

# PUBLICATION

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## D&I and Pro Bono Collaboration: Using Interdepartmental Resources for D&I

First Quarter 2022

**Over the course of the last few years, companies have increasingly prioritized their diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts. In fact, it is estimated that within the last five years, the number of D&I positions has increased by two thirds<sup>1</sup>, with some companies creating entire departments devoted to this important work. These dedicated departments serve as a resource for entire organizations, with a core mission of providing widespread influence and actionable steps to improve the workplace culture. This goal is furthered by these departments identifying creative initiatives that promote interdepartmental collaboration on D&I efforts.**

Recently, Baker Donelson's D&I committee joined forces with its Pro Bono committee in an interdepartmental collaboration to advance D&I through pro bono work by supporting an American Bar Association (ABA) initiative to educate students about the law and civil rights. Specifically, the ABA's Civil Rights Civics Institute (CRCI) provides an opportunity for students in public schools throughout the United States to submit questions to the ABA that are then answered by lawyers who volunteer their time through personalized videos and written responses in a variety of topics. Among the subjects that students have inquired about are bullying, civil rights and equal opportunity, the constitution and separation of powers, the death penalty, economic justice, education, elder affairs, Native American concerns, religious freedom, rights of women, and sexual orientation and gender identity, just to name a few.

As participants in the CRCI project, Baker Donelson attorneys volunteered to create video responses to questions posed by elementary, middle, and high school students across the country. Questions ranged from the history of civil rights and current law on rights applicable to the students, to the overall functioning of the United States government. When asked why Baker Donelson chose to join this CRCI project, Sam Bowman, pro bono shareholder, said, "There are few greater initiatives than educating our youth on the importance and necessity of civil rights and civics. These principles form the bedrock of a free and equitable society where all individuals are afforded the same liberties and are called upon to exercise those liberties for the good of all." I can relate to Bowman's sentiments, since I chose to volunteer for this project because so many children have limited, if any, exposure to diversity of thought beyond the perspective of the adults around them. This project is a unique opportunity to use my resources to provide young people with a diverse and lawyer's perspective on their civil rights.

As my fellow colleagues at Baker Donelson and I continue working on this project, we look forward to sharing additional information in upcoming publications. This CRCI project is not only a great way for the Firm to further its demonstrated commitment to D&I initiatives, but also a wonderful example of utilizing the resources of other committees to achieve the desired objectives.

<sup>1</sup> Pamela Newkirk, *Diversity Has Become a Booming Business. So Where Are the Results?*, TIME MAGAZINE (Oct. 10, 2019, <https://time.com/5696943/diversity-business/>).