

AFFINITY BAR LEADERS' DIRECTORY



MSBA



Championing Justice, Equality, and Professionalism
Our Diversity Enriches Us, Our Inclusion Empowers Us

Affinity Bar Leaders' Directory

The Minnesota State Bar Association is committed to fostering strong partnerships with Minnesota's affinity bar associations. The goal of this booklet is to help leaders within the MSBA and the affinity bars to identify avenues for collaboration and to facilitate inter-organization communication as we work to serve the legal community across the state.

Hmong American Bar Association

Fue Lo Thao

Infinity Project

Lola Velazquez-Aguilu

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers

Daniel L. Payne

Minnesota American Indian Bar Association

Jeanine L. Hill

Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association

Benjamin R. Kwan

Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers

Michael A. Essien

Minnesota Black Women Lawyers Network

Bernice L. Fields

Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association

Bryan R. Browning

Minnesota Lavender Bar Association

Claire V.J. Joseph & Alyssa Smith

Minnesota Mother Attorney Association

Adebisi Wilson

Minnesota Women Lawyers

Connie Armstrong

Somali American Bar Association

Amran A. Farah

Twin Cities Diversity in Practice

Valerie Jensen



President

FUE LO THAO

Fue Lo Thao is an Assistant Ramsey County Attorney currently assigned to the Human Services Division. He attended Carleton College for undergrad and earned his JD at Hamline University School of Law. Prior to joining the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, Fue was a Judicial Law Clerk to the Honorable Gail Chang Bohr. Fue also serves on the Board of Directors for Urban Boatbuilders, a nonprofit organization empowering youth.

CONTACT

thao_f@yahoo.com

Ramsey County
Assistant Attorney

Hmong American Bar Association (HABA)

ABOUT

A leadership organization for the advancement of legal professionals, the Hmong community and the community at large.

ANNUAL EVENTS

(dates undecided)

Fall Social

Winter Banquet

MAIN INITIATIVES

- Get a Hmong judge appointed to the bench;
- Increase membership; and
- Fundraising.

Hmong-American Bar Association



President

LOLA VELAZQUEZ- AGUILU

Lola is an Assistant United States Attorney in the white-collar and public corruption section of the criminal division. Lola has been an Assistant United States Attorney since 2010 and in that time has prosecuted large-scale financial crimes including bank fraud conspiracies, mortgage fraud, investment fraud, embezzlement, and tax fraud. Before joining the U.S. Attorney's Office, Lola was an associate at Dorsey and Whitney where she represented civil litigants and criminal defendants charged with white-collar crimes.

CONTACT

District of Minnesota,
Criminal Division
Assistant U.S. Attorney

Lola.Velazquez-Aguilu
@usdoj.gov

(612) 664-5604

Infinity Project

In the Eighth Circuit Courts

ABOUT

The Infinity Project's mission is to increase the gender diversity of the state and federal bench to ensure the quality of justice in the Eighth Circuit.

EVENTS

Prospective Judges' Conference
(in collaboration with MNAPABA)
October 29, 2016

Prospective Judges' Conference
(in collaboration with MABL)
Winter 2016/17

**Infinity CLE and Reception
at the 8th Circuit Conference**
2018 – (Biennially)

CURRENT FOCUS

Advocate for and highlight the need for more women of color on the bench in Minnesota and throughout the Eighth Circuit, both within the legal community and with decision makers.



www.theinfinityproject.org



Chair, Board of Directors
2016–2017

DANIEL L. PAYNE

Dan is a large loss claims attorney. He is a graduate of Washington & Lee University School of Law in Lexington, VA and is admitted to practice in state and federal courts in Minnesota and Virginia. Since his move to Minnesota, Dan has served as President of the University of Virginia Alumni Club of the Twin Cities, as an Elder for Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, and has volunteered for Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers in a number of capacities. He has written and presented extensively in the insurance area and on behalf of LCL.

CONTACT

OneBeacon Insurance Group
Attorney

help@mncl.org
(651) 646-5590

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL)

ABOUT

LCL provides free, confidential peer and professional assistance to Minnesota lawyers, judges, law students, and their immediate family members on any issue that causes stress or distress.

EVENTS

LCL 40th Anniversary Celebration
November 9

CLE Programs
Monthly

Common Experiences Groups
Monthly

INITIATIVES

- Reduce stigma regarding mental health (including substance issues) and the legal profession;
- Increase outreach to bar and other legal profession organizations through programs, announcements regarding services, and articles or posts; and
- Continue to be a safe and confidential place for free peer and professional assistance.





President

JEANINE L. HILL

Jeanine is an experienced general practice attorney with the law firm of Meyer & Njus, PA. She is also a judge for the Sokaogon Chippewa Community located in Crandon, Wisconsin. Jeanine has a passion for helping others in the legal and general community due in part to her diverse background. She is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa.

