

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA
Case No.: SC21-284

IN RE: AMENDMENT TO RULE
REGULATING THE FLORIDA BAR 6-10.3

COMMENTS OF THE BUSINESS LAW SECTION OF THE
FLORIDA BAR TO AMENDMENT TO RULE 6-10.3(d),
RULES REGULATING THE FLORIDA BAR

The Business Law Section of The Florida Bar (the “Section”), an organization within The Florida Bar, submits the following comments pursuant to this Court’s Order entered on April 15, 2021 (the “Order”) regarding the Amendment to Rule 6-10.3(d), Rules Regulating The Florida Bar.¹ The Section respectfully requests that the Court withdraw its amendment to Rule 6-10.3, or in the alternative, recognize that the Section’s former policy did not impose unconstitutional quotas and thus clarify that the Section may reinstate its policy, meeting the diversity standards demanded by clients and encouraging diversity within the Section’s programming, without fear that its Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs would not be approved pursuant to the new Rule 6-10.3(d).

¹These comments are submitted on behalf of the Section only, and do not express the position of The Florida Bar. However, the Board of Governors of The Florida Bar has been notified of this filing.

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I. The Section's and Business Community's Interest in Diversity Programming.

The mission of the Section includes providing a forum for the discussion and exchange of ideas leading to the improvement of business laws, proposing, and commenting on substantive business law legislation and regulations, and enhancing the administration of justice. Companies currently or considering conducting business in Florida value predictability in the administration of justice. Through the efforts of its nearly 5,000 members, the Section strives to enable businesses to better forecast outcomes, evaluate risk, and allocate resources. By crafting and updating business-related statutes, Florida courts have the foundation in place to administer predictable outcomes.

To that end, the Section has worked to build that foundation both for businesses and the courts. The Section supported the Court's decision to change the summary judgment standard and worked with the Legislature to revise the Limited Liability Company statutes, the Corporate statutes, and the Arbitration code, to name a few. Each Section position and legislative effort serves to increase predictability in the law, and attract business to Florida.

A. Businesses Demand Diversity from Lawyers.

In addition to predictability, businesses across the country find it critical to foster diversity in the workplace. Companies have found that identifying and understanding differences among employees broadens the pool of potential employees from which to draw. Employees from different backgrounds and experiences bring diverse perspectives to bear when facing the challenges all business confront. Diversity opens the door to interpreting issues, situations, and other people in different ways. Through diverse interpretations, companies discern multiple paths to resolving their challenges and disputes. Companies have concluded that diversity enhances performance and drives success.

Not only are businesses working to establish diversity within, but they are also requiring diversity from law firms they engage. In 2019, more than 170 general counsel and corporate legal officer signed an open letter to law firms. The letter, signed by officers across a wide spectrum of businesses, informed firms that companies would prioritize their legal spend on those firms that committed to diversity and inclusion.²

² *An Open Letter to Law Firm Partners*, Jan. 2019, available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EfzrIJ_nxOpaZTSAdVu_ercVGCbLEZpU/view

To continue working with those clients who drive business, lawyers representing business clients – the Section members – must follow the clients’ admonitions. Just as businesses look for diverse viewpoints to solve complex internal problems, they also value diverse viewpoints to solve their legal problems. The CLE Diversity Policy³ the Section adopted, in effect, reflects what businesses are requiring: Ensuring diversity in everything we do. Business clients want diverse lawyers with diverse perspectives representing them, and panelists with diverse backgrounds provide those diverse perspectives. The CLE Diversity Policy is consistent with the CLE policies from other organizations like the American Bar Association (“ABA”).

For Florida and the Section to continue to attract businesses to this state, they must continue to demonstrate their commitment to diversity manifested in programs offered. The policy also reflects the fact the Section consists of attorneys from diverse backgrounds, experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Therefore, the CLE Diversity Policy is another step taken by the Section that is

(last visited June 29, 2021), attached hereto as Exhibit A.

³ A true and correct copy of the original CLE Diversity Policy adopted by the Section on September 4, 2020 is attached hereto as Exhibit B.

consistent with all its other steps to support the judiciary and the business community. Fostering a commitment to diversity raises the value proposition not just for the Section members and their clients but also Florida.

B. Lawyers Benefit from Diverse Faculty While Meeting Continuing Legal Education Requirements.

As part of its dual mission of serving both the development of business law in Florida and the development of competent business lawyers in Florida, the Section is a major provider of continuing legal education programming to not only its own members, but to all of the approximately 90,000 active members of The Florida Bar. Within the past two years the Section has provided thirty-four CLE programs – more than seventy-five CLE hours.

