



www.osbar.org

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September 21, 2007

Open Letter from the Board of Governors to Oregon Minority Lawyers and Law Students and Other Interested Persons

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Over the last few weeks, many people have expressed concern that recent OSB organizational changes signal a retreat by the Board of Governors and the bar from its long-standing commitment to the Affirmative Action Program and a diverse Oregon State Bar. We assure you that is not the case. On the contrary, the decision to move the Affirmative Action Program into the Member Services Department was carefully and thoughtfully considered with a view toward providing more—not less—organizational support to a program we and the members of the Bar value highly. The deep commitment for and pride in the Affirmative Action Program was demonstrated by the House of Delegates in renewing the program last year. We want to emphasize that these management changes are *not* a change in bar policy, only in the mechanics of bar operations. There is no change in budget and no less support for the goals of the program.

For many years, AAP was part of the Member and Public Services Department, and the administrator reported to the manager of that department. From April 1998 to March 2006, the AAP was part of the Executive Services Department, with the administrator reporting to General Counsel. In March 2006, due principally to a vacancy in the General Counsel position, the Affirmative Action Program administrator began to report directly to the Executive Director. Recently, it became apparent that the program needs a level of support that the Executive Director is not able to provide. There was also a concern that the program may be hindered by its isolation from other bar functions, support services and personnel.

Member Services has been a priority for the Board of Governor for several years. Member Services works with a variety of bar groups including the New Lawyers Division and the Leadership College. Incorporating AAP into Member Services is a natural fit and will provide new opportunities for contact and interaction between minority law students, new lawyers, and future bar leaders, open new lines of communication, and create positive synergy. We are confident it will give the AAP needed operational support and will free the program staff to devote more of their time and energy to the continued success of the program. All of this will contribute to the increased success of the program.

Because this change was a shift in reporting relationships and departmental structure, it was a decision that was entirely appropriate for the Executive Director to make. That said, she made the realignment with input from a variety of people, including several current and past Affirmative Action Committee members and members of the Board of Governors. The board fully supports the decision. We believe this realignment is a good one both for the Oregon State Bar and its AAP.

We acknowledge and appreciate the passion and creativity that Stella Manabe brought to the program in her ten years with the OSB. Many people have expressed that they are reacting more to her resignation than to a change in internal OSB structure and we know she will be missed. Under Stella's leadership the Affirmative Action Program had many successes, including the creation of OLIO, a nationally recognized program. We hope and expect to continue building on the foundation she laid.

Again, we want to be clear that the OSB Board of Governors remains fully committed to the AAP and its goals, and we are not abandoning or diminishing our commitment to diversity in the legal profession and to equal access to the justice system. We will continue to do everything possible to ensure that the Affirmative Action Program is adequately funded and supported in every way. With this letter, we have tried to respond to the issues and concerns expressed by many of you and invite you to contact any of us individually if you have additional questions. We hope all of you will appreciate that this organizational realignment was done to strengthen the program and that you will continue working with us in a positive spirit to meet that objective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Albert A. Menashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Albert A. Menashe
President