2022-2023 BAR YEAR Review

BWLA of Greater Chicago, Inc.
A legacy of excellence since 1987

ABOUT BWLA

Founded in 1987, the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago, Inc. ("BWLA") is one of the fastest growing bar associations in Illinois. BWLA members include Black women attorneys, judges, law professors and law students in the Chicago metropolitan area and across the nation. BWLA is committed to serving our membership, the greater legal community, the next generation of lawyers and the general public through scholarship awards to law students, community service, pipeline programs, educational opportunities, and mentoring/networking events. Some of BWLA's core programming includes: The Mentoring Dinner Series, Road to the Robe, Street Law, and the Newly Admitted Attorneys Reception. Additionally, BWLA's Directors' Institute, equips Black women attorneys with knowledge and skills to become appointed and thrive on nonprofit, public, and corporate boards. Most importantly, BWLA recognizes the importance of building and sustaining a pipeline of Black women attorneys through financial assistance, networking, and mentorship. Each year, BWLA conducts resume review, mock interview and legal writing workshops for law students.

For over 35 years, BWLA has promoted excellence in the profession and improving the administration of justice by encouraging the inclusion of Black attorneys in law firms, the judiciary, governmental agencies and corporations. Through fostering membership expertise and coalition building with other organizations, BWLA aims to address and combat the challenges that Black women lawyers face in the profession in order to bring about positive change in the legal workplace and the community at large.

ABOUT BWLA'S SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The BWLA Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization and, as the charitable arm of BWLA, is dedicated to strengthening the pipeline of minority attorneys in the legal profession. With the generosity and support of sponsors, donors, and others, we have awarded over $1,000,000 in scholarships to diverse college and law students in the last 35 years, including over $50,000 this past year. Recent Scholarship Fund initiatives include:

• Inaugural LSAT Scholarship – Awarded three college students with an LSAT review course provided by Blueprint. Recipients wrote essays about their desire to enter the legal profession.

• 2022 Spring Essay Scholarship – Awarded $37,500 in amounts of $20,000, $10,000, $5,000, and $2,500 to four law students. The scholarship required finalists to submit an essay on parental influence and public school education and complete an interview.

• 2022 Agnes McGirth Scholarship – Awarded two law students $1,000 each. The scholarship is awarded to a law student who exemplifies tenacity and zeal for service and education while raising a family.

• 2022 Fall Book Award – Awarded $10,000 in book scholarships to 10 law students. The awards go to students who demonstrate a commitment to furthering diversity at their schools and in the legal profession. At the 2023 National Summit Legacy Gala and Awards Ceremony, the BWLA Scholarship Fund intends to again award over $50,000 in scholarships to law students and recent graduates. In addition to recognizing the 2023 Spring Essay and Agnes McGirth scholarship recipients,

•Inaugural Bar Review Scholarship - BWLA award includes a stipend and covers the cost of a bar review course for a recent law school graduate pursuing a career in government or public service.

Visit www.bwla.org to learn more about BWLA , to become a member, or to donate.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear BWLA Family,

I was always taught before you enjoy some fruit, you must recognize those who planted the tree. As the 2022-2023 bar year draws to a close and I reflect on what we have achieved this year, my heart is filled with gratitude for all those who have helped BWLA grow.

Through this overview, I hope to highlight some of the fruits of our collective labor and to recognize some of the BWLA programs and initiatives of which we should all be proud. First among them is the 2023 National Summit of Black Women Lawyers. Through the Summit, BWLA brought together over 600 Black women lawyers, judges, professors, law students, and allies to Chicago from across the country. The event set records for BWLA attendance and funds raised, but most importantly, we created much-needed time and space for community and fellowship during the course of this three-day conference. I send my heartfelt thanks to our BWLA community, including the BWLA Board, the BWLA Scholarship Fund Board, our BWLA Administrator, our members, sponsors, and bar association partners who made the dream that is the National Summit of Black Women Lawyers a reality. Special thanks to Summit Co-Chairs Amanda Brown, Jenee Gaskin, and Weeya Young, in addition to Scholarship Fund Chair Jasmine Fannell. Without each of you, the Summit would not be possible. Finally, immense gratitude to all those BWLA founders and members past and present who nurtured BWLA at any point during its rich thirty-six year history. This year, we reaped what you sowed.

