Meet the Task Force Members

Siobhan L. Stephens-Catala Esq.



Siobhan L. Stephens-Catala has been an attorney practicing in the State of Rhode Island for 15 years, committing her entire career to public service. Currently, she is Legal Counsel in the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training. She has also worked as Senior Legal Counsel for the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and as a Staff Attorney for Rhode Island Legal Services representing victims of Domestic Violence on various Family Law issues. She was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She earned her Bachelor of Arts (English-Liberal Arts) Magna Cum Laude from Lincoln University, the nation's first degree granting Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in 2001. She graduated from Roger Williams School of Law in 2004 and was the recipient of both the Feinstein Institute Public Service Award and stipend. She can be credited with contributions to Roger Williams University School of Law with helping to shape early on their Diversity Outreach Program geared toward supporting a culture in which all individuals feel valued, supported, and encouraged to excel during their law school experience. She is admitted to practice law in both Rhode Island and New York. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc, which is committed to scholarship, sisterhood and public service, the Thurgood Marshall Law Society, the Woman's Bar Association and is currently serving on the Rhode Island Bar Association's House of Delegates. She resides in the city of Providence with her husband and two children.

Why did you choose to join the Task Force on Diversity & Inclusion?

As a practicing attorney in the State of Rhode Island, I have, unfortunately, been on the receiving end of treatment that was not always becoming while litigating within the court system. That unfair treatment at times has been aimed at my race, my gender, my age, and even because I work in the public sector. As a young attorney coming from New York practicing in a new state, I never felt comfortable enough to divulge my experiences with many people. Now having practiced for so many years while building a solid reputation and establishing relationships with my peers, I realize that my silence might have been detrimental for those who might have had the same experiences. I'm finding that people need to see someone they recognize that has "made it" despite the setbacks that exist in being able to practice in the Rhode Island court system. Fortunately, I now feel confident enough in my abilities, and experienced enough in my practice, that I can be an asset and provide credible and valuable insight on some areas of change that are necessary for a more inclusive environment, and the Task Force has provided a forum for me to do just that.

What has been your greatest learning experience as it relates to diversity and inclusion?

Being an African American female attorney, practicing in a profession and living in a state where not too many exist, I can go on about my learning experiences as it relates to diversity and inclusion. However, quite coincidentally with my spotlight taking place during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, my time as a Staff Attorney at Rhode Island Legal Services was a meaningful and memorable learning experience. Representing victims of domestic violence allowed me to advocate for clients from different sectors of society and be sensitive to issues that included the cultural, economic, financial, and gender barriers that exist in moving toward the eradication of domestic violence. I participated in numerous trainings, allowing me to identify and address my own ignorance while checking myself on my own unconscious bias to be able to represent my clients in the best possible way. The experience was also important because it revealed the lack of diversity and inclusion on the Rhode Island Family Court bench as I tried to advocate my clients' position before the presiding justices at that time. Though the makeup of the State of Rhode Island continues to include a growing population for each, there was no African American, Hispanic, Asian, nor LGBTQ+ presence, at that time. I really believe that was disadvantageous because the government should reflect the people it serves.

What is your approach to understanding the perspectives of colleagues from different backgrounds?

I make it a point to listen and ask questions because I enjoy engagement in constant conversation and interaction with colleagues. I develop and try hard to maintain personal and professional relationships, which I believe allows us all opportunities to learn from one another and grow. Diverse views make for better conversations, decisions and thus drive a high-performance culture. I find that the more you interact with people, the more knowledgeable you become about resources and support systems that exist here in Rhode Island. In addition, real conversation sparks opportunities for serious change. Once I learned the importance of having these connections, I realized that I am not alone in my feelings, and it has given me the confidence to move ahead and speak my truth.

What do you think the Bar can do to raise awareness regarding Diversity & Inclusion?

I think formulating the Task Force was a great first step in introducing the Bar Association to the existing issues and also identifying members that are serious about implementing change. However, the long-term goal should be to hire someone knowledgeable and responsible for accountability and overseeing the necessary changes suggested by the Task Force and continuing to raise awareness. Having someone employed in this role, will provide strategic management and direction in the area of diversity and inclusion and would ensure that the organization's services, activities, policies, and communications support the goal of a more diverse community.