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5 BigLaw Firms Recognized For Inclusion Efforts

By **Andrea Keckley**

Law360 (August 12, 2022, 3:38 PM EDT) -- An international organization for women in tech, law, intellectual property and policy has named five BigLaw firms to its annual honor roll for their efforts toward inclusion.

The group, known as ChIPs, recognized Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP and Nixon Peabody LLP for excellence in inclusion overall. And Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, Perkins Coie LLP and WilmerHale were cited for excellence in gender inclusion, the organization announced Thursday.

The ChIPs 2022 Honor Roll is based on an annual inclusion blueprint created by ChIPs and Diversity Lab, which conducts analyses and creates initiatives to promote diversity in legal organizations. The blueprint measures the actions firms are taking to create inclusive workplaces. Firms also submit data on four key diversity inclusion indicators.

The recognized firms include two pioneering members of the Move the Needle Fund (MTN) — Orrick and Nixon Peabody — which collaborates with Diversity Lab to test initiatives to make the legal profession more diverse and inclusive.

As part of its participation with MTN, Orrick pledged to make teams serving for 40 valued clients at least 55% diverse by 2025.

"With Diversity Lab's incredible support, we have created a unique diversity report that helps our clients and our relationship partners see the diversity of their Orrick team in the context of the available pool of diverse talent in the practice areas that comprise that team," Sheryl Garko, a partner at Orrick and global chair of the firm's women's initiative, told Law360 on Friday. "We're hopeful that it will lead to conversations with our clients that are qualitatively different about how we can work together to create opportunities for diverse talent."

Nixon Peabody formed a goal for its equity partnership to consist of 30% female attorneys, 12% racially or ethnically diverse attorneys and 6% LGBTQ+ attorneys.

"We make five-, 10-year plans, and we stay the course," Rekha Chiruvolu, chief DEI officer at Nixon Peabody, told Law360 on Friday. "We evolve as needed, but we're also really committed to learning and tweaking."

The awards come amid some positive trends in firm representation, despite change being slow.

An American Bar Association survey last year found moderate increases in the percentage of promotions going to female lawyers and racially and ethnically underrepresented associates.

Still, white, male, non-LGBTQ and non-disabled still dominate in terms of representation in law firms. The top 10% of the highest-paid attorneys in law firms also remain disproportionately white and male.

The ABA's 2021 survey also found female, LGBTQ+, and other underrepresented groups making gains at the associate level but declining at the equity and non-equity partnership levels.

As part of its efforts toward diversity recruiting and retention, Perkins Cole offers diversity fellowships to 1L and 2L students. Its summer 2022 class is 57% racially or ethnically diverse and 65% female, according to the firm.

Similarly, Morgan Lewis offers diversity fellowships to 1L students and has a scholarship program for second- and third-year law students from underrepresented groups who display academic excellence and financial need. It also participates in Georgetown Law's early outreach initiative, which reaches out to high school students in underserved communities in an effort to better diversify the law school application pool.

"Our priority is to have the deepest understanding of our population and that means the broader lens we use to define our diversity, the more opportunity we have to get really specific in our actions to support people," Malaika Lindo, Morgan Lewis' senior director of diversity and inclusion, told Law360 on Friday. "So we believe very strongly in, first, having the deepest possible understanding of the breadth of our existing diversity and then, second, building out our offering with an acknowledgment of the breadth of that diversity."

WilmerHale's most recent statistics show its U.S. equity partners are 28% female and 15% people of color. In comparison, the National Association for Law Placement says that across large U.S. law firms in 2021, 22% of equity partners are women and 9% are attorneys of color.

The inclusion blueprint urges firms to commit to implementing what they refer to as a "do something hard" action.

At the leadership level, this can include providing billable hour credit for diversity efforts; linking partner or practice group leader compensation to DEI; or conducting pay and origination credit equity analyses for partners. For practice groups, actions can include "providing matter credit to underrepresented lawyers for originating or expanding work, staffing client teams with at least 50% underrepresented lawyers who have direct access to clients, and committing to an Ally Action Pledge," according to their website.

The firms will be honored in October at the ChIPs Global Summit in San Francisco.

"ChIPs is proud to recognize these firms and to present their best practices in our upcoming ChIPs Honor Roll special report," said ChIPS executive director Joan Toth in a statement. "They are setting a standard for inclusion and equity that practices across our industry should aspire to."

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.

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