When I think of what lies ahead for this organization, my heart feels light. I have believed and continue to believe that there is little that we cannot accomplish when working together. This year, I have tried to do my small part, but undoubtedly, long after this term expires, BWLA will march onward. That is the beauty and strength of BWLA. Leadership changes, and yet, the organization continues to endure. More importantly, it progresses and grows. It is no different than a relay race. When your leg of the race is up, you pass on the baton. There is no longing or regret. You merely hope to pass the baton to the next group which will continue to run. My time holding the BWLA baton is set to expire, but thank you for allowing me to carry it. It has been an incredible honor for which I am immensely grateful. I look forward to cheering BWLA on as you continue to race forward. Together, we soar.

Yours in Service,

Elsa Andrianifahanana
BWLA
President

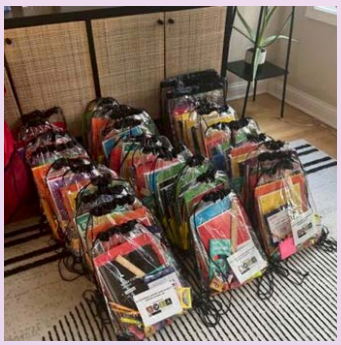
PROGRAM & EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Installation of the 2022-2023 Board of Directors and Scholarship Fund Board

On June 13, 2022, BWLA installed its new President, Elsa Andrianifahanana, the Board of Directors and the Scholarship Fund Board for the 2022-2023 bar year. The installation event was sponsored by Jones Day Chicago. One of BWLA founders, the Honorable Ann Claire Williams (ret.) gave the keynote address and the Honorable Candace Jackson-Akiwumi swore in both boards.

BWLA in the Bud Billiken Parade with Backpack Give-Away

As part of its annual tradition, BWLA members, along with their family and friends, walked in the Bud Billiken Parade on Saturday, August 13, 2022. With all the generous donations received, BWLA was able to pack over 100 school bags with school supplies which they provided to students attending the parade route.



"The Blueprint to Big Law" Workshop Series Part I: How to be a Stellar Summer Associate

On Friday, June 10, 2022, BWLA hosted Part I of its workshop series, "The Blueprint to Big Law," for diverse law students who are interested in seeking a career at a law firm. This first session covered "How to be a Stellar Summer Associate." The workshop and networking opportunity brought together summer associates and attorneys from practicing firms across Chicago for an open and in-depth discussion about big law firm life and how to turn a summer associate position into an offer. Thank you to Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP for sponsoring the event.

Part II: Unlocking On-Campus Interviews Workshop

On Friday, July 29, 2022, BWLA hosted Part II of "The Blueprint to Big Law" workshop series, this time focusing on "Unlocking Your On-Campus Interview." In this session, a panel of law firm attorneys and in-house counsel, all with experience interviewing law students for summer associate positions at firms, provided diverse law students with candid advice and tips on how to prepare for and excel during on-campus interviews with big law firms. Thank you to Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP for sponsoring the event.

BWLA Attends 2022 National Bar Association Convention and Exhibits

BWLA attended the National Bar Association's (NBA) 97th Annual Convention and Exhibits held in Memphis, Tennessee from July 24-29, 2022. The National Bar Association's Women Lawyers Division celebrated its 50th Anniversary as a part of the NBA at the convention with the theme "Celebrating Our Past and Chartering Our Future: 50 Years of Excellence in Service, Impact, and Transformation."

BWLA Attends 18th Annual Corporate Counsel Women of Color Conference

BWLA founders, board members, presidents, past and present, in addition to general body members, convened with over 1,500 corporate counsel and other attorneys from throughout the country at the 18th Annual Corporate Counsel Women Of Color Conference held on October 5-8, 2022, in Atlanta, GA.

