6% of all partners in 2019 to 10.2% in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

In diving deeper into the Town Hall Report, and coupling it with diversity statistics of the Massachusetts Trial Court, it is apparent that a significant amount of change is needed to address the striking inequities that exist.<sup>3</sup> It is also important to recognize that the public’s trust and confidence in the legal system is rooted in them seeing people within the legal system that look like them, and further that they understand the challenges that exist within the communities and cultures of the public that walk through the court doors daily.

The data that is available provides proof that the Massachusetts legal profession is not diverse and is predominately lead by white men. The minimal changes annually provide further proof that little is changing within the profession. This brings us back to the goals of the Town Hall Report, and how it came about.

The late Chief Justice Ralph Gants cared about many things during his tenure as the Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, but he cared deeply about addressing equity and the legal profession. He wholeheartedly believed that our legal system benefited from having attorneys from underrepresented backgrounds, and he appreciated the lived experiences these lawyers brought to the profession. He, however, was frustrated by the current lack of diversity in the profession and what appeared to be an inability to progress towards a more inclusive and diverse profession. His frustration caused him to engage in conversations to identify the issues, bring affinity bar stakeholders together, ask really hard questions, and give people assignments. Although Chief Justice Gants never had the chance to read the Town Hall Report, my guess is he would have been mortified. But he would have also used the opportunity to move people to action.

The experiences of lawyers and judges were always at the forefront of Chief Justice Gants’s mind, and every chance he had to speak about them, he did. During the Annual State of the Judiciary Address he delivered on October 30, 2019, Chief Justice Gants stated: “[L]awyers are so fundamental to our

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<sup>2</sup> *Representation of Women and People of Color in U.S. Law Firms in 2020*, NALP (June 2021), <https://www.nalp.org/0621research> [<https://perma.cc/4MV8-5C2Z>].

<sup>3</sup> Taking a look at local statistics in the Massachusetts judiciary in 2020, of the eight trial court chief justices only one is racially or ethnically diverse and only three are women; of the 355 justices, 39 are racially and ethnically diverse, and 156 are female; of the 87 clerk magistrates/recorders, four are racially and ethnically diverse, and 25 are female; and of the 438 assistant clerks, judicial case managers, assistant judicial case managers, assistant registers and deputy recorders 56 are racially and ethnically diverse, and 232 are female. PAULA M. CAREY, CHIEF J. OF THE TRIAL CT., JONATHAN S. WILLIAMS, CT. ADM’R, ANNUAL DIVERSITY REPORT: MASSACHUSETTS TRIAL COURT 6 (2020), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-trial-court-annual-diversity-report-fiscal-year-2020/download> [<https://perma.cc/57EZ-MDG3>].

legal system that when lawyers are under stress, our legal system is under stress.”<sup>4</sup>

With Chief Justice Gants’s support, the Supreme Judicial Court Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being has forged ahead with the fundamental goal to:

[E]ffect real, meaningful change in the profession to not only ensure that systemically oppressed legal professionals in Massachusetts receive equal treatment, but that they receive the support they need to achieve equitable access to and success in the profession, and that the barriers, challenges and slights they face every day are reduced, mitigated and, ultimately, eliminated.<sup>5</sup>

The Town Hall Report was one significant accomplishment of the Standing Committee. The second accomplishment was requiring the Board of Bar Overseers to collect more information about the composition of the Massachusetts bar, including where lawyers practice law, what types of law they practice and demographic information about bar members.

Attorneys from underrepresented populations often hear common phrases such as “change takes time” and “we are making progress.” They are tired of hearing these common phrases and they are tired of being uncomfortable while their white heterosexual counterparts move along comfortably within the profession. Chief Justice Gants most recently took the initiative in 2020 and reminded us that members of the bar and judiciary must do more than provide lip service and express feelings of sadness and anger: this was a time not just of reflection, but of action. He challenged judges to look at what they are doing (or failing to do), to root out any conscious and unconscious biases in our courtrooms. He challenged lawyers to look at what they are doing (or failing to do), to diminish the economic and environmental inequities arising from race and to ensure that law offices not only hire attorneys of color, but also welcome them into the legal community.<sup>6</sup>

I personally believe that many lawyers and leaders in the legal profession were moved by the events of 2020 and the so-called “racial awakening” that exposed the nation to issues that impact Black and Latinx communities. Despite the “awakening,” equity issues have long existed and will require more

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<sup>4</sup> Ralph D. Gants, Chief J., Mass. Supreme Jud. Ct., Annual Address: State of the Judiciary 2–3 (Oct. 30, 2019), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2019-state-of-the-judiciary-address-by-sjc-chief-justice-ralph-d-gants/download> [<https://perma.cc/2Q32-DGFY>].