CONTACT

Meyer & Njus, PA
Attorney

200 South Sixth St #1100
Minneapolis, MN 55402

jhill@meyernjus.com
(612) 630-3254

Minnesota American Indian Bar Association (MAIBA)

ABOUT

A non-profit organization of American Indian attorneys, law students, and officers of tribal courts. The organization also welcomes non-Indian attorneys and law students who are interested in Indian law.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Indian Law CLE

May (annually)

MAIBA Golf Tournament

July (annually)

MAIBA General Membership Meeting

September (annually)

UPCOMING GOALS

- Our goal is to strengthen connections with our out-state memberships;
- Build strong relationships with our tribal communities; and
- Continue our efforts to get more Indians to attend law school.



www.maiba.org



President
2016-2017

BENJAMIN R. KWAN

Ben is a trial attorney at Halunen Law in Minneapolis where he advocates on behalf of employees and whistleblowers. Ben relishes being able to use his experience as a former journalist to help his clients and his MNAPABA colleagues communicate their respective messages. He loves calling the Bryn Mawr neighborhood of Minneapolis home.

CONTACT

Halunen Law
Associate Attorney

80 S Eighth St, Suite 1650
Minneapolis, MN 55402

kwan@halunenlaw.com
(612) 605-4098

Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association (MNAPABA)

ABOUT

Promoting and supporting the personal and professional development of Asian American and Pacific American lawyers, judges, and law students, serving as an advocate for the community in Minnesota, and promoting equal access to justice.

ANNUAL EVENTS

New Attorneys Reception

Judges Reception

Annual Gala

MNAPABA & APALSA Joint Reception

Annual Summer Party and School

Supply Drive

Annual Winter Retreat

INITIATIVES

- Implementing the first year of our first-ever strategic plan;
- Continuing efforts to promote more Asian American attorneys for judicial posts; and
- Deepening relationships among our 200+ members.



www.mnapaba.org



President

July 2016 – June 2017

MICHAEL A. ESSIEN

Michael is a principal at Essien Law Office, PLLC practicing intellectual property law with a focus on patents, trademarks, copyrights, and e-commerce. Michael concentrates his practice on patent prosecutions and trademark applications, opinions, copyrights, strategic planning, and client counseling regarding intellectual property protection.

CONTACT

Essien Law Office, PLLC
IP Attorney

245 Ruth St N, Ste 201
Saint Paul, MN 55119

messien@essienlaw.com
(651) 340-4310

Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers (MABL)

ABOUT

Our mission is to promote and support the professional development of black lawyers, judges, and law students in Minnesota.

ANNUAL EVENTS

MABL Annual Scholarship Gala

November 12, 2016

Estate Planning CLE

Spring 2017

MN Minority Judges Reception

Spring 2017

INITIATIVES

- Updating Strategic Plan for 2017 and beyond to serve our mission;
- Working to build a vibrant community of African American Practitioners in diverse areas of legal practice; and
- Outreach beyond the metro area.





Managing Director

BERNICE L. FIELDS

*Arbitrator and
Attorney at Law*

blfields@mbwln.org

Minnesota Black Women Lawyers Network

(MBWLN)

ABOUT

A nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis that supports the professional development of black women lawyers.

ANNUAL EVENTS

The Network annually sponsors the Lena O. Smith Luncheon, a law school student orientation, and other social and educational events.

MISSION

- To promote black women lawyers visibility;
- To provide opportunities for mentoring and networking; and
- To encourage black women lawyers to believe that anything is possible.



President

2016-2017

BRYAN R. BROWNING

Bryan focuses his practice in the areas of products liability, personal injury, wrongful death, construction, subrogation, and commercial litigation. In his practice, Bryan utilizes specialized scientific training to effectively represent clients that have interests spanning numerous industries, including: agribusiness, automobile component parts, FDA-regulated medical devices, pharmaceutical products, complex mechanical systems, and chemical distributors.

CONTACT

Bassford Remele, PA
Attorney

33 S Sixth St, Ste 3800
Minneapolis, MN 55402

bbrowning@bassford.com
(612) 376-1617

Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association (MHBA)

ABOUT

A non-profit association dedicated to advancing the interests of Hispanic attorneys and law students in Minnesota.

EVENTS

MN Hispanic Experience Exhibit

October 2016

Annual Mentorship Reception

Fall 2016

CLE and Judges Reception

Fall 2016

Annual Gala

February or March 2017

Annual Meeting

April 2017

CHALLENGES

- Identifying and engaging out-state Latinos/membership;
- Finding the resources to meet the goals of our Strategic Plan; and
- Working to further diversify the judicial bench and corporate law departments in Minnesota.





Co-Chair

**CLAIRE
V.J. JOSEPH**

Claire is an attorney in Briggs and Morgan's business

litigation and employment departments and is a co-founder of the firm's LGBT group. Claire is the recipient of Briggs' 2012 Outstanding Pro Bono Service Award and the Ramsey County Bar Association's 2013 Excellence in Diversity Award. In 2013, Claire was appointed to the Minnesota Judicial Branch's Committee for Equality and Justice. Claire earned her JD from the University of Minnesota Law School and her LLM in international and European law from the Université Jean-Moulin 3 in Lyon, France.