Diversity in the legal profession and CLE programming is critical to ensuring the acceptance, respect, and trust by the multicultural communities and businesses served and represented. As of 2018, minorities comprised 46.7% of Florida’s population and women represented a little over half the population.⁴ Yet as of 2020, 85% of attorneys in the United States were white.⁵ Minority

⁴ See *Data USA:Florida*, available at <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/florida#demographics> (last visited June 29, 2021).

attorneys make up less than 15% of lawyers, while women constitute only 37% of lawyers.⁶ In recent years there has been some improvement in the percentage of women and minorities working as associates in law firms, but for those law firms reporting diversity statistic, LGBTQIA+ individuals amount to about 4% of associates and persons with disabilities are about 1% of all associates.⁷ But despite these small strides in associate numbers, Black women and Latina women each continued to represent less than 1% of all partners in U.S. law firms, and the percentage of Black partners overall finally surpassed 2% for the first time since the NALP began collecting data.⁸ Nationwide and in Florida, the legal profession has more to do before reaching the diversity goals to represent the communities it serves.

Diverse CLE faculty is important both to the professional development of those presenting, and to those attending the

⁵ See American Bar Association, ABA National Lawyer Population Survey, Lawyer Population by State, *available at* https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/market_research/2021-national-lawyer-population-survey.pdf (last visited June 29, 2021), attached hereto as Exhibit C.

⁶ See *id.*

⁷ See *id.*

⁸ See National Association for Law Placement 2020 Report on Diversity in Law Firms (February 2021), *available at* https://www.nalp.org/uploads/2020_NALP_Diversity_Report.pdf (Last visited July 1, 2021).

classes. The path to partnership and achieving higher level success as an attorney often includes attorneys being able to position themselves as experts through serving as CLE faculty.⁹ And for attendees, as explained by Broward State Attorney Harold Pryor:

It benefits us if we have a global perspective on the respective areas of law. It actually exposes us. Some of us who may not have connections with a member of the LGBTQ+ community or members of the Black community, members of other communities that I might not interact with, or others may not interact with on a day-to-day basis — and truly understanding how to interact with those communities and how the legal system affects those communities. These CLEs offer that perspective to attorneys.¹⁰

C. The Section Created a Policy to Meet the Demand of the Businesses and Membership it Serves.

Recognizing the importance of diversity to its members' and their clients' success, in 2011 the Section adopted its Diversity Committee's Strategic Plan (the "Diversity Plan").¹¹ The Diversity Plan specifically provides for increasing the diversity of the Section

⁹ Matt Shinnors, How to Become a Law Firm Partner (June 7, 2012), available at <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/young-advocates/articles/2012/spring2012-how-to-become-a-law-firm-partner/> (last visited July 1, 2021).

¹⁰ See Sundial, Florida Supreme Court Bans Diversity Requirement (June 14, 2021), available at <https://www.wlrn.org/2021-06-14/floridas-supreme-court-bans-diversity-requirement-cruises-restart-how-rita-moreno-goes-for-it> (last visited June 29, 2021).

¹¹ The Section's "Diversity Committee" is a Committee of the Section formed pursuant to its bylaws and is now formally known as the "Inclusion, Mentoring & Fellowship Committee" (the "IMF Committee").

by: (i) developing the Section’s Fellowship Program as a tool for encouraging a diverse array of young lawyers to engage in the Section’s mission, and (ii) providing that CLE and Committee programming should include diverse panelists and speakers, unless provided with an exception by the CLE Committee. After achieving a measure of success with the Fellowship Program, the Section redirected its efforts to increase the diversity of panelists and speakers at its CLE programs.

As set forth in the 2020-2021 CLE Committee Member Handbook of The Florida Bar (the “CLE Handbook”), the sections and divisions of The Florida Bar have the primary responsibility to select steering committee members, authors, and speakers, the topics of the programs for the section’s area of practice and interest, as well as impose quality controls above the minimum established by the CLE Committee of The Florida Bar (the “CLE Committee”). (*CLE Handbook*, pp. 2.4, 2.13). An element of the minimum quality standards set by the CLE Committee is the directive for sections, divisions, and committees to recognize the diversity of the legal community and strive to select qualified speakers who reflect that diversity. (*CLE Handbook*, pp. 2.13, 2.21). The standard of having

CLE programs reflect the diversity of the legal community is reflected in the *Seminar Evaluation Form*, which inquires as to whether there was a diversity of speakers, and the *Quick Tips-Program Chairs/Steering Committee*, which advises Sections and Divisions to make the opportunity to speak available and known to all qualified speakers with the goal of reflecting the diversity of the Bar. (*CLE Handbook*, pp. 3.8-3.9, 4.9).