BWLA Trip to DC to Celebrate Justice Ketanji Brown-Jackson's First Day on the Bench

On October 2-3, 2022, BWLA gathered with Black women attorneys from across the country at the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. as Sisters in the Law to commemorate Justice Kentanji Brown-Jackson’s historic first day on the bench. The celebration was in partnership with the National Bar Association, the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys, the Greater Washington Area Chapter NBA Women Lawyers Division and many others.

"Let's Talk About Student Loans"

On September 22, 2022, BWLA hosted the virtual program "Let's Talk About Student Loans," a candid and timely presentation and discussion on student loans and the forgiveness programs. James Mwombela, of Student Loan Planner, presented and led the discussion for the program.

BWLA'S 2022 Fall General Body Meeting

On September 27, 2022, BWLA hosted its annual Fall General Body Meeting at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath, LLP. BWLA Founder, the Honorable Ann Claire Williams (Ret.) answered questions from the floor and shared inspiring and uraging stories from her own legal and judicial career. The evening closed out with BWLA Committee Chairs discussing their plans for the bar year and the 2023 National Summit of Black Women Lawyers.

Sips for Scholarships

On November 17, 2022, BWLA Scholarship Fund hosted its annual Sips for Scholarship event at Nych Art Gallery. During the event, BWLA announced the 10 award recipients for the 2022 Fall Book Scholarships. Each recipient received $1,000.00. Guests participated in a silent auction, which featured a trip to the Dominican Republic, game day tickets to the Chicago Bulls and Cubs, hotel stays, dinner vouchers, spa services, and many more. Overall, BWLA Scholarship Fund raised over $13,500 that will be used to fund further scholarships.

BWLA and UIC BLSA Host Tea with Illinois Supreme Court Justice Lisa Holder White

On October 21, 2022 BWLA and UIC's Black Law Student Association hosted a celebratory tea to honor Justice Lisa Holder White, who was recently appointed earlier this year to the Illinois Supreme Court. Justice Holder White is the first Black woman to serve on the state's highest court. Justice Holder White encouraged attendees to: "bloom where you are planted, never forget where you come from, and always pay it forward."

BWLA Co-Hosts the Annual Joint Dinner

On November 3, 2022, BWLA co-hosted the Joint Dinner at Row 24. BWLA, together with the Cook County Bar Association, Illinois Judicial Council and the Black Men Lawyers' Association, honored Justice Cynthia Cobbs of the Illinois First District Appellate Court with the Trailblazer Award.

BWLA Celebrates Investiture of Hon. Candace Jackson-Akiwumi

On November 1, 2022, BWLA, partnered with the Federal Bar Association, to celebrate the investiture of U.S. Court of Appeals Seventh Circuit Court Judge Candace Jackson-Akiwumi at Café by the River in Chicago. Judge Jackson-Akiwumi was appointed in July 2021 by President Biden and is the second Black woman to serve on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

BWLA Co-Hosts the Youth Guidance Career Day

On Saturday, November 12, 2022, BWLA partnered with the Black Men Lawyers' Association, the Business Leadership Council, the Cook County Bar Association, the Cook County Physicians Group, and other African American and Latino professional organizations to host a Professional Career Exploration Event for Youth Guidance. Youth Guidance is a non-profit organization that creates and implements school-based programs focused on improving the social-emotional competencies and academic attainment for 7th-12th graders exposed to traumatic stressors in high risk and under-resourced communities. Students from Austin, Currie, Farragut, Phillips, and Schuarz who have been involved in Youth Guidance participated in the event to learn more about potential career pathways for the future. Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle also shared words of wisdom during the event. Thank you to Jones Day for hosting.

BWLA Celebrates For a Great Cause at Jingle and Mingle Holiday Party

On December 9, 2022, BWLA members and supporters celebrated together at BWLA's Jingle and Mingle Holiday Party held at Chicago Live Events . Entertained by a live DJ, attendees mingled the night away. BWLA assembled Blessing Bags, which were filled with essential items and given to individuals experiencing homelessness.

