The Women Lawyers Division (WLD) of the National Bar Association was established in 1972 as a vehicle for women in the practice of law to address the issues and problems that particularly affect, interest, and concern African-American women.

Through the WLD, women have made a significant impact on the goals and directions of the NBA by participating at all levels of the organization. The WLD has achieved its goal of adding positive direction to the NBA by “taking a seat at its table” and establishing a new dimension of sensitivity of the NBA as it addresses legal issues affecting women, children, the family, and the African-American community as a whole. In its sponsorship of seminars, breakfasts and other forums, the WLD has concentrated on issues of specific interest and impact on women and, as a result, brought these issues to the forefront of the NBA's conscience.

Get involved, join the WLD!
Respect Yourself Program

The WLD’s national “Respect Yourself” Community Outreach Program is a mentor program designed to educate and empower young African-American girls on the importance of self-respect and respecting others. It was launched in Miami in 2009 during the NBA’s 84th Annual Convention. The program was created after Past NBA WLD Chair, Jean Johnson, was inspired with the idea for the program following negative comments about African-American girls on a radio talk show.

As part of the program, the girls participate in a discussion and luncheon with WLD members who share their personal struggles and challenges as African-American women in the legal profession and have an opportunity to talk one-on-one with WLD members, establishing a strong foundation for a lifelong mentoring relationship.

In Las Vegas, as part of the first ever WLD Women’s Summit, the girls and WLD mentors enjoyed a presentation and Q&A with Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson, U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, a lifetime member of the NBA. The Las Vegas program was organized by NBA Past President Pamela Meanes.

Pamela Meanes
NBA Immediate Past President
Nominating an African-American Woman to the Supreme Court

Kimberly Tignor

Not too long ago, the word “historic” was something to celebrate when describing this Administration – voter turnout for the 2008 presidential election was the highest in history and it was in that election that we welcomed the first African-American family into the White House. However, we also witnessed the mounting polarization of the legislative process, which ultimately seeped into our most sacred branch of government – the judiciary - through the hyper-politicization of the judicial confirmation process.

The sudden death of Justice Antonin Scalia gave President Obama his final opportunity to shape the high court. A number of activists and organizations directly urged the president to make history once more and nominate an African-American woman.

In March of this year, the President nominated Judge Merrick Garland, who has now waited a historic 200 plus days for a hearing. Previously, a Supreme Court nominee has never had to wait longer than 125 days for a confirmation vote. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell has refused even to hold hearings on Judge Garland because “the American people should have a voice in choosing the next justice,” ignoring the will of the people that elected President Obama to a second four-year term.

Over the course of this Administration, we witnessed the mounting polarization of the legislative process, which ultimately seeped into our most sacred branch of government – the judiciary - through the hyper-politicization of the judicial confirmation process. The record delays that have been endured by judicial nominees have not only plagued over-burdened courts but also the communities they serve.

However, the untold story is how the Senate’s obstruction of the confirmation process disparately impacts African-American nominees – this is especially true for women of color. If you are an African-American nominee you are more likely have your confirmation process delayed and you are more likely to have your nomination defeated. Currently, the most diverse slate of circuit court nominees are waiting to be considered by the Senate – this slate includes two African-American women – and their confirmation process has been stonewalled. If confirmed these nominees would be on the next Supreme Court short list.

If we are serious about making history in the Supreme Court, then we must continue to support its pipelines. It is our duty to consistently identify and support African-American women at every level of the judiciary and hold our elected officials accountable should they fail to promote our candidates. If we wait until there is a vacancy on the Supreme Court to start identifying our candidates then we are already too late.
Today’s WLD Leadership Carry on a Noble Tradition

The WLD had its genesis during 1971 when an informal coalition of 18 women members of the NBA discussed soliciting new NBA members to run for national offices. These women decided that there were other issues that needed to be addressed, and thus on August 5, 1971, Ruth Harvey Charity convened the first organizational meeting of NBA women lawyers in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition to Ms. Charity, the organizing members of the WLD included: Hon. Joyce London Alexander, Ruth Banks, Hon. Alice Bonner, Joan Burt, Hon. Theresa Doss, Florence Jackson, Hon. Golden Johnson, Arthenia Joyner, Allie Weeden Latimer, Hon. Gabrielle McDonald, Ethel Olliverre, Hon. Eileen Petersen, Savannah Potter, Hon. Clara Rich, Alice Rucker, Dorothy Sampson, and the Hon. Lucile Watts.
Vice President Monica Dula

