# The Torts, Insurance & Compensation Law Section

# Final Diversity Challenge Status Report

## *I. The Diversity Challenge Plan*

### a. Who are the members of the Section's Diversity Challenge Team (identify leader)?

- Co-Chairs: Mirna Martinez Santiago and Joanna Young
- Members: Tom Maroney; Jean Gerbini; Lawton Squires; Carlos Calderón; Hon. George Silver; Roderick Coyne and James P. Delaney.

### b. What specific parts of the Section's diversity challenge plan were to be executed during the Challenge? What parts were for future efforts?

The Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law ("TICL") Section put together an ambitious and comprehensive Plan in response to the Bar Association's Diversity Challenge. The Plan included (1) hosting a Diversity Reception; (2) executing several "Strength by Association: Mentoring for Diversity" Seminars; (3) ensuring increased diversity in all TICL-sponsored Continuing Legal Education; (4) increasing membership recruitment and outreach; and (5) collaborating with Minority Bar Associations on future projects.

With exception of (5) collaborating with Minority Bar Associations on future projects, all parts of TICL's Diversity Challenge Plan were to be executed during the Challenge.

### c. What were the goals that the Section set to be accomplished?

The TICL section sought to recognize minority jurists and lawyers, increase its diversity numbers, ensure diversity in all CLE presentations and foster a relationship and collaborate with minority bar associations and its members on future events.

## *II. Evaluation*

### a. Which goals were accomplished?

TICL has accomplished all of the goals it set for itself.

*2011 Diversity Reception, Open Meeting and Diversity Seminar*

In November 2011, the TICL Executive Committee brought the Diversity Reception to fruition. The Reception was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Brooklyn Heights on Thursday, November 17, 2011. The reception was preceded by an open TICL Executive Committee meeting, at which all attendees were allowed to participate. Following the meeting, but prior to the reception, was an interactive symposium led by minority jurists, Hon. Lucindo Suarez (Supreme Court, Bronx

County), Hon. George Silver (Supreme Court, New York County), Hon. Laura Douglas (Supreme Court, Bronx County) and Hon. Gloria Dabiri (Supreme Court, Kings County), and entitled, "Strength by Association – Mentoring and the Power of Diversity." One and one-half hours of free Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (ethics) credits were offered in connection with the symposium. We should note that the entire panel for this event – including the moderators – consisted of diverse individuals.

*"Strength by Association: Mentoring for Diversity"*

The "Strength by Association" Series is a continuing TICL conversation on diversity and mentoring that started at our Summer Meeting in Bar Harbor, Maine, in August 2011. The Strength by Association Series continued that important conversation at the Diversity Reception and again in January 2012 at NYSBA Annual Meeting with a discussion titled "Strength by Association – Recruitment and Retention of the Diverse Associate and Partner."

The panel at the Annual Meeting was chaired by TICL executive committee members Mirna Martinez Santiago and Ken Krajewski. The panel consisted of various prominent attorneys, but most notably Mercedes Colwin, Managing Partner at Gordon Rees, and frequent commentator for Fox News, who also happens to be a Latina. We also secured the appearance of attorney Miles Afsharnik, Legal Director at Wells Fargo Bank, who spoke to the attendees about the influence of his gay, Middle-Eastern background upon his legal career.

*Membership Recruitment and Outreach*

Throughout 2011, the TICL Section continued to make efforts to diversify its membership through regionally-based membership recruitment events and through offering free Section membership in 2011 to NYSBA members that become new Section members. The TICL 2011/3000 Project has, as one of its goals, outreach to bring TICL Section membership to 3000 in these challenging economic times.

To that end, a number of recruitment events were held. In June, 2011, the Section held a wine tasting in Albany New York, to which NYSBA members in a broadly-defined region, including the Capital District, were invited. Outreach specifically targeted NYSBA members who did not belong to the Section already, and who self-identified themselves as minority/diverse.

On October 26, 2011, the TICL Section, in collaboration with the Minority Bar Association of Western New York, held a reception in Buffalo honoring NYSBA President, Vincent Doyle III. Special efforts were expended to invite non-Section members of diverse backgrounds, hailing from the western region of the State. The reception was organized by Sharon Gerstman and Paul Jones, members of the TICL Executive Committee. Sharon is also a member of the NYSBA Executive Committee. Sharon and Paul were honored at the Annual Meeting this year, for their continuing outreach to strengthen and diversify the TICL section and the NYSBA in Western New York.

As part of the Section's outreach plan, representatives of the Section attended a number of Law School events in 2011 in an effort to recruit our future diverse leaders. Section leaders attended a law student reception at Albany Law School in September. Students expressing an interest in the

Section were put directly in touch with the Section's Diversity Chairs and Law Journal Editor, and invited to network in person at the TICL Section's "Law School for Insurance Professionals."