<sup>5</sup> *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement*, LAW. WELL-BEING MASS., <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/dei-statement> [<https://perma.cc/P628-XWU4>].

<sup>6</sup> Letter from the Seven Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court to Members of the Judiciary and the Bar (June 3, 2020), <https://www.mass.gov/news/letter-from-the-seven-justices-of-the-supreme-judicial-court-to-members-of-the-judiciary-and> [<https://perma.cc/7F4A-S4CD>].

than an awakening or performative equity initiatives. Unfortunately, leaders of predominantly white organizations have invested the most effort in hiring a chief of diversity. The challenge is that the chief of diversity is usually the one and *only* person of color in executive leadership. They are one person who is expected to change a culture that has resulted in generations of racist, oppressive, and suppressive behavior. Even with their position and obligations within their role as chief of diversity, they are met with resistance by the employees and leadership. They often have little authority, and they are regularly undermined. These experiences are then coupled with the diversity officer’s own experiences with implicit biases, unconscious biases, and microaggressions.

The same rings true for so many lawyers of diverse backgrounds, including diversity in race, gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation, sexual identity and socio-economic status. Employers in the legal profession often profess their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion—they aggregate the data and essentially “check the box.” They focus on diversity but forget about equity and inclusion. They pat themselves on the back because they have hired attorneys from diverse backgrounds, but are rarely concerned about the experience of those same attorneys who are often met with passive aggressive and offensive comments about their race, gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation or sexual identity.

For example, employers in the legal profession sponsor affinity bar association events annually, but their numbers of attorneys from diverse backgrounds do not increase, nor do the numbers of partners from racial or ethnic backgrounds. For the few attorneys from underrepresented populations who have reached the promised land of executive level leadership, the experiences of how they got there is often untold, but are filled with tears, trauma, exhaustion, self-sacrifice, familial sacrifices, biases, and feelings of being invisible and under-valued. Many others leave Massachusetts in search for more inclusive opportunities in other states.

Far too often, employers feel obligated to increase their “diversity numbers,” but fail to create a culture of inclusion. Employers do not entirely understand that there must be a more intentional shift in culture, and it is not enough to hire attorneys from underrepresented populations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Artika R. Tyner, *Unconscious Bias, Implicit Bias, and Microaggressions: What Can We Do About Them?*, AM. BAR ASS’N (Aug. 26, 2019), [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/gpsolo/publications/gp\\_solo/2019/july-august/unconscious-bias-implicit-bias-microaggressions-what-can-we-do-about-them/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/gpsolo/publications/gp_solo/2019/july-august/unconscious-bias-implicit-bias-microaggressions-what-can-we-do-about-them/) [https://perma.cc/23AR-26HK]. Artika Tyner emphasizes that, “[D]iversity and inclusion work requires organizational mission alignment, clear vision integration, strategic planning, commitment, accountability, and resource allocation that involves the entire team. . . . To create this type of atmosphere in our bar associations, law firms, workplaces, and communities, intentional action is needed.” *Id.*

A common example of an error employers make in the legal profession is the scenario in which a small firm of eight attorneys, all straight white men and women, decides it would like to increase its diversity. The firm then hires a lesbian white woman attorney and a Black male attorney. After the hires are made, the new attorneys are introduced to their colleagues and it is back to business as usual. In this context, what the firm has failed to realize is that absent a culture change in that firm, there is a high likelihood that both new hires may not be invited to lunches, may suffer from feelings of isolation, may likely hear comments about their skills and competency, or be referred to as “diverse hires” as if they do not possess the skills of their counterparts. They will not be mentored, and if making suggestions, women’s perspectives are particularly unheard or dismissed unless the perspective is echoed by a white male attorney. The Black male attorney may be subjected to racist and offensive statements by colleagues who have not addressed the fact that they themselves have unconscious biases. As a result of these experiences, these newly hired attorneys will likely leave after a short period of time and the employer will be baffled as to why.

