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Representation of Black or African-American Associates Eclipses Pre-Recession Levels for the First Time Despite Slow Overall Progress

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) has released its 2019 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms at www.nalp.org/reportondiversity. The report, which is based on information from the recent 2019-2020 NALP Directory of Legal Employers (NDLE), shows that for the first time, Black or African-American representation among associates has finally topped the pre-recession level reached in 2009 — although by a just a hair.

“While that is a positive sign, it is barely so, and it strikes me as somewhat of a tragedy that it has taken more than 10 years to achieve such a meager benchmark, and it is notable that the number remains well below five percent,” said James G. Leipold, NALP Executive Director. “The overall arc of the storyline for large law firm diversity remains the same — it is one of slow incremental gains for women and people of color in both the associate and partner ranks,” he added. After studying the data in the annual report for more than 15 years, Leipold is convinced that “despite steady gains, great structural and cultural hurdles remain that prevent law firms from being able to measure more rapid progress in increasing diversity, particularly among the partnership ranks.”

The data in the report confirmed these trends, as women and people of color are best represented among summer associates, and well-represented among associates, but then leave the lawyer ranks each year after at a higher rate than white men, culminating in dramatic underrepresentation among equity partners,

with just one in five equity partners being women and only 7.6% of equity partners being people of color. The extent of this underrepresentation is highlighted in the numbers of women partners from specific racial or ethnic groups:

- Asian women make up only 1.46% of partners,
- Latinx women make up 0.80% of partners, and
- Black or African-American women make up just 0.75% of partners.

Read the full 2019 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms at www.nalp.org/reportondiversity.

The NALP Directory of Legal Employers provides a comprehensive and free solution for researching legal employers throughout the U.S. The NALP Directory provides specific information on law firms, government agencies, public interest organizations, and corporations, including lawyer demographics, practice areas, compensation and benefits, diversity and inclusion practices, and other valuable information about legal employers. The 2019-2020 NDLE includes information for over 108,500 partners, associates, and other lawyers in 979 offices, and for almost 7,000 summer associates in 668 offices nationwide. Go to www.nalpdirectory.com to learn more and update your listing.

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About NALP

NALP is an association of over 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That's why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and ethical principles for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For more than 40 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of our members and the lawyers and law students they serve. NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at www.nalp.org/pressreleases. For additional information, contact NALP at info@nalp.org or call (202) 835-1001.