



Board Brief

JULY



Message from the President



Diversity & Inclusion - Are They Empty Words? What Are The Facts?

Racial justice is, undoubtedly, in the bright spotlight as a result of demonstrations and protests throughout the United States and in other countries. Ernest conversations have begun,

hopefully with people examining all the facts, seeing behind and beyond bias narratives, and allowing freedom of expression and first amendment rights. Seven of the 15 books that comprise this week's New York Times Best Seller nonfiction list explicitly address race or the black experience, including the titles *How to be an Antiracist*, *Me and White Supremacy*, *The Beauty in the Breaking*, and To-Nehisi Coates 2015 National Book Award winner *Between the World and Me*. Workplace book club conversations feature titles like *White Fragility*. Exploring critical questions and uncomfortable truths about race and diversity in general should be paramount goals.

This year the Supreme Court of Ohio published an article by Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor with a historical review of our justice system, and, all in all, calls its performance over time "a mixed bag." To respond to the public's concern about sentencing based on race, for example, she urges we must do more than merely provide empty reassurances of the good intentions and fairness of judges. Data collection will help tell the whole story. Introducing a collaborative effort, calling for a statewide sentencing database, the Court recognizes that educating judges about explicit and implicit bias is not enough. We need to collect statistics to understand where we are actually are to set benchmarks, and, eventually, to demonstrate progress. Quoting President John F. Kennedy, the Chief Justice states, "Life is not fair, but our government must be."

As a part of this self-reflection and educational climate, as President and Executive Director of the Ohio State Bar Foundation, we have looked inward to study our own organization. If you saw the latest issue of the OSBA's *Ohio Lawyer*, you may have noticed the two-page spread featuring our new class of OSBF Fellows for 2020. In it, we say, "OSBF Fellows are a diverse group of lawyers. They represent the entire state of Ohio and justice system. From rural towns to big cities, large law firms to sole proprietors, judges to prosecutors, the OSBF Fellows Program brings them together under one common mission – bettering the justice system." This sounds impressive, yet in a world currently focused on diversity, our words omit that important perspective altogether. This is despite the OSBF's renewed focus on diversity as an integral part of our 3-year strategic plan. Have we met this goal?

Let us look at the statistics, the facts. To be a Fellow, one must be an attorney practicing law in Ohio for at least three years, and, unfortunately, the population of diverse attorneys here is limited. Per demographics that our Supreme Court provides, only 3.6% of Ohio attorneys are African American. (This number is based on a self-reported, optional question included in the attorney registration process.) Of our last six classes totaling 193 Fellows, nine (about 4.6%) are African American. This is arguably better, but we continue to strive to seriously increase this number.

To become a Fellow, an attorney must be nominated. Typically, Fellows make the nominations and also eligible attorneys can self-nominate. We highly encourage and promote this latter method, amongst our Fellows, our Trustees, and as published in *Ohio Lawyer*. In reality, for whatever reason, lawyers rarely self-nominate.

The OSBF Board of Trustees has 17 Trustees, and currently three (about 18%) are African American. This is a positive step after realizing the 3.6% statistic. And studies have demonstrated that the most diverse boards make the best decisions (and for companies, make the most profit). Diversity also includes different religions, sex, different types of law practices, and age. Notably, research indicates that a significant return on equity occurs when a particular minority comprises 30%. Why? That's when critical mass, or full and free representation of the minority view, is achieved.

In addition to these facts, our OSBF's impact can and should be judged by the investments we make for our grantees throughout Ohio. Many of our grantees serve a substantial minority population, which encompasses disenfranchised groups.

The vast majority of students served by the [Law and Leadership Institute](#), which we have supported continuously for years, are disenfranchised minority students. We have taught at events in Akron for [Asian Services in Action \(ASIA\)](#), with the major majority being black refugees from Africa. We also have supported the Ohio Innocence Project. These facts speak loudly about us and our commitment to improving the experiences of minorities, as they interact with our justice system.

On June 3, President Kitrick called a special meeting of our board. In an unprecedented move, the OSBF board decided to grant up to \$500,000 out of our endowment to advance the rule of law and racial justice. The OSBF has never engaged in such an act. We will be announcing this decision to the broader public in the next few weeks, once we have finalized our fall grants application process.

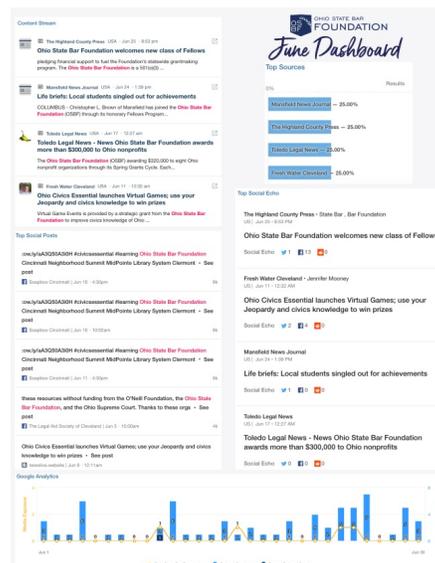
Now we ask that you do your part. If you know of a diverse attorney who might be a good candidate for our Fellows program, please visit our website [here](#), review our criteria list, and share with the attorney you would like to nominate. If you know any nonprofits addressing minority inequalities in our justice system, encourage them to apply for a grant. Of course, as always, [you can donate to amplify our efforts](#), too.

The OSBF and its board help thousands whose experiences under our system may be unfair or misunderstood. Just like President Kennedy, we are working towards creating a world where the way we govern is as fair as it can be.



Check out OSBF media mentions during the month of June.

JUNE DASHBOARD



Recently, Issue Media Group, our strategic grantee, wrapped up its first-ever Civics Essential Virtual Game Event, a fast, free, and fact-filled Jeopardy game through Zoom. Last year, IMG hosted trivia

events at local libraries around the state. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements, these events had to become virtual.



So, after quick and careful planning, IMG hosted four virtual game nights over a two-week span. Attendees could participate from the comfort of their home while learning, conversing, and competing for some great prizes.

[Get the full scoop on the virtual events in a recent article from FreshWater Cleveland.](#)



OSBF Staff Update

Thanks to COVID-19, 2020 looks very different than what we anticipated. However, the OSBF staff has used this as an opportunity to grow, learn, and experiment. While we cannot hold in-person meetings, our team has become virtual meeting experts - utilizing this must-needed technology to meet as a staff, as committees, and as a board. The new 2020 Fellows Class hasn't been able to shake hands or sit side by side, but that hasn't stopped them from regularly connecting and planning what's to come for their class year. And while the All Rise Annual Dinner and Awards Ceremony won't be held as it usually is, the team has exciting plans to celebrate this year's awardees in a brand-new, special way.

As the OSBF team planned for 2020, a pandemic was never discussed. But thanks to our staff's hard work, dedication, and creativity, we will still make this year one to be remembered.



Can we count on you to do your part? At the end of each issue of the Brief, we will ask you to partake in an activity (we promise it will be easy!) to help us spread the word on the great work the Foundation is doing throughout Ohio.

We are welcoming our 2020 Fellows Class through special posts on our social media channels. Will you give them a warm welcome, share some words of wisdom, or let them know why the OSBF is so great? Just visit our LinkedIn or Facebook page, look for these welcome posts, and leave a comment!

When you give, we give.

All donations to the OSBF go directly to our grantmaking efforts.

[Give Now](#)

See what's happening on our social media sites:

