



# The State of Black Women in the Law

2023 DEIB Assessment Report

by Krystal Studavent Ramsey, Dean Alfreda Robinson, Sharon Bridges, and Desiree C. Boykin



**Kanarys**

# Table of Contents

Report Contributors.....3

Foreword..... 8

Preface.....10

About the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division.....12

About the National Bar Institute.....12

About Kanarys, Inc. ....12

Executive Summary.....13

General Representation Challenges in U.S. Legal Industry.....14

Assessment Participant Demographics.....16

Assessment Participant Sentiments and Experiences.....18

Conclusion and the Path Forward.....24

Roadmap—What Organizations Can Do to Advance Black Women..... 25

Resources.....27



## Report Contributors



**Krystal Studavent Ramsey, Esq.**  
Director of Diversity & Inclusion,  
Blank Rome

Krystal Studavent Ramsey is an award-winning business and DEI leader who marries her work experience and skills to her passion of developing inclusive work environments and advancing and amplifying the voices of historically marginalized communities, by leveraging her ability to develop and connect with people, transform culture, improve operations, and grow business. She leads Blank Rome's (an Am Law 100 law firm) Diversity & Inclusion function and strategy firmwide across 1000+ employees and 15 offices, with 14 in the U.S. and one in Shanghai, and works collaboratively to foster an equitable work environment and inclusive culture in which all Blank Rome's workforce experiences belonging and has the opportunity to thrive. She manages a team of Diversity & Inclusion professionals and reports to the Firm's Chair/Managing Partner and Chief Operations Officer. Krystal is a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee Cabinet and Strategic Planning Committee.

Krystal has 15 years of interdisciplinary experience in the legal industry, with a focus on DEI and growth strategy, operations, talent/leadership development and management, change management, marketing, and business development. Prior to Blank Rome, Krystal was a legal workforce consultant for Axiom, the world's largest Alternative Legal Services Provider, advising general counsel across the country on workforce strategy. Krystal is a former practicing corporate attorney and General Counsel, Senior Vice President of Business Affairs of Music World Entertainment, the entertainment management company and record label home to Beyoncé, Solange, and BET Sunday Best artists (MWG). She was Director of Strategy and Operations for the national nonprofit, Diverse Attorney Pipeline Program ("DAPP"), providing coaching and career placement for first-year, women of color law students, and the Executive Director of Houston-based nonprofit, the Downtown Group ("DTG"), which was formed in 1997 to develop, advance, and uplift Black women attorneys throughout Greater Houston. The organization has 400+ members. Prior to the above-mentioned roles, Krystal served in a DEI and business development role for global law firm Norton Rose Fulbright (1 of the 10 largest law firms in the world).

Krystal has been recognized as a Top 15 Diversity & Inclusion Champion by Diversity Global Magazine, a Woman Who Means Business in the Outstanding Business Leader in Law category and Outstanding Head of Diversity by the Houston Business Journal, a Diversity and Inclusion Champion by Texas Lawyer Magazine, and an Outstanding Lawyer in a Non-Traditional Setting by the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division. Krystal frequently speaks to and coaches women of color in the law on branding, strategic networking, and business development, with several related initiatives that she created and launched through the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division. She also created BR Advance, a leadership development program for women of color partners at Blank Rome. She is on the Houston Reception Steering Committee for the 2023 Texas Minority Counsel Program Conference and a member of the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division.

Krystal received her juris doctor from Thurgood Marshall School of Law, bachelor of science in social justice from Texas Southern University, organizational change management certificate from Wharton, and diversity and inclusion certificate from Cornell.





**Dean Alfreda Robinson**

Past President & CEO, National Bar Association

Associate Dean & Co-Director, Litigation & Dispute Resolution Program, GWU Law School

Alfreda Robinson has led a remarkably distinguished legal career. Dean Robinson served as the 77th President (and only 13 of 15) of the 98-year-old, preeminent National Bar Association. She is the recipient of many high marks of distinction. Robinson has received the prestigious National Bar Association's **highest** honor, the C. Frances Stradford Award. In July 2022, Dean Robinson was inducted into the prestigious National Bar Association Hall of Fame, and in June 2023, she was inducted into the venerable Washington Bar Association Hall of Fame. Moreover, Alfreda is the recipient of the National Bar's prestigious Heman Marion Sweatt Award, Sankofa Award, and many Presidential Outstanding Service awards. Dean Robinson is a member of the District of Columbia Bar and U.S. Supreme Court Bar.

This year Dean Robinson was appointed by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to the U.S. Department of Transportation Anti-Discrimination Subcommittee, Aviation Consumer Protection Advisory Committee. She is the recipient of other organization's honors including, the Women's eNews' Dorothy Height Champion for Civil Rights Award, as a Leader for the 21st Century. Also, the GW Black Law Students Association has established the Dean Robinson Oral Advocacy Annual Award in her honor, that is bestowed on a deserving student during the GW BLSA Patricia Roberts Harris Annual Gala, which Dean Robinson co-founded four decades ago.

Dean is often described as "a leader of leaders" for her decades of visionary, collaborative and effective leadership in many organizations. Her Bar Year theme was "**moving forward boldly**" and resulted in one of the most financially successful NBA Bar years, even during the Covid pandemic. She is a very seasoned, exceptional fundraiser. Her Bar Year proudest accomplishment: personally raising the largest, single donation in NBA history. Overall, her NBA proudest leadership roles: service as the National Bar President and Chairing the powerful, influential NBA Judicial Selection Committee 11 times.

Alfreda Robinson is the Associate Dean for Trial Advocacy and Co-Director of the Litigation and Dispute Resolution Program at George Washington University Law School. She teaches Professional Responsibility and Pretrial Practice. Robinson serves on the Advisory Committee of the newly established GW Equity Institute. Alfreda is the visionary founder of the Power Reimagined Gender and Race Equity Project. Furthermore, she is a member of the Executive Committee of the Professional Responsibility Section of the American Association of Law Schools. She hosted the 2023 Washington Bar Annual Conference and Installation.

Dean Robinson is a Board member of the National Bar Institute, Board member of the NBA Board of Governors, former Board member of the Washington Bar Association, Executive Committee member of the NBA Law Professors Division, Vice Chair of the NBA Civil Trial Advocacy Section, President of the NBA South Africa Affiliate, Vice Chair of the NBA Botswana Affiliate, and member of GWAC's Judicial and Executive Appointments Committee (Greater Washington Area Chapter, Women Lawyers Division, NBA).



Alfreda Robinson earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Chicago, and a J.D. degree from GW Law School. After law school, Dean joined the U.S. Department of Justice, where she received numerous honors, including the U.S. Attorney General's Special Commendation, Outstanding Performance, Special Achievement, and Exceptional Performance awards.

A much sought after speaker, her recent presentations have included, "**Power Reimagined**" at the GW Equity Institute Initiative (September 2022), and "**Power Reimagined**" at the "#Be the Movement" Women's Policy Bootcamp, organized by the DC Mayor's Office On Women's Policy and Initiatives (March 2023).

During July 2023, her collaborative effort with the NBA Women's Lawyers Division **National Survey of the Black Women Lawyer** experience will be published worldwide.

Dean Robinson's most important published scholarly article is "**Corporate Social Responsibility and African-American Reparations: Jubilee.**" Rutgers Law Review, 55:309, 2003. Her forthcoming scholarship is an essay entitled, "Power Reimagined", focusing on gender equity in the legal workplace, presenting the results of her successful Black Women Law Students Gender Equity Project, sponsored partially by the GW Equity Institute Initiative.



**Sharon Bridges**

Vice President & Deputy General Counsel, Bridge Partners

Attorney Sharon F. Bridges is a trusted legal and business advisor to executive leadership in matters related to board governance, commercial transactions, compliance, contracts, crisis management, enterprise risk management, government relations, human resources, labor and employment, mergers and acquisitions, privacy and security, project management, and litigation. A native of Las Vegas, Nevada, Attorney Bridges relocated to Rankin County, Mississippi, in her teens and graduated as the first African American Valedictorian of her high school class.

A visionary and strategic thinker, Attorney Bridges has successfully driven legal solutions and business outcomes as senior legal counsel for three academic medical centers and as a law firm equity partner, representing national and international corporations in complex legal matters for over 25 years. Attorney Bridges currently serves as Vice President and Deputy General Counsel for Baystate Health Inc. in Springfield, Massachusetts, one of the largest non-profit health care systems in western Massachusetts, working remotely from Jackson, Mississippi. In this role, Attorney Bridges serves on the executive leadership team and manages the operations of the legal department overseeing a staff of attorneys and legal professionals, focusing on the overall corporate strategy while designing legal solutions that mitigate risks to the organization.

Attorney Bridges has been an active leader in a host of legal and non-profit organizations. She served as General Counsel and Vice President for the National Bar Association, the



oldest association of African American lawyers, judges and law professors. From 2010 to 2014, Attorney Bridges served as International Program Chairman for Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., leading the implementation and evaluation of the organization's programs world wide in the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada and the Caribbean Islands. She served as Adjunct Professor for the Jackson State University Pre-Law Program and was named Adjunct Faculty of the Year in 2020. Attorney Bridges is a former Mississippi Corporate Counsel Association Vice President and Treasurer. She currently serves on the Morris Brown College Foundation Board and the American Health Law Association Women's Leadership Council.

Attorney Bridges received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing from Morris Brown College, Atlanta, Georgia and a Juris Doctorate from Loyola University School of Law, New Orleans, Louisiana. She is licensed to practice law in Massachusetts (in-house counsel designation), Louisiana and Mississippi.



**Desiree C. Boykin**

Chair, National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division  
Senior VP, General Counsel & Secretary of Corporation, United Negro College Fund

Desiree Boykin is the senior vice president, general counsel, and secretary for UNCF. She joined UNCF in 2002 and provides advice and counsel to the UNCF Board of Directors, senior staff, and member presidents in the areas of higher education, insurance, constitutional law, intellectual property, corporate compliance and corporate governance. She was elected secretary of the corporation in October 2017. Additionally, she practices probate, contracts, employment and nonprofit law. Desiree manages UNCF's legacy portfolio (testamentary gifts), which has resulted in more than \$67 million in revenue during her tenure.

Prior to joining UNCF, Desiree was an associate attorney at the law office of John Paul Simpkins, where she was responsible for all phases of general civil practice including personal injury, product liability, family law and medical malpractice.

She has numerous professional and civic affiliations, including membership in the National Bar Association, the Greater Washington Area Chapter Women Lawyers Division, Howard University Alumni Association, DC Club and the Howard University School of Law Alumni Association. Desiree is currently the president of the National Bar Association's Women Lawyers Division.

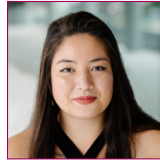
Desiree has a law degree from Howard University School of Law and a bachelor's degree in communications from Howard University.



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San Raphael, CA





## Foreword

By Desireé C. Boykin  
Chair, NBA Women Lawyers Division

Black women attorneys in this country shared a collective victory when Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson was confirmed and sworn-in to the Supreme Court of the United States. Her triumph showed us that the highest levels of our beloved legal profession were accessible to Black women. However for many, the level of success achieved by Justice Jackson and others seems out of reach.

The National Bar Association (NBA) and Kanarys Inc. partnered to evaluate the state of Black women attorneys on matters of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Members of the NBA Women Lawyers Division (WLD) were the source of the data, which showed that while a majority of us feel empowered, respected and supported in our workplaces, there are many that experience, or witnessed someone experience, discrimination or bias. Incidents of discrimination and bias are amplified when they occur at the intersection of being Black and being a woman.

According to the NBA/Kanarys data, Black women attorneys do not feel adequately mentored and combining that with the impact of discrimination and bias can leave Black women feeling isolated and out of place. This highlights the importance of and need for the WLD WE Empower Mentoring Program.

Now in its third year, the WLD WE Empower Mentoring Program is a four-month professional development mentoring program for Black women law students, primarily from HBCU law schools. Pairing seasoned and new attorneys with law students, the program offers opportunities for comprehensive discussions around work etiquette and culture, building one's personal brand, networking with peers, and promoting work-life balance. The brainchild of past WLD Chair, Sharon Bridges, this mentoring program fills a much-needed gap as shown by the assessment data. Thank you Sharon for your leadership and commitment to young women.

I encourage every Black woman attorney to join the National Bar Association WLD. Whether you are an accomplished veteran or recent law school graduate, the WLD affords you the opportunity to belong to a dynamic group of inspiring and caring Black women attorneys.





## Statement of GW Law Associate Dean Alfreda Robinson

June 21, 2023

There is a need to measure progress by the meaningful inclusion of Black women lawyers at leadership ranks in every part of the legal profession.

Notwithstanding decades of well-intentioned declarations, Mansfield Rules certifications, lofty goals, commitments, studies, conferences, lawsuits, and excuses, there is inexcusable single digit representation of Black women lawyers at the highest leadership ranks in law firms, corporations, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and law schools and universities.

Black women have extraordinary qualifications and immeasurable corporate value, despite confronting a unique set of challenges. Increasing Black women lawyers in leadership is manifestly required and will dramatically and significantly produce greater: 1) equitable compensation, recognition, business development, and promotion; 2) participation in the development of visionary organizational policy and strategic planning; 3) identification of invisible discriminatory practices—including macro- and micro- aggressions; and 4) critical outcome determinative sponsorship—not just mentorship—of recent Black women lawyers and law students. The Power Reimagined Institute addresses this.

**Quoting: GW Law Associate Dean Alfreda Robinson**



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## Preface

by NBA WLD Leaders

The legal industry (profession) like other American institutions was established with the exclusion of Black people and centered around Whiteness. As we know, racial inequality is deeply rooted in American society, and as a result, is embedded throughout Corporate America. Macon Bolling Allen, an African American man, was the first known African American lawyer to practice in the United States in 1844. According to the US Census in 1930, there were only 1,247 Black lawyers out of a total complement of 160,605 in the United States. Out of the 1,247, 1,223 were male and only 24 were women (2%).<sup>1</sup>

Fast forward to present day, Black women remain significantly underrepresented, and growth is sluggish in the legal industry (profession), with strides being made at the summer associate and associate levels. While Black women make up just under 5% of first-year law students, attrition rates among minority attorneys are as much as three times that of their White peers, according to the American Bar Association.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2022 National Association for Law Placement Report, in U.S. law firms by race/ethnicity, Black and Hispanic/Latina women each continued to account for less than 1% of all partners in 2022. The percentage of Black partners overall increased by just 0.1 percentage points, from 2.22% of all partners in 2021 to 2.32%. Black associates saw the biggest year-over-year increase in representation, up by more than half of a percentage point to 5.77% of all associates, with Black women making up just over 3% of associates.

In 2021, the number of Black women leading American law schools reached a high of 28. Two were interim deans. Twenty-one of them were appointed dean for the first time within the last four years. A number of them are also the first Black woman to hold [their position](#)<sup>3</sup>. Per the 2021 MCCA Fortune 1000 General Counsel Trend report<sup>4</sup>, 35 of the general counsels were Black women, which is a slight increase but still remains low. [According to an American Bar Association report](#) on Black women on the federal bench, in the nation's history, there have been 73 Black women federal judges across the nearly 1,770 federal judgeships across the country.<sup>5</sup>

In 2022, the National Bar Association WLD hosted a standing room only event at the annual conference called "The State of the Black Woman Lawyer in America" where we discussed the above statistics and personal experiences of Black women throughout the legal industry. More importantly, these discussions served as a catalyst to conduct this study in partnership with Kanarys.

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<sup>1</sup> [Black Lawyers in the 1930s—Marquette University Law School Faculty Blog](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Jackson's Path to Court Topples 233-Year Barrier for Black Women \(2\) \(bloomberglaw.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [How Black women law school deans are reshaping their institutions \(19thnews.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [2022\\_MCCA-Fortune-1000-GC-Survey.pdf](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Judges | American Bar Association Profile of the Legal Profession \(abalegalprofile.com\)](#)



Our goals with this study are below:

- Typically when we discuss the challenges and progression of women in the legal industry, we are referring to and referencing the experiences of White women. In the Lean In—State of Black Women in Corporate America study, they recommend that companies focus on the unique barriers and nuanced challenges of Black women in the workplace. We wanted to present a tool that illuminates and pinpoints specific challenges of Black women in the law on a broader scale so we can have a concentrated, collective focus in addressing those challenges.
- We want to promote and further the advancement of Black women in the legal industry because we are qualified, talented, driven, and capable. In addition, we want to accelerate progress while also encouraging organizations to commit to making the growth and advancement of Black women a business priority.
- We want genuine allyship and for more leaders in the industry to participate and engage in racial equity work.
- Aside from identifying challenges, we want to offer and share actionable insights and solutions. We have provided a roadmap, which offers recommendations to support Black women in a holistic way throughout their legal career journeys and, if implemented, can support transformation and growth initiatives for this constituency.

The above-mentioned statistics and historical data prove that the same problems persist. These include:

- There is a lack of acknowledgment of Black women's skills, experience, and knowledge. Accountability measures are not put in place to address inequitable organizational practices and processes that impact Black women.
- Low representation of Black women in leadership (with genuine authority) to provide guidance or influence significant change.
- Business operations are not being disrupted to effectuate positive change for Black women in the legal industry
- Black women's challenges are diminished when aggregated with other populations of women.
- Black women's value and lived experience must be recognized for more than increasing diversity in an organization, so we can be provided with equitable support and access and have a higher level of investment for success across the legal industry.

We hope that you will read this report in its entirety, reflect on the findings, and implement recommendations from our roadmap and other sources. We need to move beyond talking about the same challenges year over year, and make change happen together now.



## About the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division (WLD)

The NBA was founded in 1925 and is the nation's oldest and largest national network of predominantly Black attorneys and judges. It represents the interests of approximately 66,000 lawyers, judges, law professors, and law students. The NBA is organized around 23 substantive law sections, 10 divisions, 12 regions, and over 80 affiliate chapters throughout the United States and around the world.

Founded by eighteen (18) phenomenal women who decided to work together to address discrimination and bias within their workplaces and organizations, the WLD was established in 1972 as a vehicle for women in the practice of law to address the issues and problems that particularly affect interest, and concern Black women. Since then, WLD attorneys have achieved great success within and outside of the NBA.

The Honorable Arnette R. Hubbard and WLD member, served as the first woman president of the NBA and since her monumental breakthrough, 12 other women have proudly served in that role, including our current president Lonita K. Baker. WLD women have had leadership roles in state and federal government, law firms, solo practices, non-profit organizations, at all levels of the judiciary, and everything in between.

Through the WLD, women have made a significant impact on the goals and directions of the NBA by participating at all levels of the organization. The WLD has achieved its goal of adding positive direction to the NBA by "taking a seat at its table" and establishing a new dimension of the sensitivity of the NBA as it addresses legal issues affecting women, children, the family, and the Black community as a whole. In its sponsorship of seminars, breakfasts, and other forums, the WLD has concentrated on issues of specific interest and impact on women, and as a result, brought these issues to the forefront of the NBA's conscience.

## About the National Bar Institute (NBI)

Founded in 1982 by members of the National Bar Association, the oldest and largest professional organization of lawyers and judges of color in the world, the National Bar Institute shares the same passion and commitment for advancing minorities in the legal profession by promoting education, advocacy and action to ensure civil and human rights, and equal justice for all. In fulfilling its mission, the NBI has established objectives that call for supporting students and legal education programs, and issues that broadly impact human and civil rights.

## About Kanarys, Inc.

Kanarys, Inc. is a technology company that provides the data and tools that organizations need to create long-term systematic change around DEIB challenges. Kanarys' platform provides the framework, benchmarking, and data that these organizations need to incorporate best-in-class DEIB into their policies and practices so they can track and measure impact on business outcomes.



## Executive Summary

The NBA WLD partnered with Kanarys, Inc. in 2022 to launch an initiative to obtain targeted DEIB data analytics regarding members of the NBA WLD, affiliate chapters, and other Black women legal organizations and networks across the country. The assessment was open from August 8, 2022 to October 24, 2022.

Below is an overview presenting some of the highlights from the assessment. For a detailed look at the findings from the assessment, please read the Full Report. We also provide a roadmap to ensure that Black women at different points in their legal career journey are treated fairly and are empowered to lead and grow in the legal industry.

### Participant Demographics

There were 163 participants who identify as Black women. In addition, 95% of participants disclosed their organization type, with 48% thereof indicating they currently work within a law firm. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to disclose a wide variety of demographics (e.g., age, family status, religion, income, political ideology) which they deem important to their identity that may not be captured in traditional employee onboarding demographic surveys. Overall, the data shows that participants felt the most comfortable disclosing their organizational tenure, job title, and type of legal organization.

### Methods and Key Findings

**Kanarys Benchmark Score.** The Kanarys proprietary Industry Benchmarking Score (KS) consists of a numerical score representing a score within a range from (0) to the highest score (100) among all organizations that Kanarys has assessed. The purpose of the KS is to provide an objective metric to benchmark organizations across industries on their DEIB performance that allows organizations to proactively determine where they need to allocate resources. As of 2023, the KS is 58 across organizations representative of industry across the United States. Collectively, this participant cohort scored below the KS across all categories of DEIB. This highlights the importance of recognizing the intersectional identity and unique experiences Black women face within the legal industry.

**Sentiment Analysis.** Beyond the scoring analysis, a deeper analysis into the sentiments of the participants show that while many of the participants reported positive sentiment in some areas, there are a number of opportunities for the legal industry to improve to help make the workplace a more inclusive and positive place for Black women lawyers and professionals.

For instance, a majority of the participants reported that they have genuine opportunities to develop their skills at their workplace and feel comfortable requesting for reasonable accommodations without resistance. Furthermore, a majority of the participants felt comfortable expressing specific aspects of their identity within the workplace and that their opinions are valued.

However, there is still significant work to be done to ensure that there are accountability measures in place to curb bias and discrimination, as

- 47% of the participants feel the burden of having to educate people on DEIB solely because they are Black.
- 36% reported having personally experienced discrimination or bias at their workplace.
- 41% reported having personally witnessed discrimination or bias at their workplace.

There needs to be collective work to understand the nuanced challenges and barriers that Black women face in the workplace. There should be intentional measures and systems in place to mitigate bias, address discrimination, and maintain accountability. Having a designated DEIB leader in charge of driving a DEIB strategy and organizational transformation through a DEIB lens will also help improve these experiences. Outcome and process metrics should continuously be evaluated to monitor progress and refine along the way. To accelerate progress, such designated DEIB leaders should report to someone in the C-Suite, preferably the CEO or an equivalent leader.

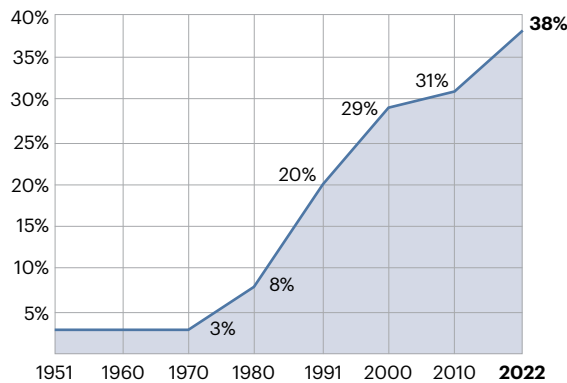


## General Representation Challenges in U.S. Legal Industry

As of January 1, 2022, there are 1,327,010 active lawyers in the United States, according to the American Bar Association's (ABA) [National Lawyer Population Survey](#). This is a 6.6% increase since 2012, when there were 1,245,205 active lawyers. This survey highlights that while the legal profession has grown in the last ten years, this growth has been stagnant compared to faster growth in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The ABA delivered an insightful report—[Profile on the Legal Profession](#)—in July 2022 that sheds some additional light on the current status of lawyers in the United States.

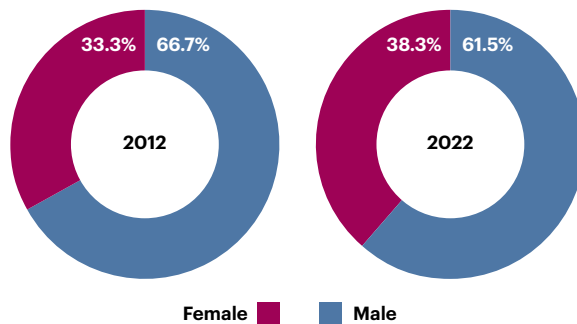
Thirty-eight percent (38%) of all lawyers are women, an increase from 33% in 2012.

**Figure 1—Women in the Legal Profession by Decade: 1951–2022**



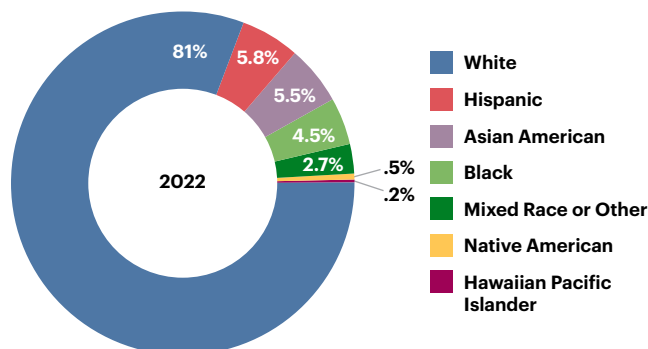
Sources: ABA National Lawyer Population Survey; American Bar Foundation Lawyer Statistical Reports; ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar

**Figure 2—2012 vs 2022 Lawyer Gender**



However, the percentage of Black lawyers is nearly unchanged since 2012 when 4.7% of all active lawyers were Black and currently it is 4.5%. This is significantly less than the percentage of Black people in the United States (13.4%). As Figure 3 shows, White people are overrepresented in the legal profession when compared to the U.S. population.

**Figure 3—2022 Lawyers by Race and Ethnicity**



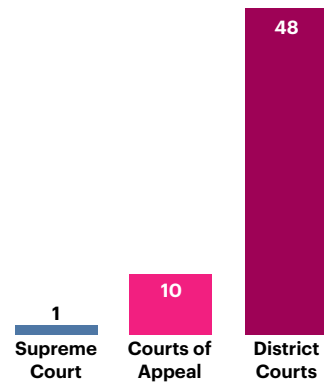
Kanarys

Further, with respect to the federal courts, the ABA Profile of the Legal Profession report also highlights representation of Black women at the judiciary level. Thanks to Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, we have our first Black woman lawyer on the Supreme Court in U.S. history. Furthermore, there are currently 10 Black women judges in the Court of Appeals and 48 in the District Courts.

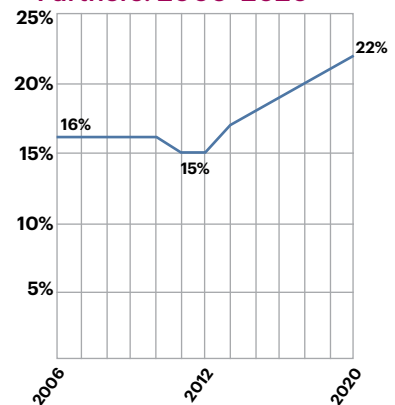
With respect to law firms, the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) released its [Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms](#) in January 2022, which found progress in representation of women and people of color at major U.S. law firms between 2012 and 2021. Notably, the progress was most significant at the summer associate level where 41% of all summer associates in 2021 were people of color and 25% of the summer associates were women of color.

More specifically, in 2020, 22% of all equity partners were women, up from 15% in 2012. The number of women lawyers is higher in lower levels, i.e., at the associate level or non-equity partnership level. (In 2020, nearly half of all associates were women and 32% were non-equity partners).

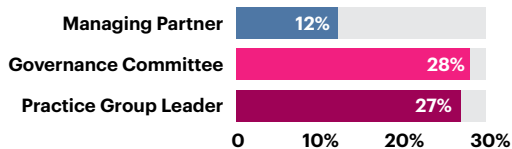
**Figure 4—Black Female Federal Judges by Court**  
as of July 1, 2022



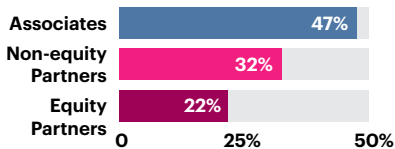
**Figure 5—Female Equity Partners: 2006–2020**



**Figure 6—Women in Law Firm Leadership Roles: 2020**

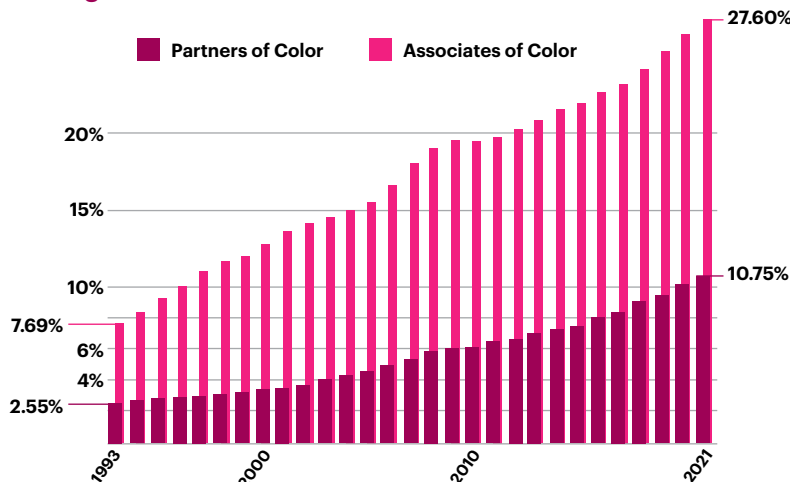


**Figure 7—Women in Law Firms: 2020**



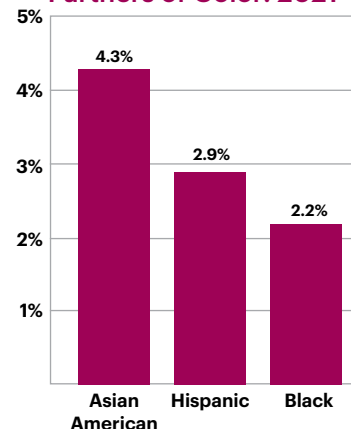
Although the percentages of Black partners, associates, and lawyers increased in 2021, representation of Black lawyers in law firms still lags behind that of Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latinx lawyers.

**Figure 8—Partners and Associates of Color: 1993–2021**



Source: National Association for Law Placement 2021 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms

**Figure 9—Law Firm Partners of Color: 2021**



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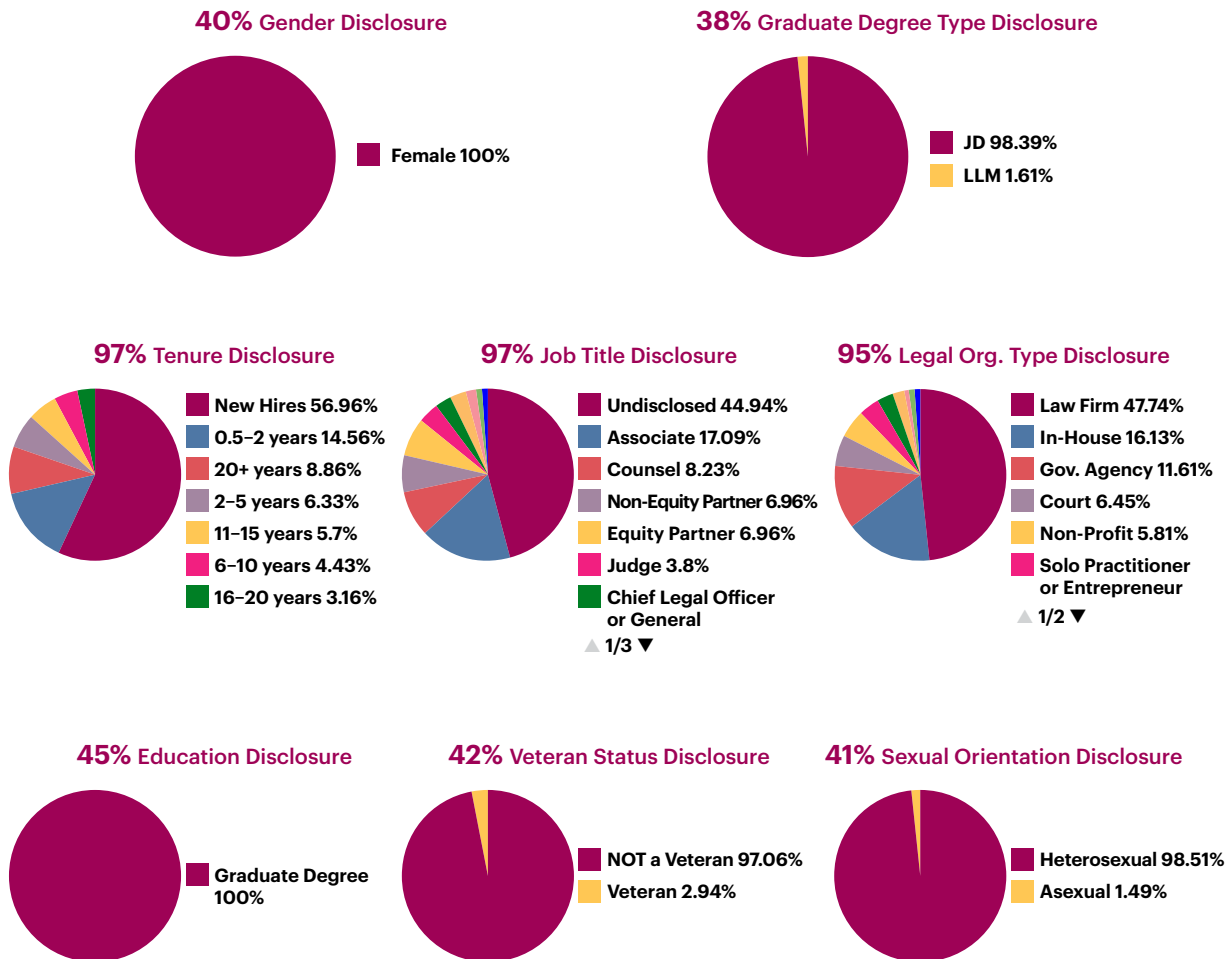


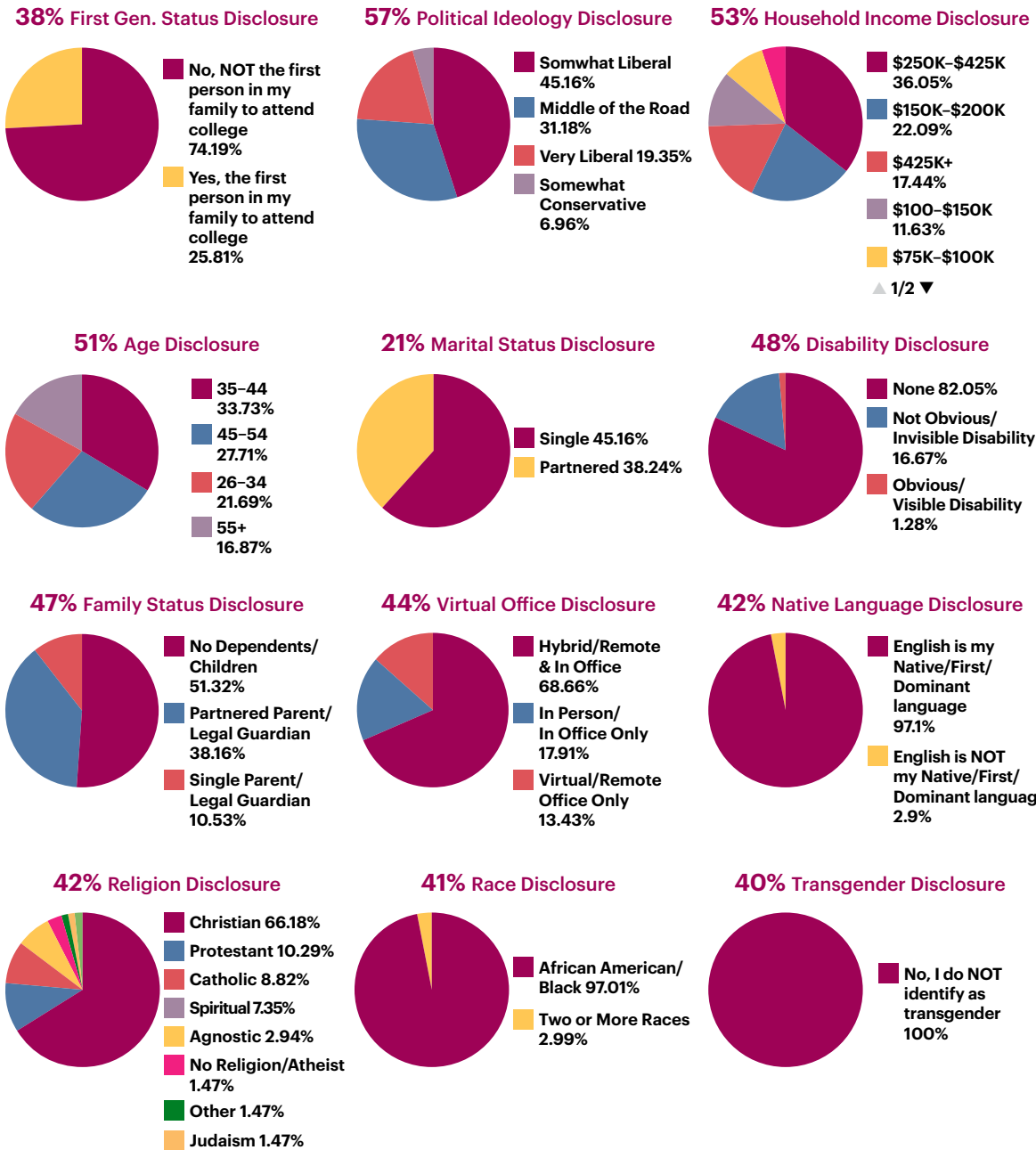
## Assessment Participant Demographics

Participants were given the opportunity to disclose a wide variety of demographics (e.g., age, family status, religion, income, political ideology) which they deem important to their identity that may not be captured in traditional employee onboarding demographic surveys. As a reminder, all 163 participants identify as Black women. In addition, 95% of participants disclosed their organization type, with 48% thereof indicating they currently work within a law firm.