In January 2020, the Section created a study group to pursue the creation and adoption of a policy which would encourage inclusiveness in Section-sponsored CLE programs. The study group reviewed the existing CLE diversity policies, if any, of other national and state bar organizations and surveyed the diversity of the Section's CLE programs within the past year. On September 4, 2020, the Section adopted the BLS Diversity & Inclusion CLE Speaker Panel Policy (the "CLE Diversity Policy"),¹² which triggered this Court's Order. The Section determined that having a CLE Program with diverse faculty would aid in eliminating bias, the recruiting and retaining diverse attorneys, increasing program quality, and increasing the Section's diversity.¹³

¹² See note 3, *supra*.

Accordingly, the Section set forth benchmarks that CLE programing should endeavor to satisfy for the Section to sponsor. The CLE Diversity Policy provided that CLE programs with three or more panel participants, including the moderator, would be “diverse” if the panel included the following: (i) individual programs with faculty of three or four panel participants, including the moderator, would strive to have at a minimum at least 1 diverse member; (ii) individual programs with faculty of five to eight panel participants, including the moderator, would strive to have at a minimum at least 2 diverse members; and (iii) individual programs with faculty of nine or more panel participants, including the moderator, would strive to have at a minimum least 3 diverse members. Implementing the CLE Diversity Policy remained subject to the review by the IMF Committee and the Chair of the Section. The CLE Diversity Policy only requires that the steering committee of the CLE program perform a “diligent search and inquiry” in selecting and recruiting speakers for the program. If the steering committee is unable to obtain a diverse speaker panel, or confirmed

¹³ The CLE Diversity Policy defines “diverse” as a panel which includes members of groups based upon race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and multiculturalism. See Exhibit B.

diverse speaker(s) can no longer to participate in the CLE program, then the IMF Committee or the Chair of the Section may grant an exception from the policy.

The CLE Diversity Policy does not create or reserve a fixed number or proportion of speaking opportunities for a specific minority group. The policy establishes a demonstrative framework to achieve a range of diversity amongst the speakers and considers diversity as a plus factor while still evaluating each potential speaker as an individual without race or ethnicity being the defining feature of his or her credentials. The CLE Diversity Policy is also not a mandatory policy, but provides the Section an internal monitoring system to achieve the Section's diversity and inclusion goals .

This Court recognized it is important for the Section to eliminate bias, increase diversity and implement tactics aimed at recruiting and retaining diverse attorneys. But, based on perceived quotas in the Diversity Policy and citing *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 334 (2003) and *Regents of University of Cal. v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 307 (1978), the Court amended Rule 6-10.3 on April 15, 2021, effective immediately and proscribed the board of legal specialization and education from approving "any course submitted

by a sponsor, including a section of The Florida Bar, that uses quotas based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, national origin, disability, or sexual ordination in the selection of course faculty or participants.” *In re Amendment to Rule Regulating the Florida Bar 6-10.3* (April 15, 2021) at 6. Since this Court stated it believed the Section’s policy was an impermissible quota, the Section’s Executive Committee voted to rescind its policy so that its pending CLE programs could be approved for credit. However, the Section is grateful for the opportunity to explain its policy, assure the Court that the policy is both prudent and constitutional, and respectfully request the Court to either amend the rule or clarify that the Section’s policy does not run afoul of the Rule 6-10.3 as amended.

II. The Section’s CLE Diversity Policy Helped Ensure the Diversity Demanded by Florida Businesses Without Violating Constitutional Prohibitions Against State Actors Imposing Admissions Quotas.

Minor similarities between the CLE Diversity Policy and university admissions processes do not mean the Section’s CLE Diversity Policy violated the Constitution or Rule 6-10.3(d) as amended. First, the CLE Diversity Policy comes from a voluntary, self-funded professional association, not a government entity.

Second, the CLE Diversity Policy applies to a small group of speakers and moderators who educate professionals on a voluntary basis, not thousands of students competing for a limited seats at universities and colleges. For these reasons, the Section respectfully submits that the policy does not impose an unconstitutional quota.