The “why” is that the work does not start and end with simply hiring people with diverse backgrounds; the hiring is only the beginning of the culture change. Employers must ensure there is continuing education and training on race, racism, developing cultural competency, the LGTBQ community, and white fragility, among other things. Employers must be prepared to be uncomfortable in order to facilitate conversations amongst their employees. Employers must be willing to create safe spaces for employees to share their experiences. An employer’s failure to address the culture will perpetuate a repetitive cycle of diverse attorney hires and departures. The same rings true for municipal operations, judicial systems, and bar associations. David A. Thomas articulated this “why” saying:

Most leaders in predominantly white organizations don’t have high quality, authentic relationships with people who are different from them. If we don’t work on creating those high-quality kinds of relationships where we can talk about the things that—once we get beyond just our playbook for diversity—are still getting in the way, we won’t make progress.<sup>8</sup>

The question we have to ask ourselves, which was the question the late Chief Justice Gants often asked is: *If we know what the issue is, and we know what*

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<sup>8</sup> *Social Impact: Beyond the Business Case for Diversity: What Leaders Must Do*, KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON (Feb. 22, 2021), <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/beyond-the-business-case-for-diversity-what-leaders-must-do/> [<https://perma.cc/YVK2-AMG5>].

*the data says, and we have enough literature on how to improve equity in the legal profession, why is nothing changing?*

The only answer I have ever come up with is: *the Massachusetts Legal Community, does not care enough about equity in the Massachusetts legal profession to change it.* It not only brings me sadness to feel this way, but it is frustrating and infuriating. As someone who sits in an executive leadership position in a predominantly white organization, and as someone who has served as the president of an affinity bar association and sits on a number of boards and commissions, what I see through my equity lens is depressing. I ask myself all of the time: *Why did I enter a profession that is not only one of the least diverse, but has also created and fostered an environment in which I feel like I am not welcomed or skilled enough to be in it?* There are constantly feelings of isolation being the only Black woman. As the youngest member in senior leadership there were moments when I felt my opinion did not matter, or was dismissed. During times when there was no response on significant issues raised, the lack of responsiveness and the delays created feelings of being undervalued. These experiences forced me to evaluate why I am here, and why I expend energy battling the skills of mediocre white men who sit in their positions as the result of systems of oppression and white privilege, not because they are any smarter or more educated or passed a harder bar exam than I did.

In these moments of reflection, I think back to why I entered this profession. I remember being a high school student in mock trial knowing I wanted to become a lawyer. The concepts of advocacy and speaking up for people in the court was extremely exciting. But I was saddened by the fact I had so few Black attorneys to look up to or even aspire to be. There were a few in my extended family, but the perception was that attorneys were all white men. As I ventured off into the world, I remember always being told: *as a Black woman, you must be smart and work hard in order to be an attorney.*

## II. A LEGAL JOURNAL

When I embarked on my education journey after graduating from Boston Latin Academy, my first stop was college at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. If you read the history books, the United States from 2000 to 2004 was a challenging time, but I made it through. Despite the disruptions, I always focused on my education and having personal and professional growth experiences, because I was taught that was the only way I would make it into law school.

One of the experiences I remember having was an internship at a juvenile detention facility in Northern Virginia. The majority of the young people there were Black and Latinx, and the majority of the correction officers were white men. The kitchen and custodial staff were Black and Latinx. The few court



officers who were Black and Latinx—although they enjoyed the work with the young people—were often met with challenges as a result of their race and gender.

One Black woman correction officer with whom I often worked with told me one day that she always bought one thing for herself every paycheck because it made suffering through her job worth it. She followed it up by saying that when she came to work, she kept her head down and just did her job. Although my time spent there was invaluable, I departed thinking about how shocking the race, gender and power dynamics were at the institution. At twenty-one years old, I had read many books about racism and discrimination happening in our legal system and government, but I had never witnessed it firsthand until this internship. I was taken aback by the environment in which this Black woman correction officer worked in daily to survive and take care of her family. Although these conversations with her happened in 2003, and this was the experience of a Black woman correction officer, it is very similar to my reality and the reality of so many lawyers of underrepresented backgrounds, even now—*go to work, get the job done, and don't complain*.