The purpose of the below graphics is to provide a visual of the current landscape of the participants. Overall, participants felt the most comfortable disclosing their organizational tenure (97% disclosure), job title (97% disclosure), and type of legal organization (95% disclosure). This should give organizations, particularly law firms and corporations that employ in-house counsel, the awareness to become better enabled to make prescriptive decisions based on workplace challenges experienced by their Black women lawyers.

*Note that references to the disclosure percentage rates at the top of each pie chart refers to the percentage of those participants who responded to the corresponding demographic question, whereas the pie charts indicate the percentage of individuals that identify with each demographic group. For purposes of this report, Kanarys generalizes these participation rates as representative of the WLD of the NBA.*





Kanarys

## Assessment Participant Sentiments & Experiences

### Kanarys Benchmarking & Overall Scoring

The Kanarys proprietary Industry Benchmarking Score (KS) consists of a numerical score representing a range within a score from zero (the lowest score) to one hundred (the highest score) among all organizations that Kanarys has assessed. The purpose of the KS is to provide an objective metric to benchmark organizations across industries on their DEIB performance that allows organizations to proactively determine where they need to allocate resources. As of 2023, the KS is 58 across organizations representative of industry across the United States.

The assessment questions measure the following categories: Diversity (i.e., inherent, and self-evident characteristics of the current and future workforce), Equity (i.e., differences in remuneration, benefits, opportunities, and access for different groups), Inclusion (i.e., current state of integration, acceptance, and respect experienced by employees), and Belonging (i.e., the extent that employees feel valued and supported). In other words, participants answered a variety of questions that correspond to each category. Each category then received an average score based on responses to these corresponding questions, all of which are below the KS.

NBA Overall Score	49	Kanarys Benchmarking Average Score (KS)	58
Diversity Score	56	Diversity Score	66
Equity Score	48	Equity Score	57
Inclusion Score	51	Inclusion Score	59
Belonging Score	51	Belonging Score	57

The National Bar Association's Women's Lawyer Division scored below average overall, and within each category when compared to the KS. Not only is the overall score below average compared to cross-industry averages (i.e. KS), but also below average compared to the 2022 Bloomberg Law Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework. The WLD's below average score highlights the importance of recognizing the intersectional identity and unique experiences Black women face in the legal industry, as the intersectional identity of a Black woman represents how multiplicative effects of race and gender are leading to a less positive experience. This report is unique in including additional intersectional identities such as household income, political orientation, and age to create a more nuanced and specific profile of the experiences of Black women lawyers for the purposes of curating tailored interventions to improve DEIB within the legal profession.

**Diversity.** In general, 66% of the NBA participants, which represent a myriad of legal organizations, agreed their workplaces display a commitment to improving diversity. However, only 65% of respondents indicated their intention to remain in their current



organization in two years, indicating the need to not only continue recruiting and hiring Black women, but also the need to improve efforts to support Black talent so they may truly thrive within their organizations to improve retention. In addition, respondents indicated the need to continue promoting Black women within the organization into leadership positions. Upon disaggregation by identity group, additional gaps were identified.

- Individuals with a household income of < \$200,000 reported lower scores ranging from 47–53
- Individuals with a household income of > \$200,000 reported higher scores ranging from 54–58

This suggests that pay equity may be an important factor in Black women’s experience of workplace belonging, and those with higher household incomes have a more positive experience. Note that there is a 22-point gap between those at the ages 26–37 and ages 45–54 in seeing themselves at their workplace in 2 years. This means there is a need for organizations to examine retention efforts for junior lawyers.

However, although lawyers between the ages of 45–54 indicated higher sentiment in remaining in their current organization, this group scored the lowest in believing their workplace is committed to improving diversity.

NBA Highest Scoring Diversity Item	57	NBA Lowest Scoring Diversity Item	54
I see myself at the same organization in 2 years.		I believe my workplace promotes Diversity.	

**Equity.** Overall, the participants scored below average (NBA score = 48) on Equity, a 9-point deviation from the KS (KS = 57). This score is higher than other areas as more respondents felt that they had opportunities to improve their skills (NBA score = 68). However, sentiment regarding accountability for discrimination (NBA score = 32) and equitable promotions (NBA score = 36) showed a 10-point deviation below the KS. Although participants reported an average sentiment (NBA score = 56) regarding their workplace’s displaying commitment to improving equity, many did not believe there are mechanisms for holding people accountable when they do experience discrimination. Lower than average sentiment marked by at least a 10-point deviation below the KS regarding fairness in performance evaluations (NBA score = 45), workplace treatment (NBA score = 45), recognition (NBA score = 48), and work assignment allocation (NBA score = 44) may indicate that discrimination is present in these processes. Only sentiment regarding fairness in compensation scored in the average range (NBA score = 50). In addition, 29% of participants felt that white allyship at their organization is performative.

NBA Highest Scoring Equity Item	68	NBA Lowest Scoring Equity Item	32
I am given opportunities to improve skills.		I feel there is accountability for discrimination.	



**Inclusion.** In general, participants reported a higher sentiment score regarding their workplace commitment to improving inclusion (NBA score = 58) and also reported that their workplace helps participants understand different backgrounds, with a score reflecting the KS of 44. However, participants who are aged 55 and above (NBA score = 31), have an invisible disability (NBA score = 36), have a tenure of less than six months (NBA score = 37), and work in person (NBA score = 33) scored below average. In addition, those with disabilities, identifying as somewhat Liberal, and work in person reported at least a 20-point gap below the KS. This suggests that there are growth opportunities within these specific identity groups to improve their sense of belonging within the workplace. Sponsorship and mentorship sentiments also show a 5- and 7-point deviation from the KS. Participants indicated mentorship programs show preference to in-group mentorship (e.g., male mentee paired with male mentor), which inherently exclude Black women from mentorship programs as there are a lower number of Black women in leadership and higher levels.

NBA Highest Scoring Inclusion Item	58	NBA Lowest Scoring Inclusion Item	48
I believe my workplace is committed to improving Inclusion.		I feel adequately mentored.	

**Belonging.** Although 66% of the participants reported feeling comfortable expressing their identity in their workplace, participants reported a lower-than-average sense of belonging (NBA score = 56), compared to the KS of 59. This score is lower for:

- New hires (NBA score = 52)
- Those in hybrid work roles (NBA score = 52)
- Those with a household income of less than \$200,000 (NBA score = 45)

This discrepancy may be indicative of the visible differences of a Black woman and lack of representation in senior leadership positions.

Further, the participants also experience the burden of educating others about DEIB (NBA score = 32), compared to the KS of 42. Specifically, participants who work in person only, those over the age of 35, and identified with marginal political ideologies (i.e., “Somewhat Liberal”, “Somewhat Conservative”) reported the heaviest burden regarding educating others about DEIB.