BWLA's Angel Giving Tree

BWLA's Community Service and Outreach Committee partnered with the Salvation Army's Robert Stern Red Shield Center again this year to purchase gifts for children in need who reside in Englewood.

BWLA Spring Mentoring Dinner

On January 26, 2023, law students and attorneys gathered for BWLA's 2023 Spring Mentoring Dinner. Thanks to the Mentoring Dinner planning committee, the Government Services Committee, and, all of the mentors, Judge Nichole Patton from the Cook County Circuit Court, Judge Melanie Patrick Neely, Chief Administrative Law Judge for the State of Illinois, Lindsay Jenkins, Partner at Cooley LLP, and Chandra Toussaint, Corporate Counsel, US/Canada Global Commercial Law at Ingredion Incorporated who helped keep this BWLA tradition going strong. Thank you to Sidley Austin LLP for sponsoring the event.

BWLA 1:1 Mentoring Program

The BWLA Young Lawyer's Committee kicked off its Mentorship Program on January 17, 2023. Through this program, junior attorneys are connected with more experienced attorneys to foster an open channel for supportive guidance, growth, and collaboration. Participants will engage with, and encourage one another by sharing challenges, successes and lessons learned in their legal profession.

BWLA Attends the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

On March 10, 2023, BWLA's Mentor Program and Young Lawyers' Committee hosted an incredible and unforgettable night for BWLA board members, mentors, and mentees at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater! The Alvin Ailey dance performance provided the opportunity for BWLA mentors and mentees, who have been meeting over the last several months, to have their first in-person group outing together!

BWLA's Second Annual "Fun on the Slopes" Ski and Spa Retreat

The weekend of February 3-5, 2023, BWLA hosted its second annual "Fun on the Slopes" Ski and Spa Retreat at the Grand Geneva Ski and Spa Resort in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Attendees enjoyed skiing, spa treatments, lounging at the pool, shopping at local boutiques, games, and deep discussions at the finale dinner at the Chop. Thanks to Dr. Amber Gardner, Clinical Mental Health Counseling Professor at Northwestern University and Walden University, who provided attendees with a CLE Course, "To Be a Woman, a Lawyer and Black: A Holistic Approach for Improving Resilience, Self- care, and Wellness for Black Women Lawyers."

An Evening with BWLA Corporate Counsel

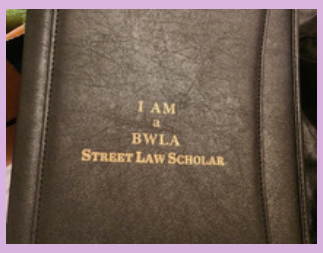
On February 7, 2023, the BWLA Corporate Counsel Committee hosted its February meeting and heard from some of Chicago's top in-house corporate counsel. The event was hosted at the Chicago office of McDermott, Will, and Emery LLP. During the event, Averil Edwards moderated a candid and engaging discussion with general counsel panelists BWLA Past Presidents Kenya Jenkins Wright and Erica Kirkwood, and BWLA Scholarship Fund Board Members Djenne Clayton and Steffany Cunningham. A special thanks to McDermott, Will, and Emery LLP for sponsoring the event.

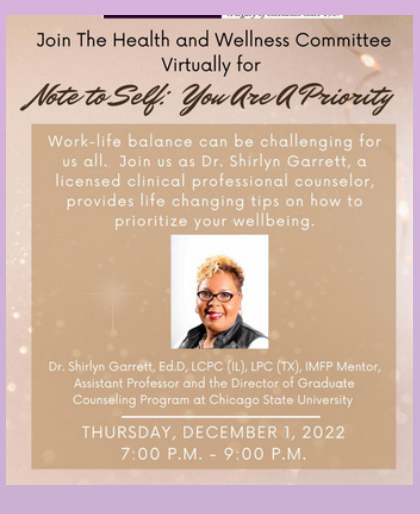
BWLA Honors Justice Joy V. Cunningham at Judicial Reception and Black History Month Celebration