Immediate Past WLD Chair elected a NBA Vice President for 2016-2017

At the NBA’s 2016 Annual Convention, outgoing WLD Chair Monica Dula was elected as one of the NBA’s Vice Presidents. The election of attorney Dula to the position of Vice President is an achievement in line with the origins of the WLD. Vice President Dula is the Vice President for Membership.

Monica Dula is a staff attorney with the Criminal Defense Division of the Legal Aid Society. Before joining the Legal Aid Society, Vice President Dula worked for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In addition to being the immediate past Chair of the WLD, Vice President Dula has also served as the Chair of the NBA’s Election 2004 Task Force and as Vice President for Membership of the Metropolitan Black Bar Association of New York.
WLD Attorneys Living Abroad and Loving It!

Beverly Baker-Kelly and Kristi Willie

It feels like a dream for Kristi Willie and Beverly Baker-Kelly to have each found work faraway in the Arabian Gulf. Both currently work in Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman; Kristi as a lawyer and Beverly as a law professor. To a certain extent it was by chance for Kristi but planned by Beverly.

Kristi knew from the age of twelve that she wanted to be an attorney. She became the first college and law school graduate in her family. After graduating from law school, she obtained her Teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification and headed for South Korea where she taught for three years. She returned to the United States to take the bar exam during her final year in Korea and then joined up with African-American friends from Korea to relocate to Muscat. She spent her first year in Muscat teaching and then a legal job opened up at a prestigious Omani law firm where she continues to flourish (see insert on a sample daily workday). Voila!

Beverly came to Muscat in 2009 where she and her husband were the first African-American couple to both be Fulbright Scholars. Paul, a dermatologist, imported his research project on keloids to the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and passed away five years later from complications of Parkinson’s disease. Beverly, with the help of a talented team of editors, and a Cuban-Omani female dermatologist and co-editor of the book finished Paul’s magnum opus, Taylor and Kelly’s Dermatology for Skin of Color, Second Edition, 2016 (see www.amazon.com). Beverly is at the Modern College of Business and Science where she teaches senior level core courses in commercial law.

There are approximately four million inhabitants in Oman. Half are Omanis and the remainder is expats mostly from south-east Asia and Muslim countries. There are approximately 1,500 Americans, but it feels like a smaller community. Beverly and Kristi live among the kindest people in the Gulf. You’ll often see Omani men offering to carry packages for women since Omanis are generally helpful.

Medical facilities in Oman are top notch and inexpensive thanks to employer-provided health insurance. The roads are excellent (although Omanis do drive a bit fast) and Muscat is exceptionally clean and safe. Housing is plentiful and ultramodern hotels with restaurants offering worldwide cuisines are increasing by the day. The hot weather is livable and the month of Ramadan, with its 15-hour daily fast, is bearable. Oman is a relatively conservative culture but that is in the process of changing. Kristi and Beverly respect the traditions but do not participate in its separation of the sexes in various venues. The
female traditional dress of a hijab (head covering) and an abaya (long black covering) is not mandatory for expat women. Thank goodness!

Both Beverly and Kristi are paid enough to sustain their lifestyles without feeling a pinch. An average water bill is about $7.00 a month. Recently, Beverly opted to buy a Toyota rather than a luxury car because “she is a little person” here in Oman and prefers a low profile lifestyle. She is shown a great deal of respect but tires of the perpetual greeting of “Dr. Beverly” by everyone, due to her graduate degrees.

Kristi’s hobbies include daily weight training at a local gym and outdoor activities with friends on weekends. Beverly attends every performance at the stupendous Royal Opera House and is a well-known patron at the local state-of-the-art movie theaters in the shopping malls. She also exercises daily in an elegant exercise facility.