The Section participated in outreach to diverse law students at NYSBA events in Brooklyn Law School, New York Law School, Cardozo School of Law, SUNY Buffalo School of Law, Syracuse University School of Law and Pace University School of Law in October and November.

Tim Fennell, of the Executive Committee, spoke on behalf of the NYSBA at the Syracuse University School of Law event. As previously noted, Tim has been instrumental in leading TICL's outreach to young lawyers and law students. In addition to speaking at law schools, Tim participates on the faculty of the Young Lawyers Trial Academy and TICL is a proud sponsor of that event every year.

Upstate Membership Chair Robert Coughlin and Downstate Membership Chair Rich Kokel served as the coordinators for the October – November law school events.

Of note, is that for those events before the Diversity Reception on November 17, 2011, the attending Executive Committee members were directed to extend invitations to the first ever Open TICL Executive Committee meeting, CLE and Reception to all interested students. As a result, numerous law students attended the event and were able to network with the panelists and other attendees.

b. **Did you have sufficient resources? Support? Collaboration?**

The New York State Bar Association – and in particular, its staff – has proven an invaluable resource over the past year. Pat Johnson, Lori Nicoll and Megan O'Toole provided guidance and tireless effort to TICL during the Challenge and beyond.

**c. In the execution of the plan, what worked and what didn't?**

The "Strength by Association: Mentoring for Diversity" series was a rousing success. We were not only able to meet our goal of recognizing diverse jurists and attorneys and increasing diversity on our CLE panels, but the quality of our speakers and programs attracted many attorneys who had otherwise not been previously exposed to TICL.

Part of our Section's focus was on attracting and mentoring young lawyers and future lawyers. We note that the young lawyers and future lawyers did not seem to fully grasp the concept of TICL and/or understand the need for networking and mentoring with attorneys in different legal fields.

As the TICL Section continues its diversity mission long after the NYSBA Section Challenge concludes, it is important to recognize its not up to one event or person to meet such an important goal as diversity. It is a continuous and ceaseless effort and should be part of all section activity. Communication is essential to this effort: Going forward, the TICL Section will continue to take advantage of every opportunity to get out its message of inclusion, and to demonstrate why there is a need for the mentoring and networking that more "seasoned" TICL Executive Committee Members so generously offer.

d. **If you were to do it again, what would you do differently?**

As noted above, TICL needs to take advantage of every opportunity to get that message of inclusion out in its approach to attracting diverse, young and future lawyers. The TICL Section looks forward to working with Megan O'Toole and her most capable and helpful membership staff to "re-imagine" the NYSBA Law School events.

e. **What was the best part of the Challenge for your Section**?

The Challenge served as an opportunity for our section to expand its horizons and add fresh blood (and perspective) to the Executive Committee. The NYSBA Section Challenge provided our section with a fresh platform to spread the TICL Section's message of inclusion. Because of the Challenge we have several new members of the Executive Committee who have already proven invaluable to not just the Section's diversity efforts, but to our work as a whole.

The TICL Diversity Team led by Mirna Santiago and Joanna Young made it all fun as the Section as a whole rose to exceed the NYSBA Section Challenge. The TICL Diversity Team was recognized at the Annual TICL/Trial Lawyers Dinner held during the Annual Meeting for its outstanding effort and commitment.

## *III. Looking to the Future*

**a. What will be the future diversity efforts of the Section?**

Thankfully, TICL has been at the forefront of the diversity movement for a number of years now (even before the Bar issued its Diversity Challenge). As such, TICL was one of the first sections to have a Diversity Committee. TICL's Diversity Committee and Team is tasked with ascertaining that TICL's CLEs reflect the Bar's commitment to diversity and with seeking out collaboration opportunities with the various Minority Bars. We will also continue our membership efforts.

For 2012, we have committed to sponsor the "Smooth Moves" event (to be held in April) and are also sponsoring two scholarships to the Young Lawyers' "Trial Academy." Our annual Section Meeting, to be held in Montreal, Quebec, August 16-19, 2012, will continue the diversity theme. We are reaching out to minority and womens' bar associations to collaborate with us on the program. The collaboration includes the provision of speakers for our panels, scholarships for the associations' members to attend the programs, networking receptions and structured activities aimed at creating mentorship relationships. Montreal was chosen as an accessible and reasonably-priced destination that is attractive to a broad segment of the Bar and their families.

**b. How can the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion assist the Section in these future efforts?**

The Committee on Diversity and Inclusion has been most supportive of the TICL Section. The TICL Section looks forward to continuing its mission to promote diversity and inclusion for many years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

***Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law Section***

Jean Gerbini, Chair
Thomas Maroney, Immediate Past Chair
Mirna M. Santiago, Co-Chair, Diversity Committee