I recall when I was preparing to start law school in 2005, I was invited to a Peer Mentoring Program which took place for two weeks before that academic year started. It was for “non-traditional” students as they called it. The goal was to acclimate us to law school, keeping in mind that our experiences will be very different. At the time, I did not quite know what that meant, but as I ventured through my legal education, met law students and lawyers from underrepresented populations, I very quickly learned that my legal journey would never be the same as my white counterparts.

In thinking about my academic and professional experiences, coupled with my real-life experiences and those of my non-white colleagues, it really raises the questions: Why is the legal profession still so inequitable in 2021? Why is it that law students and lawyers with diverse backgrounds—whether based on race, gender, religion, culture, sexual identity, sexual orientation, disabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, mental health status, who have finished academically rigorous course loads, taken standardized tests, and passed their local bar exam—have such difficulty obtaining employment, retaining employment and holding positions of power and leadership? Why has very little been done to uplift attorneys from underrepresented populations? Why is there still a sea of white male attorneys who dominate the seats of judges, legislators, clerks, partners, and CEOs?

As a way to answer this question, I started thinking about a concept called “Step Up, Step Back,” that I learned about while participating in a program. Although I realize that this concept is used primarily as part of meeting ground rules to help equitably facilitate meetings, it made me wonder how it could be applied to the legal profession. Can you imagine there being a time when white

male attorneys are so self-aware of their privilege that they know when certain positions become available, it is a time to step back? Can you imagine a time when white male attorneys read a space and realize that the most important and powerful voice in the room is not theirs, and encourage or create space for other people to speak up? Can you imagine an all-white bar association giving itself a reality check and working to change their culture without having to be told that the optics of their white, predominately male-run organization creates the impression that diverse attorneys are not welcome? Can you imagine a time when competitiveness is no longer the focus, but rather professionalism and collegiality, to reach a common goal focused on equity? Can you imagine the vetting boards for judges and clerks having the diversity that allows them to have the appropriate lens to effectively vet lawyers hoping to become judges—or perhaps the not-so-brilliant idea of realizing that if the vetting process does not lead to diverse candidates, perhaps the process is racist and should be changed?

I believe that there are tremendous opportunities to create equity in the legal profession, but organizations have to care and be committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a *culture change*. There must be conversations about implicit biases in the workplace and the desire to address these issues must be focused on the societal impact not merely for any business gain.

To begin to address these existing inequities and take steps in the right direction, employers should:

Take inventory of policies and practices within the organization and remove the ones that inhibit diversity. Stop favoring work processes, methods, and styles used mostly by white men; women and minorities may take different approaches that are just as effective. Expand your personal and professional network to include people who don't look or sound or believe like you do.<sup>9</sup>

Professors Robin J. Ely and David A. Thomas further state that, “[C]hange is hard because leaders are invested in the status quo. In many ways, the status quo enabled their own successes, so change feels threatening. That’s partly why there’s no template for change. Each leader is unique, and each workplace is unique with its own set of challenges.”<sup>10</sup>

Although I believe that equity in the legal profession needs to be addressed for all underrepresented populations, my professional experience has been one that focuses primarily on race equity. I found the work of “Equity in the Center” (a Project of ProInspire), to provide a tremendously meaningful

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

and transformative approach to building a race equity culture using a race equity cycle—awake, woke, work.<sup>11</sup>

At the AWAKE stage, organizations are focused on people and on building a workforce and boards comprised of individuals from different racial backgrounds. The primary goal is representation, with efforts aimed at increasing the number of people of different racial backgrounds. At the WOKE stage, organizations are focused on culture and on creating an environment where everyone is comfortable sharing their experiences, and everyone is equipped to talk about race equity and inequities. The primary goal is inclusion and internal change in behaviors, policies, and practices. At the WORK stage, organizations are focused on systems to improve race equity. The primary goal is integration of a race equity lens into all aspects of an organization. This involves internal and external systemic change and regularly administering a race equity assessment to evaluate processes, programs, and operations.<sup>12</sup>