Armed with wanderlust, Kristi and Beverly have traveled independently on their own dimes. Kristi to Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, United Arab Emirates (Dubai), Qatar, Bahrain, Brazil, to name just a few. This December she plans to jet off to West East Africa to explore the Kenyan and Tanzanian game preserves. Beverly has traveled to all those places and many more. Kristi’s employer gives her an annual air ticket to take a month’s leave in the United States. Beverly goes home twice a year for summer and Christmas vacations.

Both Beverly and Kristi are comfortable with the ‘unknown’. After six years of living abroad, Kristi entertains thoughts of returning to the United States for a while but Beverly just doesn’t go there in her mind. Neither of them lives in the future but merely enjoys living in the present in Muscat.

It is a good life for these two lawyers who take life by storm and are unafraid of living as voyeurs in another culture. kwillie05@gmail.com; bbakerkelly@gmail.com

Beverly Baker-Kelly was the Chair for ten years of the National Bar Association’s International Law Section and co-chaired many of those years with Kendal Tyre. Kristi is a neophyte in the NBA.

Kristi’s Typical Day at Her Law Office

9:00–9:30 - Arrive at the office. Check email and enter time sheets. Discuss open issues with colleagues.

9:30–10:00 - Respond to client emails, assuming the response is simple and doesn’t require additional research or consideration with colleagues.

10:00–12:00 - Draft and/or review documents (e.g., commercial agreements, corporate resolutions, tender documents). Submit drafts to senior attorney assigned to the file for review.

12:00 – 14:00 - Prepare memoranda on legal issues or questions posed by clients (e.g. labor matters, licensing regulations, contract disputes), including performing the necessary legal research.

14:00–15:00 - Meet with clients in relation to business acquisition. Prepare notes for the meeting as point of reference for colleagues.

15:00–15:30 - Call a potential new client to discuss scope of work. Prepare engagement letter.

15:30–16:00 - Review a new file assigned by head of department (HOD). Meet with HOD to discuss.

16:00–18:00 - Review earlier prepared draft documents that with a senior colleague. Make necessary revisions and send to client.

18:00–18:30 - Respond to pending emails (those that required additional research).
Protect the Vote! We make a difference.

Professor Rachel J. Anderson

There are just a few more days until Election Day, November 8, 2016. Voters in many states are already engaged in early voting.

Many issues that fall square within the mission of the NBA are on the ballot across the country at the national, state, and county levels. People are voting on a lot of issues that will have a significant effect on women and people of color. They include (alphabetical order):

- a woman’s right to choose,
- birth control,
- equal pay for equal work,
- funding for Planned Parenthood,
- health equity,
- Obamacare, and
- sex education.

At the same time, voters are facing intentional and unintentional acts that can suppress the vote, e.g., (alphabetical order):

- intimidation,
- long lines,
- negative campaigns,
- new voting restrictions,
- polling places not opening,
- reduced numbers of polling locations,
- registered voters not appearing on the rolls,
- registered voters receiving provisional instead of regular ballots, and
- and more.

There is still time. You can still protect the vote. The voters and the country need you!

- Assist Voters: Volunteer to staff voter hotlines to ensure that voters have access to accurate and timely information.
- Observe Polls: Volunteer to be a poll observer. Your presence alone will encourage higher levels of compliance and, if you are onsite, you can contribute to improving the voting process in real time and for other voters going forward.
- Support Volunteers: Offer housing and rides to attorneys from other states.

As President Obama said on a nation-wide call on Oct. 30, 2016, “You need to ignore the distractions and fight through it. ... You need to work your tail off these last few days. ... Your President could not be prouder of you, could not be more grateful for what you are doing. ... When you dig deep and you’ve got that sense of mission, that’s how we make progress, that’s how we change the country. ... Go back out there and get to work. ... Make sure we run through the tape.”
WLD Achievements

40+ Years of WLD Success

Since 1972, the WLD has served the particular needs of its constituency as well as the NBA. Notable achievements of the Women Lawyers Division and its members during its history are the following:

1. Organization of Local Affiliates. The first local chapter of the WLD was organized in Washington, D.C. in 1974. Since that time affiliates have been established in several states, including California, Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania. Members of local chapters have provided leadership and officers to the national WLD.

