

Women Take Charge in Bar Associations, Forming Strong 'Sisterhood'



In a significant shift for the legal profession in the United States, nearly all of the significant American bar associations for underrepresented groups are now led by women. The American Bar Association (ABA), the country's largest voluntary bar association, is also currently led by a Black woman, Deborah Enix-Ross, who will be succeeded by Mary Smith, the organization's first female Native American President.

The women-led groups include the National Bar Association, the largest organization of Black U.S. lawyers; the Hispanic National Bar Association; the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association; the South Asian Bar Association of North America; the National LGBTQ+ Bar, and the National Association of Blind Lawyers. The National Native American Bar Association will also swear in a woman president next month. The prevalence of women in these leadership roles is seen as a sign of progress for female lawyers in recent years, even as challenges remain.

According to the latest ABA data, women make up more than half of law school graduates but just 38% of all lawyers. They are underrepresented among federal judges, at 30%, and comprise just 22% of law firm partners with an ownership stake in their firms. However, the growing number of female bar association presidents provides more opportunities to discuss problems women face in the legal profession, such as their higher attrition rate.

The legal profession has traditionally been male-dominated, but the tide is turning, and more women are in leadership positions. Tara Raghavan, president of the South Asian Bar Association of North America, believes that the increasing number of female bar association presidents provides more opportunities to discuss the challenges women face in the legal profession, such as the higher attrition rate.

Put your legal job search in the hands of experts - sign up for LawCrossing today.

While these challenges have not been eliminated, having a voice at the table means they are amplified, and there is more meaningful discussion around them. The American Bar Association (ABA) is taking note of this trend and holding an online webinar on Friday, timed to coincide with Women's History Month. Six female bar presidents will share their leadership journeys and the hurdles women face.

According to Enix-Ross, the women bar presidents have formed a support network to give each other advice and share notes on handling their unique challenges. "It has become a sisterhood," she said. "Sometimes it's easier to speak to your sister outside of your organization about the challenges you're facing, to see if they are facing it and how they handled it."

Forming this supportive sisterhood among female bar presidents marks an essential milestone in the journey toward gender equality in the legal profession. It provides women a platform to speak up and advocate for themselves and other women, addressing the issues women face in the profession. The increase in female representation in bar associations also inspires and motivates younger women lawyers, giving them hope that they, too, can achieve leadership positions.

Overall, the rise of female leadership in bar associations signals a shift towards a more diverse and inclusive legal profession. While there is still work to achieve true gender equality, having more women in leadership positions is a step in the right direction. The supportive sisterhood of female bar presidents provides a source of encouragement and advice for women lawyers at all stages of their careers.