CONTACT

Briggs and Morgan, PA, *Attorney*
cjoseph@briggs.com



Co-Chair

**ALYSSA
SMITH**

Alyssa is an attorney editor in Codes and

Regulations at Thomson Reuters and earned her JD from Hamline University School of Law. A percussionist, Alyssa also holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts, and enjoys spending time using her musical background to help raise funds and awareness for breast cancer research, treatment, and education.

CONTACT

Thomson Reuters, *Attorney Editor*
info@mnlavbar.org

**Minnesota
Lavender Bar
Association
(MLBA)**

ABOUT

The primary association of attorneys in Minnesota supporting the LGBT Community.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Fall Social

October 18, 2016

**16th Annual MLBA
Conference**

January 2017

Annual Meeting

Spring 2017



*Community Justice
through Individual Advocacy*



President
2016–2017

ADEBISI A. WILSON

Adebisi is the Director of Innocent Community Development with Innocent Technologies. Prior to joining Innocent Classroom, Adebisi was an attorney with Blackwell Burke PA and an equity associate with Minneapolis Public Schools. She graduated from New York Law School in 2007. She is currently a member of the MSBA Diversity and Inclusion Council and president of the Minnesota Mother Attorneys Association.

CONTACT
Innocent Technologies
*Director, Innocent
Community Development*

adebisi@
innocenttechnologies.com
(612) 927-2277

Minnesota Mother Attorney Association (MMAA)

ABOUT

The Minnesota Mother Attorneys Association is an organization whose mission is to promote the professional development of mother attorneys by capitalizing on the special opportunities and skills that arise from motherhood to drive career excellence.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Mother Attorneys and Monkey Bars
Spring/Summer

Annual Membership Event
Fall/Winter

Leadership CLE
Summer

Networking Events





President

July 2016 – June 2017

CONNIE ARMSTRONG

Connie is Associate General Counsel at McGough Construction. Prior to joining McGough, Connie was a litigation attorney who counseled and defended businesses, contractors and employers in contract, construction and employment matters. Connie's first priority has always been understanding her clients' business and objectives, she enjoys strategizing and the challenge of working collaboratively to achieve successful results. Connie is a member of the Minnesota Air National Guard, currently assigned as the Deputy Mission Group Commander at the 148th Fighter Wing in Duluth.

CONTACT

McGough Construction
Associate General Counsel

connie.armstrong
@mcgough.com

Minnesota Women Lawyers (MWL)

ABOUT

An association of attorneys, judges, law students, legal employers and others who are dedicated to advancing the success of women attorneys and striving for a just society.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Committee Fair and Summer Social
August 2016

Rosalie Wahl Leadership Lecture
November 14, 2016

**Annual Conference for Women in
the Law & 45th Annual Meeting**
April 21, 2017

INITIATIVES

- Ongoing implementation of the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan;
- Ongoing implementation of MWL's Diversity and Inclusion Statement; and
- Implementation of the ABA-developed GOOD Guys program to engage men in the advancement of women lawyers within the state.



www.mwlawyers.org



President

September 2016 – 2017

**AMRAN
A. FARAH**

Amran grew up in south Minneapolis but was born in Mogadishu, Somalia. She graduated from Hamline University School of Law and received her BA from the University of Saint Thomas. She is currently an attorney at Waldeck Law Firm, practicing primarily in insurance defense matters, including construction law, product liability, and insurance coverage. Amran is also a member of the Governor's Council of Minnesotans of African Descent and the Minneapolis Police Conduct Oversight Commission.

CONTACT

Waldeck Law Firm, PA
Attorney

aafarah03@gmail.com

**Somali American Bar
Association
(SABA)**

ABOUT

A continental association of attorneys, judges, law professors, and law students of Somali heritage.

INITIATIVES

- Legal workshops in community spaces;
- Connecting Somali businesses to legal professionals; and
- Mentorship to increase the number of Somali lawyers in Minnesota.





Executive Director

VALERIE JENSEN

Val Jensen is an expert in leading cultural change and talent development across and within organizations. She has spent her career bringing together individuals from very different backgrounds to problem solve and leverage their contributions and energies to help their organizations get the best results. As the executive director of TCDIP, Val has coached and counseled numerous attorneys, developed extensive programming on leadership and professional development and created a platform where everyone has an opportunity to participate and grow.

CONTACT

vjensen@diversityinpractice.org
(612) 333-8024

80 S Eighth St, Suite 500
Minneapolis, MN 55402

Twin Cities Diversity in Practice (TCDIP)

ABOUT

An association of law firms and corporate law departments focused on the recruitment, advancement and retention of diverse lawyers in the Minnesota.

STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITIES

- Deepen member engagement and involvement;
- Expand TCDIP's influence as a diversity and inclusion leader; and
- Align organizations capacity to meet opportunities.

Twin Cities 
Diversity in Practice

diversityinpractice.org