2. Sponsorship of Seminars. In 1975, the WLD sponsored its first seminar at the NBA National Convention. The WLD hosts seminars at each annual convention, which have addressed the following subjects: impact of juvenile law on the family, domestic violence, energy law, sexual harassment, child advocacy, international law, professional ethics, post-conviction relief, law teaching and trial techniques, ascending to the bench and judicial selection methods, the Internet and personal computer technology, rainmaking and leadership for women.

3. Sponsorship of Breakfast and Luncheons at the NBA Conventions. Since 1976, the WLD has recognized outstanding women lawyers and jurists at its luncheons and annual breakfasts. Outstanding guest speakers have included the Hon. Constance Baker Motley, U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York; the Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton, non-voting Congressional Delegate from the District of Columbia; the Hon. Ann Diggs Taylor, Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan; the Hon. Joyce London Alexander, Magistrate of the U.S. District Court in Boston; the Hon. Juanita Kidd Stout, former Supreme Court Justice from Pennsylvania; the Hon. Joyce Tucker, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Member; Derrick Bell, Harvard Law School Professor; Barbara Arnwine, Executive Director, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under the Law; Debra L. Lee, Executive Vice President & General Counsel of BET, Inc.; Dr. Dorothy I. Height, President Chief Executive Officer of National Council of Negro Women, Inc.; Emma Darnell, County Commissioner of Atlanta, Georgia; the Hon. Ann Claire Williams, Judge of the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals; the Hon. Johnnie B. Rawlinson, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit; and Phyllis James, Executive Vice President, Special Counsel for Litigation, and Chief Diversity and Corporate Responsibility Officer for MGM International.

4. Service in the Highest Offices of the NBA. In 1977, Ruth Harvey Charity, a WLD member, was elected a Vice-President of the NBA, which was the first time in 25 years a woman had held so high a position within the NBA. In 1981, another WLD member, Arnette R. Hubbard, was elected the first President-Elect of the NBA; and Alice Bonner, a founder of the WLD, was installed as the second woman president of the NBA Judicial Council Division. Since that year, ten other female WLD members have served as President of the NBA: Arthenia L. Joyner, Algenita Scott Davis, Sharon McPhail, Paulette Brown, Beverley McQueary Smith, Evett L. Simmons, Kim M. Keenan, Vanita M. Banks, Mavis Thompson and
Pamela Meanes. Members of the WLD have also served in other offices in the NBA and on its Board of Governors.

5. Sponsorship of the U.S. Supreme Court Group Swearing-In. The Supreme Court Swearing-In tradition began in 1981 and continues today. Each Spring (usually Memorial Day weekend), the WLD anticipates scheduling and sponsorship of a group of NBA members for admission to the U.S. Supreme Court.

6. Respect Yourself Mentor Program. On August 4, 2009 during the NBA 83rd Annual Convention, the WLD launched its national “Respect Yourself” Mentor Program, which was developed to educate young, at-risk and disadvantaged African American girls about the importance of respecting themselves and others. Since its inception, the WLD has hosted the program in several major cities, including St. Louis, New Orleans, Baltimore and Las Vegas.

7. 40th Anniversary. In 2012, the WLD celebrated its 40 years of existence. The WLD sponsored several programs and events in commemoration of this significant anniversary, including a reception honoring the WLD Founders and past Chairs and the annual breakfast with a salute to the women NBA Past Presidents and keynote address by WLD Founder, Allie B. Latimer.

8. National Women’s Summit. In 2016, the WLD sponsored the first National Women’s Summit in the history of the NBA.

UPCOMING NBA EVENTS

Jan. 28-Feb. 2 - Judicial Council Retreat and Midwinter Meeting, Trinidad & Tobago
Feb. 15-19 - Young Lawyers Division Conference and Retreat, Trinidad and Tobago
Feb. 23-25 - Commercial Law Section 30th Annual Corporate Counsel Conference, Atlanta, GA
Mar. 17-20 - Small Firms/Solo Practitioners’ Division 22nd Annual Conference, Miami FL, Cocomay and Nassau Bahamas
Mar. 30-Apr. 1 - NBA Mid-Year Meeting and Gertrude Rush Dinner, Washington, DC
May 7-18 - International Affiliates Meeting, Dubai and India
July 29-Aug. 4 - NBA 92nd Annual Convention, Toronto, Canada (book your room now!)