

Diversity & Inclusion January Newsletter – Task Force Member Q&A

Jennifer L. Sylvia, Esq.

Brief Bio:

Jennifer is an associate with Moses Ryan Ltd. practicing civil litigation within employment discrimination, contract disputes, personal injury, and tax appeals. She graduated summa cum laude as an undergraduate at Roger Williams University in Business Management with a minor in political science. She earned her Juris Doctor from Roger Williams University School of Law. While in law school, Jennifer externed with the Honorable Edward C. Clifton, assisted the Pro Bono Collaborative and participated in the Jessup International Moot Court.

She is admitted to practice law in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. She is an active member of the Rhode Island Bar Association as a member of the House of Delegates and has been involved in the Superior Court Bench Bar Committee, Probate Committee, and Annual Meeting Planning Committee. She is excited to participate in the newly formed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee after being a member of the Task Force. Jennifer is also an active member of the Rhode Island Women's Bar Association and a member of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. Wanting to broaden her knowledge of social justice issues, she started a book club with friends and family. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband, daughter, and son, and all their many extracurricular activities.

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

Answer: The year 2020 was a great eye-opening year for social justice issues and had a significant impact on me. Reading about the continual racial atrocities occurring within a short period of time made me, for the first time, really question what I had been taught about the social aspects of this country. I have always been a strong believer in female equality, and after 2020 I wanted to focus on equality for all disparaged groups, especially within the legal field. It was uplifting and exciting when I heard about the Task Force that I had no hesitation joining, as it was an important and necessary step for the Rhode Island Bar.

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

Answer: My greatest learning experience has been that most of what I was taught in school was so severely lacking in the truth. The cruelties minorities and other marginalized groups have suffered from was so quickly gleaned over. I remember being taught repeatedly as a child that we should aim to be "colorblind," yet such teachings have actually exacerbated and perpetuated the systematic racism that is prevalent throughout this country. I have read several books about social justice and history and have been shocked at how much I was never taught in school, and I feel it is so important for all generations to be educated on these issues if there is ever going to be real change.

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

Answer: I try to approach everyone with empathy. Even though I do not know the challenges they have face, I believe empathy is the greatest way to 'put yourself in someone else's shoes' to get a better understanding of where they are coming from. The more empathy we had in this world, the more kind we could all be.

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

Answer: Education is an important and vital first step. There can be so much a person does not even realize of how their actions and/or inactions are prejudicial. The more education to the Bar members will open the eyes of even more attorneys on how their actions make an impact and will have more of an influence on making changes within their lives. It will spread significantly from there.