

Anti-Affirmative Action Group Withdraws Lawsuit After Law Firm Expands Diversity Fellowship Program



In a recent development, a group founded by a prominent anti-affirmative action activist has chosen to drop its lawsuit against a U.S. law firm, Perkins Coie, aimed at challenging the firm's diversity fellowship program. The decision comes after the law firm revised its application criteria, now allowing all law students to apply, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. This notable change marks a significant step toward enhancing diversity within the law firm's ranks.

A Shift in Perspective

Edward Blum's American Alliance for Equal Rights, a well-known organization advocating against affirmative action policies, agreed to dismiss its case against Perkins Coie in a Dallas federal court. The catalyst for this resolution was Perkins Coie's announcement that it would open its diversity fellowship program to all law students, eliminating the previous restriction that limited participation to members of "historically underrepresented" groups.

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Blum expressed his views on the matter: "There are many other law firms with similar racially discriminatory programs. It is hoped that these firms proactively open their programs to all law students before they are sued in federal court."

Bill Malley, the managing partner of Perkins Coie, stated in response to the case's resolution, welcoming the decision. He emphasized the firm's unwavering commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

A Milestone in Diversity

Perkins Coie, a global law firm with a workforce of more than 1,200 lawyers, was one of two firms Blum's non-profit organization targeted in August. The lawsuits alleged that their diversity fellowship programs unlawfully excluded specific individuals, including white students, based on their racial background.

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These paid fellowship programs were initially created to support the recruitment of people of color, addressing a long-standing challenge major law firms face in diversifying their partnership ranks. According to data from the National Association for Law Placement, people of color accounted for just 11.4% of all partners in major U.S. law firms as of the previous year.

Expanding Inclusivity

Similarly, the law firm Morrison & Foerster removed language from its fellowship program specifications, limiting participation to Black, Hispanic, Native American, or LGBT applicants. This change also prompted Blum's organization to withdraw its lawsuit against that firm.

This shift toward inclusivity highlights the ongoing efforts of various organizations to eliminate discriminatory practices in fellowship programs and create more opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds.

Legal Background

Edward Blum's group has taken legal action based on a Civil War-era law designed to protect formerly enslaved Black people, prohibiting racial bias in contracting. This law has been central to several recent lawsuits challenging various diversity initiatives.

In September, Blum's organization used the same law to challenge the Fearless Fund's grant program for Black women-led businesses, resulting in a federal appeals court blocking the program pending further litigation.

This development in the Perkins Coie case underscores the evolving landscape of diversity and inclusion in the legal profession and the ongoing legal battles surrounding interpreting Civil War-era laws in the context of contemporary diversity initiatives.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.