On February 22, 2023, BWLA hosted its annual Judicial Reception and Black History Month Celebration to celebrate and honor members of the judiciary at the Chicago office of Jones Day. This year, BWLA honored Illinois Supreme Court Justice Joy V. Cunningham, presenting her with the BWLA Ann Claire Williams Award. A long-standing member of BWLA, Justice Cunningham was appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court last year, and is the second Black woman to serve on the state's highest court, following Justice Lisa Holder White, who was appointed earlier last year as well. BWLA President Elsa Andrianifahanana, partner at Jones Day, gave welcoming remarks and Hon. Sharon Johnson Coleman presented the award to Justice Cunningham. Special thanks to Jones Day for sponsoring.

BWLA's Street Law Program

Every month, members of the BWLA Street Law Program Committee volunteer and teach high school students from the Noble Academy about various aspects of the law and the legal profession. The Street Law Program provides students with insights into important legal issues and connects them with actual attorneys to make the reality of a potential legal career that much more accessible.





I Am a Priority Workshop and CLE

The BWLA Health and Wellness Committee hosted Dr. Shirlyn Garrett a licensed clinical professional counselor who provided insight and strategies on how to prioritize wellbeing and cope with trauma and stress.

BWLA Sponsors UIC Law's 2023 Black Legal Summit "Taking up Space: Unapologetically Black"

On February 18, 2023, BWLA President Elsa Andrianifahanana, partner at Jones Day, BWLA Vice President, Era Laudermilk, Chief of Staff for Law Office of the Cook County Defender, BWLA Board Member at Large, Shannon Stokes, Deputy General Counsel & Ethics Office for the Illinois Dept. of Healthcare and Family Services, along with Cook County Bar Association President, Natasha Jenkins, associate at Littler Mendelson, BWLA Past President Kalia Coleman, partner at Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila, and Malaika Caldwell, Corporate Counsel at Kyndryl served as speakers for University of Illinois at Chicago Law's 2023 Black Legal Summit "Taking up Space: Unapologetically Black" hosted at the Chicago office of law firm Reed Smith LLP.

BWLA Scholarship Fund Creates New Scholarship Opportunities for Bar Prep and Family Law

During the 2022-2023 bar year, the Scholarship Fund launched two new scholarships. The first, the Bar Prep Scholarship, provides funds to cover bar prep courses, in addition to a spending stipend for those pursuing careers in government or public service . The second, the Bradford & Gordon scholarship, targets those interested in family law and includes an internship opportunity with the firm.

BWLA Co-Sponsors Fireside Chat on Inclusive Sponsorship

On April 5, 2023, BWLA co-sponsored a fireside chat with Jhaymee Tynan, author of "Inclusive Sponsorship: A Bold Vision to Advance Women of Color in the Workplace" along with the South Asian Bar Association (SABA) of North America, South Asian Bar Association of Chicago (SABA Chicago), the ispanic Lawyers of Illinois (HLAI), Asian American Bar Association of Greater Chicago (AABA Chicago), and others.

THE 2023 NATIONAL SUMMITOF BLACK WOMEN LAWYERS

This year, BWLA hosted the 2023 National Summit of Black Women Lawyers on March 30-April 1, 2023, which brought together over 600 Black women attorneys and allies from across the country. The three-day conference was full of insightful and inspiring programs and provided a special opportunity for fellowship across and within our profession.

The first day of the conference started with an opening reception and celebration of the judiciary hosted by Title sponsor of the conference Jones Day. The program featured remarks from trailblazer and American Bar Association President Deborah Enix-Rossand an armchair interview with one of BWLA's founders Hon. Ann Claire Williams (Ret.), and Hon. J. Michelle Childs.