This race equity cycle includes the entire organization from Board of Directors, CEOs, Senior Leadership, workforce, community, organization culture, and learning environment as a means to create a Race Equity Culture. The authors believe that a Race Equity Culture is “one that is focused on *proactively counteracting* race inequities inside and outside of an organization. It requires an *adaptive and transformational approach* that impacts behaviors and mindsets as well as practices, programs, and processes.”<sup>13</sup>

### III. MEANS OF LESSENING THE BURDEN . . .

As employers are thinking about the challenging work ahead to create a more equitable legal profession, addressing implicit bias in their workforce is a key component. There is a direct correlation between levels of bias found in the workplace and feelings of inclusion at work, as well as the desire for attorneys from underrepresented backgrounds to stay at or leave an organization.<sup>14</sup>

Some recommendations<sup>15</sup> for leaders working towards making a change in favor of diversity and inclusion, include:

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<sup>11</sup> EQUITY IN THE CTR., AWAKE TO WOKE TO WORK: BUILDING A RACE EQUITY CULTURE (2018), <https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/role-senior-leaders-building-race-equity-culture/ProInspire-Equity-in-Center-publication-digital-July-2018.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/4U66-EW8L>].

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Karen Horting, *The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion*, FORBES (June 5, 2019), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2019/06/05/the-business-case-for-diversity-and-inclusion/?sh=1046a4dc2324> [<https://perma.cc/YN2L-RQYY>].

<sup>15</sup> For more tools to create a more equitable workplace, see *Organizational Assessment Tools and Resources*, RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/plan/informing-the-plan/organizational-assessment-tools-and-resources> [<https://perma.cc/D8SJ-L83A>].

1. *Have more thoughtful conversations about D&I.* Leadership teams at organizations are often hesitant to discuss race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. This can be because they are not confident they have the skills needed to communicate properly about this information in a multicultural environment. Better education of what implicit bias is and how it manifests itself, however, is crucial to address and eliminate workplace bias across all industries.

2. *Appoint diversity champions within your organization.* Diversity champions within the workplace will set an example for your employees and communicate the message that supporting diversity and inclusion is a top priority.

3. *Implement bias interrupters to reduce or eliminate bias in your processes.* Bias interrupters are small changes to your basic systems like hiring, performance evaluations, assignments and promotions that will interrupt and correct implicit bias in the workplace.

But the work does not stop here, nor does it stop after employers have engaged in conversations and training. The real work is what you do in addition to these efforts. It is not enough for an employer to say they care about diversity, equity, and inclusion but are unable to prove it. It is not enough to sponsor affinity bar events but fail to hire and retain members of those same affinity bar associations. The lack of diversity in the Massachusetts legal profession should no longer be acceptable to all of its members, not just the ones impacted, and there should be a commitment by all to make a change.

Employers should begin to walk the walk. Employers should look at their recruiting efforts and ensure they are recruiting from all law schools, not just the elite. There are brilliant law students from underrepresented populations that decide which law school they will attend based on their personal financial affairs, because they are often first-generation law students, and their families are poor. Employers should be engaged in the law school experience via internships and clinics, not just summer associate hiring. Employers should review their application and hiring practices for law students and lawyers to ensure it lacks bias and does not disproportionately impact people from certain groups. Employers should consider mentorship opportunities at their offices. White male partners should make sure the associates from underrepresented populations receive the same grooming, mentorship, support and client connections, while they navigate the partnership track, as they do with white male associates. This all equally applies to governmental agencies that are often plagued with years of entrenched nepotism, favoritism, obstructionism, and political connections.

## CONCLUSION

Change is not easy; it requires commitment and action. Eliminating the status quo is scary. Humans possess the natural instinct to be competitive and self-absorbed. The reality is that these human instincts coupled with generations of a racist, systemically oppressive profession, has resulted in significant inequities. As members of the bar, who have been trained to call one another “sister” and “brother” must think hard about what our responsibilities are to this profession, to one another, and to the legal system as a whole. We must be a people of action and we must forge ahead in the very way that Chief Justice Gants blazed the trail for us to follow in his footsteps. He was bold, he was brilliant, and he was a man of his word. He fought tirelessly to address the injustices and inequities that plagued our legal system. My only wish for the future of the Massachusetts legal profession is that we all begin to care as Chief Justice Gants did, that we eliminate the performative lip service, and that we swiftly move to action.