Chair's Letter from Robert T. (Bob) Wilson

**Michigan Pledge to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion**

Last month I received a letter from State Bar of Michigan President Tony Jenkins concerning the SBM's initiative to improve diversity and inclusion in the legal profession, the "Michigan Pledge to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion." One of the president's goals is to increase the emphasis on and activities in support of that initiative. In his words:

> It is critical that we improve in this area because we continue to fall behind other professions in terms of admitting and retaining people from diverse backgrounds.

In the case of the Business Law Section, the statistics are quite striking. At the Section Chair orientation meeting last Fall I received a detailed package on the demographics of the BLS. Among the data was a chart showing active Michigan resident Business Law Section members by race and ethnicity for 2010 (excluding no answers and prefer not to answer responses). The percentage figures were as follows:

- American Indian .3%
- Asian-Pacific 1.3%
- African Origin 3.1%
- European 89.8%
- Hispanic-Latino .7%
- Multi-Racial 1.2%
- Arab 1.1%
- Other 2.4%

Regardless of how one measures diversity, these figures suggest that large segments of the population are virtually absent from membership in our Section. In the interests of achieving a more balanced membership within the Business Law Section and the State Bar at large, President Jenkins is encouraging individual lawyers, firms, bar associations, and Sections of the State Bar to become signatories to the Pledge; the text of which reads as follows:

> We believe that diversity and inclusion are core values of the legal profession, and that these values require a sustained commitment to strategies of inclusion.

DELEG Reorganization

Governor Snyder has just issued an Executive Order substantially reorganizing one of the state departments most important to many business lawyers, the Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth. The order can be viewed [here](#). You are encouraged to review this order, and additional information as it becomes available, so that you can keep up with the changes rolling out of this administration.

In-House Counsel Event

Remember that the Business Law Section is co-presenting with *Crain's Detroit Business* its first in-house counsel awards program. The program includes its first list of the best in-house counsel in Michigan. For details and to nominate someone (or yourself), visit *Crain's Detroit Business*.

Although the schedule is not yet final, the celebration and awards event will be held during the week of May 2. Please plan to attend.

Section Events

- March 10—Council Meeting (State Bar of Michigan, Lansing)
- March 21—Commercial Litigation Committee Meeting (Brooks Wilkins Sharkey & Turco, Birmingham)
- May 6—Council Meeting (Inn at St. John's, Plymouth)
- May 6-7—Business Law Institute (Inn at St. John's, Plymouth)
Diversity is inclusive. It encompasses, among other things, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, nationality, language, age, disability, marital and parental status, geographic origin, and socioeconomic background.

Diversity creates greater trust and confidence in the administration of justice and the rule of law, and enables us to better serve our clients and society. It makes us more effective and creative by bringing different perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, talents, and interests to the practice of law.

We believe that law schools, law firms, corporate counsel, solo and small firm lawyers, judges, government agencies, and bar associations must cooperatively work together to achieve diversity and inclusion, and that strategies designed to achieve diversity and inclusion will benefit from appropriate assessment and recognition.

Therefore, we pledge to continue working with others to achieve diversity and inclusion in the education, hiring, retention, and promotion of Michigan's attorneys and in the elevation of attorneys to leadership positions within our organizations, the judiciary, and the profession.

A number of SBM Sections have already become signatories to the Pledge. I have invited President Jenkins and Gregory Conyers, the SBM director of diversity, to the forthcoming meeting of the BLS Council to be held March 10 in Lansing, to make a presentation on this important initiative. I hope you will consider attending.