In addition, the participants reported being fearful of reporting DEIB issues to their immediate manager and HR and reported being silenced and dismissed. Indeed, the participants reported a 30-point gap below the KS in their ability to share DEIB issues with their immediate manager without fear of retaliation, and an 8-point gap below the KS in their ability to share bias concerns with Human Resources.

Lastly, although many participants report strong DEIB communication efforts within their organization, participants indicated an 11-point discrepancy below the KS in believing their organization prioritizes DEIB as part of their overall strategy.

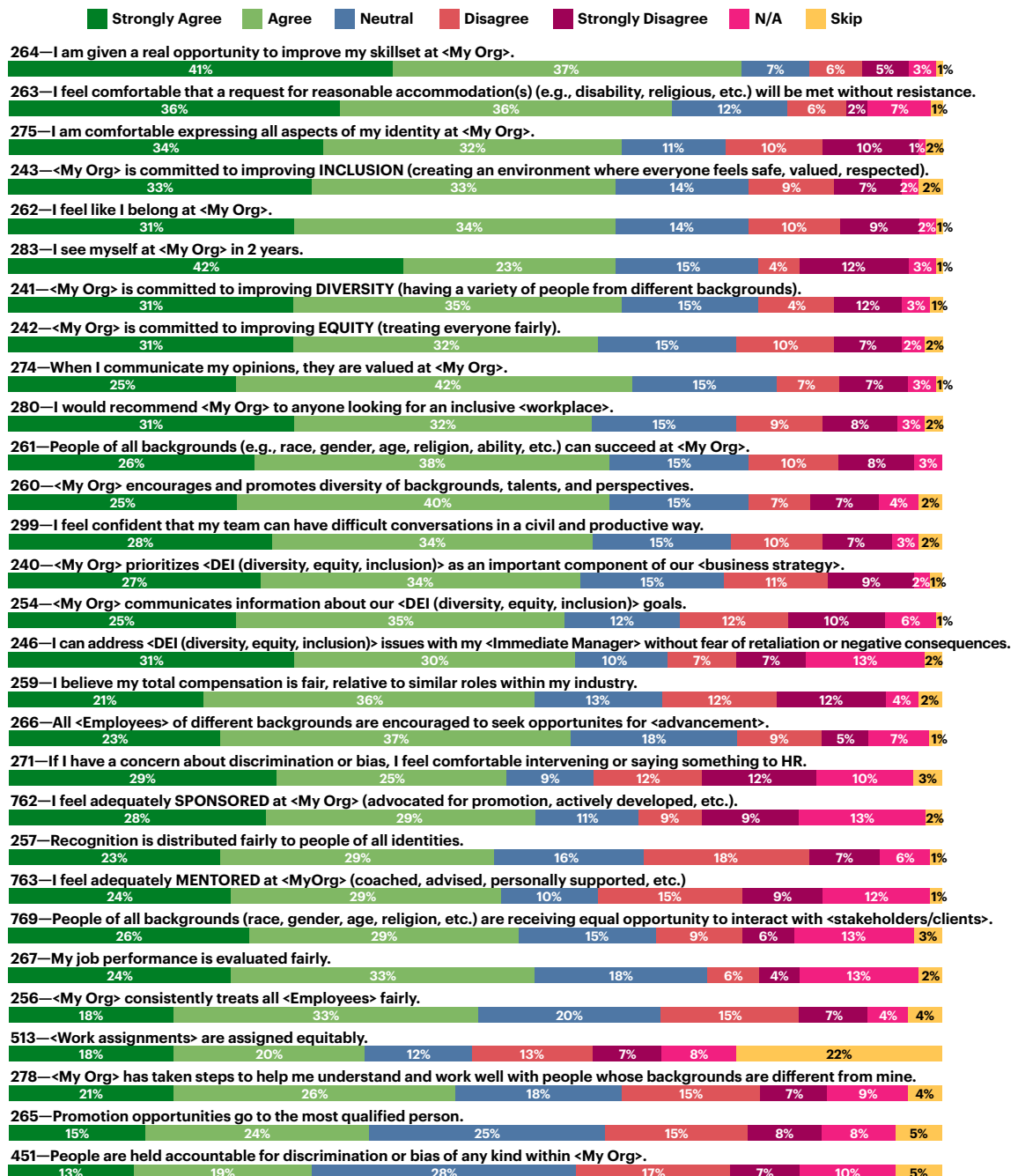
NBA Highest Scoring Belonging Item	59	NBA Lowest Scoring Belonging Item	32
I am comfortable expressing my identity at work.		I feel the burden of educating others about DEIB.*	



Ultimately, the intention of the NBA scoring metric is to show how the participants' sentiments about their workplace compares to that of the organizations that Kanarys benchmarks. Each of the four overarching categories—Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging—scored below the KS. This means that organizations or employers that these participants work for have an opportunity to move the needle in these areas to help achieve better sentiment among their Black women workforce.

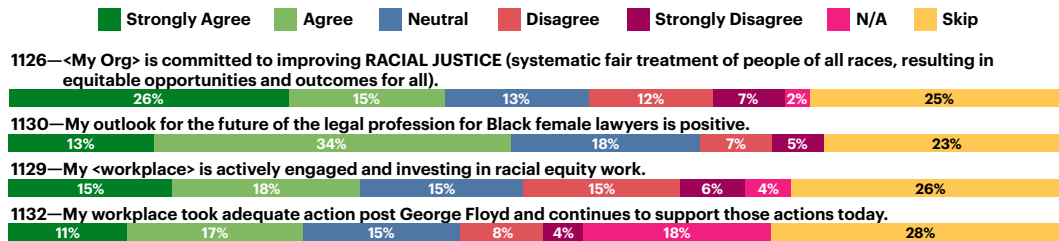
While the above was an overview of how participants' responses scored when compared to the KS, below is a graphical overview of sentiments among the participants, ranging from positive to negative.

### Positive Questions



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### Custom Positive Questions



### Positive Sentiments

Participants felt positively in many areas. The following is an overview of some of the most positive sentiments.

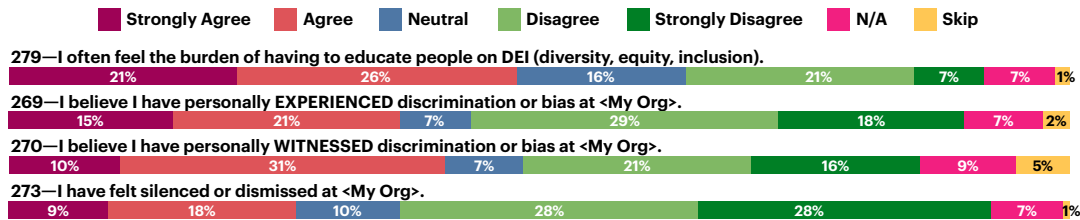
- 78% of participants reported they are given a real opportunity to improve their skills at their workplace.
- 72% of participants reported they feel comfortable that a request for a reasonable accommodation(s) (e.g., disability, religious, etc.) will be met without resistance.
- 67% of participants feel their opinions in the workplace are valued.
- 66% of participants feel comfortable expressing aspects of their identity at their organization.

In general, the participants recognize the vocal efforts their organizations are spearheading to improve DEIB within the legal industry. Indeed, respondents specifically cited conversations regarding DEIB as mechanisms to break down silos and monitor workload distribution. Participants also reported hopeful sentiment in increasing the number of Black partners within law firms. An increase in Black women representation at the partner level may increase the participants' comfort in expressing aspects of their identity at their organization. Regardless of the representation at the partner level, participants report strong positive sentiments regarding community and progress within the legal profession in the past 20 years.