The second day featured plenary sessions, CLEs, and a leadership luncheon featuring NAACP Legal Defense Fund Director Counsel Janai Nelson. Other programs and speakers included Forum on the State of Black Women in the Law feat. Loretta Lynch, Partner, Paul, Weiss and Former U.S. Attorney General; Tara Murray, Special Assistant to the U.S. President, Office of Civic Engagement; Shirlethia Franklin, Partner, Jones Day; SaMee Harden, 2021-2022 White House Fellow; General Counsels' Panel feat. Danielle Gray, Chief Legal Officer, Walgreens Boots Alliance; Deborah Telman, Chief Legal Officer, Gilead Sciences; Wanji Walcott, Chief Legal Officer, Pinterest; Fireside Chat feat. Valerie Jarrett, CEO, the Obama Foundation with Alfreda Bradley-Coar, Chief Legal Officer, the Obama Foundation.

The pre-lunch plenaries concluded with a segment on Economic Development and Wealth in the Black Community feat. John Rogers, Co-CEO of Ariel Investments and Board Member of McDonald's and Nike with Karen Freeman-Wilson, CEO, Chicago Urban League, and Aisha P. Lavinier, Partner, Kirkland & Ellis.

THE 2023 NATIONAL SUMMIT OF BLACK WOMEN LAWYERS

The second day ended with the legacy gala and awards ceremony. The evening was hosted by CNN Host and Legal Analyst Laura Coates and we celebrated four Black women attorneys pushing us forward: Loretta Lynch, First Black Woman United States Attorney General; Desiree Ralls-Morrison, Chief Legal Officer of McDonald's; Judge Arnette Hubbard (ret.), First Woman to be President of the National Bar Association; and Haben Girma, Human Rights Advocate and Author of Haben: The Deadblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law. We also awarded over $50,000 in scholarships.

The third and final day of the conference featured: A Call to Action on Criminal Justice Reform feat. Kim Foxx, Cook County State's Attorney; Sharone R. Mitchell, Jr., Cook County Public Defender; MiAngel Cody, Lead Counsel, the Decarceration Collective; The Road to the Robe - Judges' Panel feat. Hon. Ann Claire Williams (Ret.), Of Counsel, Jones Day, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit; Hon. Joy V. Cunningham, Supreme Court for the State of Illinois; Hon. Tiffany Cunningham, Federal Circuit Court; Hon. Sharon Johnson Coleman,U.S. District Court for thr Northern District of Illinois; Hon. Nancy Joseph, U.S. District Court for Eastern District of Wisconsin; A Celebration of Lawyers on the Rise and Our Next Generation of Black Women Leaders feat. interview of Haben Girma, Human Rights Lawyer and Best-Selling Author of Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law, with Haben Fecadu, Country Director, American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative.

Other conference features included:

- Small Business Expo;
- Fitness Classes;
- Board Readiness Seminars;
- One-on-One Student Loan Consultation;
- Professional Headshots;
- Networking Tips and Speed Networking Reception;
- Dine Arounds;
- Sightseeing and Shopping; and
- Professional Clothing Drive for Formerly Incarcerated Women.

BWLA hosted this conference in partnership with the Greater Washington Area Chapter, Women Lawyers Division, Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys, Black Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, Black Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, Wisconsin Association of African American, the Cook County Bar Association, and the Black Men Lawyers' Association. Together, we set a BWLA record for event attendance and funds raised. Thank you to all sponsors, partners, volunteers, and conference attendees for helping us come together for this amazing event and for your support throughout the bar year. We did it.

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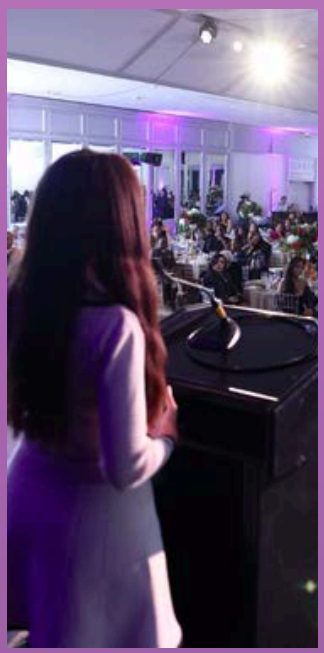

TOGETHER, WE SOAR.

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