

# AFFINITY BAR LEADERS' DIRECTORY



**MSBA**  

---



Minnesota  
State Bar  
Association

# 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**

*Thomas Beimers*

## **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**

*Lariss Maldonado*

## **Minnesota Lavender Bar Association**

*Erin Bryan & Alyssa Smith*

## **Minnesota Mother Attorney Association**

*Adebisi Wilson*

## **Minnesota Women Lawyers**

*Kendra Brodin*

## **Somali American Bar Association**

*Amran A. Farah*

## **Twin Cities Diversity in Practice**

*Valerie Jensen*



## **President**

*8/2016 – 8/2017*

# 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

*January - December*

# 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](http://www.theinfinityproject.org)



**Chair, Board of Directors**  
*7/2017 – 6/2018*

## THOMAS BEIMERS

Tom is a partner with Hogan Lovells LLP, where he has a health care regulatory practice. He is a graduate of Macalester College and the University of Minnesota School of Law. Tom has experience with criminal, civil, and administrative health care fraud matters, and is a frequent national speaker on health care law topics. In addition to his work with LCL, Tom is also on the board of The Jungle Theater.

## CONTACT

Hogan Lovells  
*Partner*

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**

*9/2016 – 9/2017*

**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](mailto: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.





## **President**

*10/2016 – 10/2017*

# **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.





## **President**

*7/2017 – 6/2018*

# **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](mailto: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

4/2017 – 4/2018

# LARISS MALDONADO

Lariss is an Associate General Counsel at UnitedHealthcare. Lariss's role covers litigation, compliance, and regulatory affairs. She supports the company's Special Investigations Unit addressing issues of fraud, waste, and abuse. Before joining UnitedHealthcare, Lariss was a litigation associate at Faegre Baker Daniels.

## CONTACT

UnitedHealthcare  
*Associate General Counsel*

9800 Healthcare Ln.  
Minnetonka, MN 55343

Lariss\_maldonado@uhc.com  
(952) 931-5759

# Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association (MHBA)

## ABOUT

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

## EVENTS

**Annual Mentorship Program  
Kickoff and Reception**  
*Fall 2017*

**Judges Reception**  
*Fall 2017*

**Annual Gala**  
*February or March 2018*

**Annual Meeting**  
*April 2018*

## INITIATIVES

- Supporting growth, development, and success of Latino attorneys in MN;
- Advocate for the promotion of Latinos to leadership positions in the community, law firms, businesses, and on the bench;
- Launching Latina Leadership Council;
- Mobilizing members to participate in pro bono initiatives supporting the Hispanic community;
- Expanding membership out-state.



[www.minnhba.org](http://www.minnhba.org)



**Co-Chair**  
5/2017 – 5/2019

## ERIN BRYAN

Erin serves as Senior Corporate Counsel in the

Law Division of U.S. Bank, where she provides legal support to U.S. Bank's mortgage and consumer lines of business. Prior to joining U.S. Bank in 2014, Erin was an associate in the Finance and Restructuring group at Dorsey & Whitney LLP, where her practice included a wide variety of transactional matters and bankruptcy litigation for clients in the financial services, healthcare, technology, and energy industries. She earned her law degree from the University of St. Thomas School of Law in 2007.

### CONTACT

U.S. Bank, *Senior Corporate Counsel*  
erin.bryan@usbank.com



**Co-Chair**  
5/2016 – 5/2018

## 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*  
asmith613@gmail.com

# Minnesota Lavender Bar Association (MLBA)

### ABOUT

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

### ANNUAL EVENTS

#### Fall Social

*October 2017*

#### 17th Annual MLBA Conference

*January 2018*

#### Annual Meeting

*Spring 2018*



*Community Justice  
through Individual Advocacy*

[mnlavbar.org](http://mnlavbar.org)



**President**

*2016 – 2018*

**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**

7/1/17 – 6/30/18

**KENDRA  
BRODIN**

Kendra is Client Development Manager at the intellectual property law firm of Merchant & Gould where she helps current and future clients of the firm determine how to best protect their great ideas and innovations. Prior to joining Merchant & Gould, Kendra served as the Executive Director of a leading staffing and recruiting firm in Minneapolis as well as Director of Career and Professional Development at St. Thomas School of Law. For several years prior to those roles, Kendra provided private coaching and consulting services related to issues impacting law firms and lawyers with a focus on supporting the success of women attorneys.

**CONTACT**

Merchant & Gould

*Client Development Manager*

[kbrodin@merchantgould.com](mailto:kbrodin@merchantgould.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 29, 2017*

**Rosalie Wahl Leadership Lecture**

*November 9, 2017*

**Annual Conference for Women  
in the Law & Annual Meeting**

*April 27th, 2018 (tentative)*

**INITIATIVES**

- Engaging and growing a diverse membership of women lawyers from all backgrounds and career paths
- Building deeper relationships with the other affinity bar associations, corporate counsel, the judiciary, our legal employer partners, and law students
- Highlighting and promoting creative ways to address gender inequities in the legal profession.



[www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org)



**President**

*8/2016 – 8/2017*

**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](mailto: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](http://diversityinpractice.org)