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Grand Rapids Bar Association Unveils Action Plan for Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative on March 22

Grand Rapids, Michigan – The Grand Rapids Bar Association, in conjunction with 13 of the region’s leading law firms, will unveil the action plan of the Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative to increase diversity in the legal community on Thursday, March 22.

More than 10 months in the making, the action plan details how the GRBA and 13 other law firms will work to “achieve diversity and inclusion in the education, retention and promotion of Michigan’s attorneys.” The five-year plan, which will be released during a 5 p.m. signing ceremony at the University Club in downtown Grand Rapids, establishes committees that will address three critical issues facing the Bar Association and members firms:

- Increasing the number of attorneys of colors in West Michigan law firms within five years
- Improve the rates of retention and advancement of female attorneys and attorneys
- Expanding the pipeline of persons of color who enter law school and the profession

The signing ceremony, which will include comments by GRBA President Mark Smith, is **open to the media**.

“Much thoughtfulness and hard work went into developing this action plan, which will provide a five-year roadmap for the Bar Association and area law firms as we work to increase diversity,” Smith said. “Through many discussions, the managing partners of West Michigan’s leading law firms realize that together we can accomplish much more than we can individually.

“As a legal community, we recognize the importance of collaboration to bring about changes that will increase our diversity and ensure we are open and inclusive. This action plan is another significant step in that process.”

Smith explained that the Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative was formed in June 2011 after a series of productive discussions on ways that medium and large law firms can improve diversity and inclusion. The action plan establishes three committees focused on pipeline development, recruitment and retention, then lays out specific steps that each will take.

Some of the actions recommended include:

- Working with area high school guidance counselors and college pre-law advisors to position the collaborative firms and the GRBA as a resource

- Developing a mentorship program model for high school and college students to encourage students to consider law as a career
- Recruiting attorneys and staff to participate in Schools of Hope tutoring programs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and other programs
- Pooling resources to provide financial assistance to students of color through scholarship or support in taking LSAT prep courses
- Expanding opportunities for the Minority Clerkship Program, including development of judicial internships
- Facilitating introductions of lateral candidates to member firms of the collaborative and developing a mechanism to share information
- Developing a mentorship program for lateral associates of color to facilitate a connection to the community
- Ensuring that work environments and work-related social activities are hospitable and inclusive
- Developing a strategy to increase the number of female attorneys and attorneys of color in leadership positions
- Instituting an annual training program on diversity and inclusion, sponsored by GRBA and collaborative member firms
- Developing an annual conference that focuses on business development and leadership development for female attorneys and attorneys of color
- Developing social media strategies to provide information and resources

Signatories to the Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative are:

Tracey T. Larsen, Barnes & Thornburg
 Ingrid A. Jensen, Clark Hill
 James S. Brady, Dykema
 Frank G. Dunten, Dickinson Wright
 Michael D. Homier, Foster Swift
 David Fernstrum, Mika Meyers
 Richard A. Gaffin, Miller Canfield
 Craig A. Mutch, Miller Johnson
 Kevin T. Grzelak, Price Heneveld
 Robert C. Shaver, Jr., Rhoades McKee
 William J. Hondorp, Smith Haughey
 Douglas A. Wagner, Warner Norcross
 Lawrence J. Murphy, Varnum Law

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