

Miami-Dade FAWL Leads Diversity Initiative

Inspired by the Florida Supreme Court's initiative to eliminate all forms of discrimination within the legal profession, on November 7, 2014, the Miami-Dade chapter of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers ("Miami-Dade FAWL"), the Dade County Bar Association ("DCBA") and Disability Independence Group, Inc. ("DIG") hosted a Call to Action Diversity Summit focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in bar-related activities. The summit, sponsored by a grant from the Florida Bar and U.S. Legal Support, educated voluntary bar associations on how to develop best practices to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate in bar events. The event hosts requested each voluntary bar association in Miami-Dade County to send a representative on its behalf to attend the summit. Attendees representing over a dozen voluntary bar associations in Miami-Dade County received a warm welcome from the Honorable Maria Korvick of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, Deborah Baker, President of Miami-Dade FAWL, Herman Russomanno III, President of the DCBA and Sharon Langer, Development Director of DIG.

The summit provided bar leaders with valuable tools to promote inclusion. Miami-Dade FAWL Accessibility Committee Chairs Courtney Engelke and Stephanie Moot, as well as David Baghdassarian, a partner at K&L Gates LLP, shared Miami-Dade FAWL protocols and practical tips for facilitating participation:

- Create an Accessibility Committee and/or designate an ADA coordinator. Miami-Dade FAWL's Accessibility Committee is responsible for developing best practices to facilitate inclusion of persons with disabilities and for handling requests for accommodation (e.g. interpreters).
- Include accommodation language in all written announcements. All written Miami-Dade FAWL announcements contain accommodation language so that persons with disabilities are aware that they may contact Miami-Dade FAWL's designee to request an accommodation as needed.
- Identify resources for persons with disabilities so that requested accommodations are timely provided. For example, Miami-Dade FAWL worked with Jody Shulman from U.S. Legal Support to provide computer assisted real-time captioning ("CART") for the summit. CART facilitates communication for persons with hearing impairments by transcribing the spoken word into text displayed on a screen.
- Select venues that welcome persons with disabilities and recognize their needs. For instance, Miami-Dade FAWL selects venues that provide designated accessible restrooms and parking spaces. It also collaborates with venues regarding table settings and

configurations so that persons with disabilities can join tables and move freely around the room.

The summit was the first of its kind and marks an important step toward advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in bar-related events. Miami-Dade FAWL is proud to be at the forefront of this issue.

Stephanie Moot is a Co-Chair of Miami-Dade FAWL's Accessibility Committee. She is an attorney at K&L Gates LLP where she focuses on ADA compliance and litigation.

Courtney Engelke is a Director of Miami-Dade FAWL and a Co-Chair of its Accessibility Committee. She is an attorney at Colson Hicks Eidson where she focuses on personal injury and products liability litigation.