A. The Section is not a Governmental Entity, and Florida Bar Approval of Section CLE Is Based on Criteria That Have Nothing to do With Diversity or Quotas.

The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution mandate that the federal government and those acting on its behalf provide citizens with equal protection under the law. But “the fifth [and fourteenth] amendments erect no shield against merely private conduct.” *Committee of U.S. Citizens Living in Nicaragua v. Reagan*, 859 F.2d 929, 946 (D.C.Cir. 1988) quoting *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1, 13 (1948) (covenants between private individuals prohibiting minorities from purchasing property “cannot be regarded as a violation of any rights guaranteed ... by the Fourteenth Amendment”). Due process and equal protection therefore applies only to the government actors, not private entities, or individuals. *Reagan*, 859 F.2d at 946. “[A] private party’s

behavior must be instigated by or dependent upon the exercise of governmental authority to justify attribution of the consequences of that behavior to ‘state action’” and to trigger the due process and equal protection clauses. *Id. quoting Franz v. U.S.*, 707 F.3d 582, 591 (1983).

As noted above, the Section is a voluntary, self-funded association. Its operations are not funded by the Florida Bar, the Florida Supreme Court, or any other government agency or entity. Membership in the Section is also voluntary, and the Section does not invoke the powers of The Florida Bar or the Florida Supreme Court to impose specialized criteria for its membership. The Section’s sole membership criteria paying the Section’s annual membership dues. The Section’s bylaws provide a clear disclaimer that the Section lacks the authority to act on behalf of The Florida Bar: “No action of the section may be represented or will be construed as the action of The Florida Bar unless the action is approved by Board of Governors of The Florida Bar.” *Article VIII, § 8.1*. Since the Section does not receive government funding, does not invoke governmental authority, and cannot act on behalf of the government, it is not a governmental entity.

Similarly, the CLE Diversity Policy was not “instigated by or dependent upon the exercise of governmental authority” such that the action may be attributable to the government. *Reagan*, 859 F.2d at 946. The government cannot be held responsible for a private decision unless:

[The government] exercised coercive power or has provided such significant encouragement, either overt or covert, that the choice must in law be deemed to be that of the [government]. Mere approval of or acquiescence in the initiatives of a private party is not sufficient to justify holding the [government] responsible for those initiatives under the terms of the due process.” *Id. citing Blum v. Yaretsky*, 457 U.S. 991. 1004-1005 (1982).

The Section did not rely on, seek the approval from, or invoke a governmental authority in adopting the CLE Diversity Policy. To the contrary, the IMF Committee drafted the CLE Diversity Policy and submitted it to the Executive Council of the Section for approval. The Section was not required to obtain permission from any governmental entity or body to enact policies to eliminate bias and promote diversity. The CLE Diversity Policy applied only to the Section, its members, and third-parties choosing to do business with the Section. For all of these reasons, the Section was

authorized to enact the policy to promote diversity and inclusion among its members.

To determine whether to accredit a proposed CLE course, The Florida Bar's CLE Accreditation Standards look primarily at the course's content and the CLE instructors' experience – there are no quotas. See Standing Policies of The Florida Bar Part 500, § 5.01 (a) (standards). The only criteria The Florida Bar considers is whether the course or activity has “significant intellectual or practical content designed to increase or maintain the attorney's professional competence,” that those conducting the course are “qualified by practical or academic experience” and conduct the course “in a setting physically suitable to the educational activity or program.” Standing Policies of The Florida Bar Part 500, § 5.01 (a) (standards). These neutral criteria do not ask why the CLE sponsors chose particular faculty, or even consider any factors other than competence. To the extent The Florida Bar's approval of a CLE course proposal is government action, it is not imposing or ratifying the CLE Diversity Policy.

B. The CLE Diversity Policy Did Not Utilize an Impermissible Quota, But Rather a Is a Flexible Policy Informed by Diversity Considerations.

Even if the facts showed the Section was a quasi-governmental agency, or that adopting the CLE Diversity Policy depended upon exercising government authority, the CLE Diversity Policy did not use a quota. The Section acknowledges that government policies using racial classifications must overcome strict scrutiny and be narrowly tailored to further compelling government interests.¹⁴ *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 308. But diversity, standing alone, “is a compelling [government] interest that can justify [the use of] race” as a selection criterion. *Id.* at 308, 328. While “[a]ll government racial classifications must be analyzed [with] strict scrutiny,” “not all such uses are invalidated by strict scrutiny.” *Id.* at 308. “Context matters,” and not all policies that utilize race as selection criteria are equally objectionable. *Id.* “Strict scrutiny is designed to provide a framework for carefully examining the importance and the sincerity of the government's reasons for using race in a particular context.” *Id.* at 327.