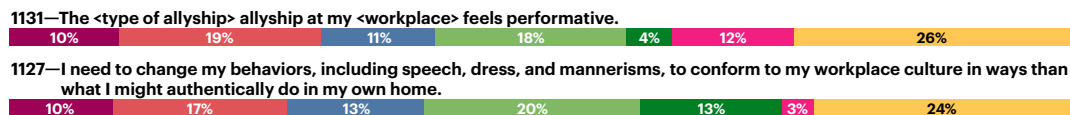




### Negative Questions



### Custom Negative Questions



### Negative Sentiments & Growth Opportunities

- 29% of participants reported that white allyship at their organization feels performative.
- 36% of participants reported having personally **experienced** discrimination or bias at their organization.
- 41% of participants reported having personally **witnessed** discrimination or bias at their organization.
- 47% of participants reported often feeling the burden of having to educate people on DEIB.

As is evident, these particular data points highlight an overarching trend: there is little accountability within organizations in this industry. Without accountability measures in place, underrepresented groups are more likely to experience or witness discrimination and bias in their workplace. It is not enough to simply have white allyship at the organization – there needs to be specific measures in place to mitigate bias and address discrimination. Otherwise, it is superficial and performative, hence why nearly 30% of participants reported feeling this way.

A robust DEIB strategy also calls for the appointment of a designated DEIB leader within the organization to enforce accountability measures. Having a designated DEIB leader in charge of executing DEIB programs will also alleviate the broader population of Black women of the added responsibility of further educating employees. Taking this a step further, this designated DEIB leader should be given a direct line of reporting to a senior executive in the C-Suite, with a focus on reporting to the CEO (or equivalent) as a best practice. If DEIB leaders are not empowered to drive meaningful change, we will continue to see slow to little progress when it comes to DEIB. After the George Floyd murder in 2020, DEIB leaders became like a “triage” overnight, becoming one of the most significant players in Corporate America to manage the crisis but they still have not been given adequate authority or resources to push for change.



## Conclusion and the Path Forward

As the [ABA Commission on Women in the Profession](#) states so succinctly in a 2020 report, “**Left Out and Left Behind: The Hurdles, Hassles, and Heartaches of Achieving Long-Term Legal Careers for Women of Color**”:

***There has been far too little progress in addressing the everyday work experiences and challenges faced by women lawyers of color due to the unique double bind of gender and race.***

Due to this inherent gender bias, which is further complicated by race, women of color who practice law have more difficulties and unfavorable experiences. In over 30 years of research, the commercial case for racial and gender diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace has been well established. However, in order to make any real progress, we must evaluate the true experiences and sentiments of Black women in the law. The results of this assessment indicate that even while there are achievements to be celebrated, there remains more work to be done. In fact, 47% of participants are charged with educating others about DEIB, and further, 70% of participants reported experiencing or witnessing discrimination or bias, adding to the emotional burden they often carry.

As a reminder, these metrics and insights should be considered as a baseline for future evaluation in supporting Black women in the law and for informing institutional DEIB initiatives and strategies in the years to come. While the NBA can work to help amplify the voices of and elevate its WLD members in the legal industry and their workplaces, progress can be accelerated when more organizations recruit Black women and invest in fostering an inclusive culture and equitable work environment to retain and advance Black women.



## Roadmap—What Organizations Can Do to Advance Black Women

### **Expose Black women at the high-school level to the legal industry in efforts to attract them to attending law school and expanding the pipeline.**

- Develop semester long—online and live—lecture courses with celebrity lawyers and clients.
- Facilitate moot court competition.
- Sponsor a one-day school visit to explore law schools, law firms, and corporations (in-house legal departments).
- Host mentorship sessions where lawyers and law students (BLSA) mentor college students.
- Launch law school one-week intensive summer camps or boot camps.
- Host a Black Women Lawyers National Law Day event.

### **Be intentional about retaining and advancing Black women.**

- When evaluating demographic data, we recommend disaggregating the data so stakeholders that are managing and reviewing the data can have better visibility into the gaps for retention purposes.
- Performance, progress, and process metrics should be tracked and monitored to understand the work experiences for Black women; address gaps and problem areas expeditiously and provide guidance and interventions.
- Leaders should be held accountable (e.g., performance reviews, feedback, reporting, and evaluations) for the development and advancement of Black women in the law; should be incentivized to reach/exceed goals, which are levers for organizational change.

### **Have ongoing contact with Black women law students.**

- Partner with school BLSA affinity group; host and sponsor events and share resources.
- Create a mailing list and send communications.
- Invite to events throughout the year.
- Send job and summer associate opportunities.

### **Invest in hiring more Black women to your organization, especially for mid-level (e.g., senior associates) and senior/executive level positions.**

- Track pipeline and hiring outcomes for Black women to ensure practices are inclusive and equitable.
- Educate recruiters, interviewers, evaluators, and hiring decision makers on how to mitigate bias and use objective review criteria when interviewing.
- Make sure the interviewer slate is diverse and knowledgeable of diversity best practices.
- Partner with organizations like the National Bar Association and local Black Bar associations and professional networks to support hiring goals.

### **Celebrate the successes of Black women, internally and externally.**

- Recognize and celebrate high performance.
- Evaluate all contributions to your organization, reward accordingly.
- Share high-profile business opportunities and promote Black women to leadership positions when they consistently produce positive results for your organization.
- Share milestone moments and positive outcomes, internally and externally.



## Roadmap—What Organizations Can Do to Advance Black Women

### Address promotional inequities.

- Present significant growth opportunities to Black women.
- Be sure to monitor and present work allocation, quality of work/projects, relationship building and networking, engagement with influencers and power players (internally and externally), and branding/visibility opportunities.
- Succession plans need to incorporate Black women and should not start when they are a senior-level practitioner.
- Provide growth and learning opportunities at different levels of the career journey, including mentorship and sponsorship, coaching, leadership development, branding opportunities, and high-profile projects.

### Self-education is critical.

- Time is spent on what we care about. Black women should not as an oppressed and marginalized group have to always educate on our oppression, especially when there are copious resources available for self-learning. This adds extra layers of exhaustion, diminishment, and interrupts our professional and personal lives. This applies to Black women who informally and formally do DEIB work. Carve out time to learn and apply what you learn. Those in the formal DEIB role are there to support your learning journey.

### Foster an inclusive culture and equitable work environment.

- Establish trust and safety within your organization through open and transparent communication, making good on commitments, creating an environment for learning and growth, and showing more empathy.
- Work collectively to dismantle systemic barriers and build systems of equity.
- Don't let stereotypes, tropes, and misinformation guide your understanding of Black women. To move beyond performative actions, take a deeper dive to get educated on our full experience and take action by using the three Ps—privilege, platform (of influence and voice), and persistence.
- When you see something inappropriate, disrespectful, or discriminatory against Black women, don't be silent (makes you complicit) or passive. Do something meaningful and say something (e.g., don't agree with what you are doing and will not accept it) to address directly.



## Resources

[ABA Survey finds 1.3M lawyers in the U.S.](#), American Bar Association (ABA) (June 20, 2022) (with direct reference to the [National Lawyer Population Survey](#))

[2022 ABA Profile of the Legal Profession](#), American Bar Association (ABA) (July 2022)

[2021 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms](#), National Association for Law Placement (NALP) (January 2022)

Peery, Destiny, et al., [Left Out and Left Behind: The Hurdles, Hassles, and Heartaches of Achieving Long-Term Legal Careers for Women of Color](#), ABA Commission on Women in the Profession (2020)

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