



The State Bar of California

OPEN SESSION AGENDA ITEM 706 MARCH 2020

DATE: March 12, 2020

TO: Members, Board of Trustees

FROM: Hon. Brenda Harbin-Forte, Chair, Council on Access and Fairness

SUBJECT: Council on Access and Fairness (COAF) – Approval of Scope of Work

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Board of Trustees identified the State Bar's strategic objectives to advance diversity and inclusion. The Board adopted objectives where the State Bar could have the greatest impact, including: examining the disproportionate attrition rate of diverse students in law school; eliminating unintended bias in the Bar Exam; collecting and analyzing statewide data to identify systemic issues that need to be addressed, and developing programs to address them; and supporting judicial diversity.

The Council on Access and Fairness (COAF) requests the Board of Trustees to expand its diversity pipeline work to also include a focus on early education efforts in high schools, community colleges, and college. These efforts include outreach, mentorship and education programs.

BACKGROUND

In January 2019, the Board of Trustees adopted amendments to the State Bar's 2017–2022 Strategic Plan to include concrete objectives advancing the diversity and inclusion components of the State Bar mission. Based on input from leaders in the field and a variety of stakeholders, the objectives focus the work where the State Bar is uniquely situated to make the most impact. Many organizations and entities provide direct programming to improve diversity (through education, mentorship and other specific forms of expertise). However, few if any have the statewide reach and unique role of the State Bar. The State Bar shifted its focus to

systemic and institutional impact, rather than delivering direct programming. Pursuant to its Strategic Plan objectives, the State Bar intends to:

- Serve as a data repository, research institution, and technical assistance provider on topics such as trends in attorney demographics, cross-sector employment data, and meta-analysis of diversity and inclusion studies;
- Convene stakeholders to discuss emerging issues, best practices, and data collection; and
- Recommend, incubate and/or pilot promising programs that are based on data and have the potential to scale throughout the state.

The Council on Access and Fairness (COAF) is a ten-member subentity that supports the State Bar to effectuate these diversity and inclusion goals and objectives. In March 2019, the Board approved an updated charge and work plan for COAF, which included activities to support the Strategic Plan objectives related to the pipeline to the legal profession, retention and career advancement, and judicial diversity. The Board directed the focus of COAF's diversity pipeline activities to be on pipeline issues within law school, such that COAF's activities would be aligned with the Strategic Plan goals and objectives.

At its September 25, 2019 meeting, COAF unanimously passed a motion to recommend that the Board amend COAF's mission statement as follows: (1) to include advancement of programs and initiatives at both the high school and college levels; (2) to permit COAF to engage with and support California LAW efforts; (3) to permit COAF to appoint a COAF member to serve as liaison to California LAW; (4) to permit COAF to serve as a resource for Law Partnership Academies' Advisory Council volunteers; and (5) to permit COAF to organize presentations to underrepresented high school and college students on the path to becoming an attorney.

COAF requests that the Board of Trustees expand its diversity pipeline work to also include a focus on early education efforts in high schools, community colleges, and colleges. These efforts include outreach, mentorship, and education programs.

FISCAL/PERSONNEL IMPACT

None

AMENDMENTS TO RULES OF THE STATE BAR

None

AMENDMENTS TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES POLICY MANUAL

None

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal: 4. Support access to legal services for low- and moderate-income Californians and promote policies and programs to eliminate bias and promote an inclusive environment in the legal system and for the public it serves, and strive to achieve a statewide attorney population that reflects the rich demographics of the state's population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None

ATTACHMENT LIST

- A.** Council on Access and Fairness Request to the Board of Trustees to Expand COAF's Mission Statement

November 7, 2019

Sonia Delen, Programs Liaison
Brandon Stallings, Programs Liaison
Hailyn Chen, Diversity Liaison
The State Bar of California
Board of Trustees

Re: Expansion of COAF's Mission Statement

Dear Sonia, Brandon, and Hailyn:

The Council on Access and Fairness (COAF) is honored that the State Bar Board of Trustees (BOT) has entrusted to COAF a major role in carrying out diversity and inclusion initiatives in the BOT's Strategic Plan. Currently, COAF's initiatives focus on the portion of the pipeline to the profession that begins at the law school level. COAF is concerned that this limitation hampers realization of the goal of diversifying the profession because it misses important opportunities to encourage and support underrepresented high school and college students who may be interested in entering the legal profession.

At its September 25, 2019 meeting, COAF unanimously passed a motion to recommend that the BOT amend COAF's mission statement in the following respects: (1) To include advancement of programs and initiatives at both the high school and college levels; (2) To permit COAF to engage with and support California LAW efforts; (3) To permit COAF to appoint a COAF member to serve as liaison to California LAW; (4) To permit COAF to serve as a resource for Law Partnership Academies' Advisory Council volunteers; and (5) To permit COAF to organize presentations to underrepresented high school and college students on the path to becoming an attorney.

COAF members are eager to support this expanded mission. We hope you will favorably consider our request, and look forward to further discussions with the BOT.

Sincerely,

Hon. Brenda Harbin-Forte
COAF Chair