¹⁴ Lower levels of scrutiny may also apply to government policies utilizing other classifications. See *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U.S. 190 (1976). Thus, a mixed analysis may be required where a policy, like the Section’s policy, refers to diversity in general without identifying a single specific class.

To be narrowly tailored, a race-conscious selection policy cannot insulate minority applicants from competition with all other applicants. *Bakke*, 438 U.S. at 315. Instead, it may consider race or ethnicity only as a “plus’ in a particular applicant's file.” *Id.* at 317. The policy must be “flexible enough to consider all pertinent elements of diversity in light of the particular qualifications of each applicant, and to place them on the same footing for consideration, although not necessarily according them the same weight.” *Id.*

There exist impermissible quotas. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the University of Michigan’s (“Michigan”) admissions policy in *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 244 (2003). Michigan used a point system to assess candidates wherein a total of 100 points guaranteed admission. *Id.* at 255. The school automatically awarded twenty of the necessary 100 points to all minority applicants. *Id.* This policy resulted in the admission of “virtually every” minority applicant. *Id.* at 272. This case involved a clear use of impermissible quotas.

In contrast, the U.S. Supreme Court reached the opposite conclusion in *Grutter*. In that case, Michigan had amended its admissions policy to give “substantiate weight” to “soft variables”

that included race and ethnic diversity in assessing applicants. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 316. In upholding Michigan’s amended admissions policy, the Supreme Court placed great emphasis on the fact that Michigan’s revised policy did not reserve a fixed number of seats for “certain minority groups,” and that minority applicants were already among other qualified applicants, and not distinguished or isolated into separate categories during the decision-making process. *Id.* at 335.

The CLE Diversity Policy is flexible in the same way as the approved admissions process was in *Grutter* – flexible enough to avoid running afoul of the Constitution. The CLE Diversity Policy is not an all-inclusive means for assessing panelist eligibility and does not mandate using points or inflexible quotas as was the case in *Gratz*. The policy considers diversity as a plus factor while still evaluating each potential speaker as an individual without race or ethnicity being the defining feature of his or her credentials. Moderators are able and encouraged to consider diversity factors among other eligibility criteria.

In addition, the policy only requires that the steering committee of the CLE program perform a “diligent search and

inquiry” in selecting and recruiting speakers and does not forbid or ban panels that do not meet the CLE Diversity Policy’s goals. Unlike the forbidden program in *Regents*, the policy does not set aside any number of speaker spots, programs, or even time, for diverse speakers. Any program that has two or fewer panelists does not need to consider diversity as a factor. It is only when there are three or more panelists on a program that diversity consideration come into play. And even then, if the benchmarks identified in the policy for programs with three or more speakers cannot be met, the Section may waive the CLE Diversity Policy or make an exception to it.¹⁵ Because the policy allows for waivers, appeals, exceptions, and is not required for all programs , it is, by definition, not mandatory. For all these reasons, the CLE Diversity Policy is appropriate, narrowly tailored, and served a compelling interest.

¹⁵ While the CLE Diversity Policy was in place, the Section did not refuse to sponsor a single CLE due to lack of diversity. The Section has no knowledge of injury caused by the Policy.

III. The Court Should Rescind Its Rule Change, Allow the Section to Reinstate its Diversity Policy, and Allow The Florida Bar to Approve CLE Credits Sponsored by Private Providers Who Incentivize Diversity.

The Section rescinded the CLE Diversity Policy in the wake of the Court's Order in an abundance of caution so as to ensure the planned programs could receive approval moving forward, but make no mistake: The Section has not abandoned its commitment to meet the demands of both businesses doing business in Florida and its section members, all of whom have a strong interest in ensuring that our members incorporate diverse perspectives into their legal work and professional development.

The Section urges the Court to either withdraw its rule change or clarify that the CLE Diversity Policy does not impose an impermissible quota, so that the Section can re-adopt the policy it crafted to meet the needs of Florida businesses and business lawyers.

Respectfully submitted,

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I HEREBY CERTIFY that I electronically filed the foregoing and served a true and accurate copy of this document via the Florida Courts eFiling Portal on July 13, 2021 to all parties not exempt from Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.516 at the indicated email address on the service list, and by U.S. Mail to any other parties.

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