

2023 Year In Review

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



SpencerFane®

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# A Letter From James Crumlin

At Spencer Fane, we see inclusion as both a core value and key to our business success.

While recognizing we have more work to do, we are proud of everything we accomplished in 2023. As a firm, we launched two new internal connect groups; continued to make steady improvements in hiring, promoting, and retaining diverse attorneys and professional staff; and even earned national recognition for our DEI programs.

As highlighted in these pages, our internal initiatives truly blossomed in 2023, and Spencer Fane welcomed opportunities to continue the dialogue in advocating for DEI in the legal industry. We connected our attorneys and staff through book clubs and sponsorship programs, continued the tradition of longstanding diversity initiatives such as our annual Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship Breakfast, and expanded our participation in key affinity groups such as the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce across our office footprint.

Despite great success, it was not a year without its challenges. Like many others in our industry, Spencer Fane grappled with an important question in the wake of DEI challenges by the courts and the public – how do we evolve our programs and policies in an ever-divisive world? We persevere. Spencer Fane remains intent on leading by example, walking the talk, and putting actual deeds and dollars behind our stated commitments.

We are extremely grateful for the firm leadership's ongoing support of our DEI efforts and the dedicated work of the DEI Committee, as well as the countless attorneys and staff who help us further our goals. As a firm, we remain committed in our efforts to promote diversity, dismantle barriers to inclusion, and foster equity. We also continue our focus on engaging with our clients and our communities to advance shared inclusion and diversity goals.

On a more personal note, this was my first year as Chair of the DEI Committee, and it was incredibly rewarding to witness the passion and camaraderie of our entire team firsthand. I want to thank and recognize the people in each of our offices across all our practices whose participation, support, and leadership has been critical to our organizational advancement. It truly underscores the role each of us plays in creating a culture of authenticity, responsiveness, and teamwork – every day in everything we do.

Our entire firm welcomes the opportunity to discuss these and other firm initiatives with our clients and industry colleagues as we explore new ways to advance diversity and inclusion together. Spencer Fane envisions a firm where each person is empowered, has a voice in decision-making, feels a sense of belonging, and has opportunities for growth.



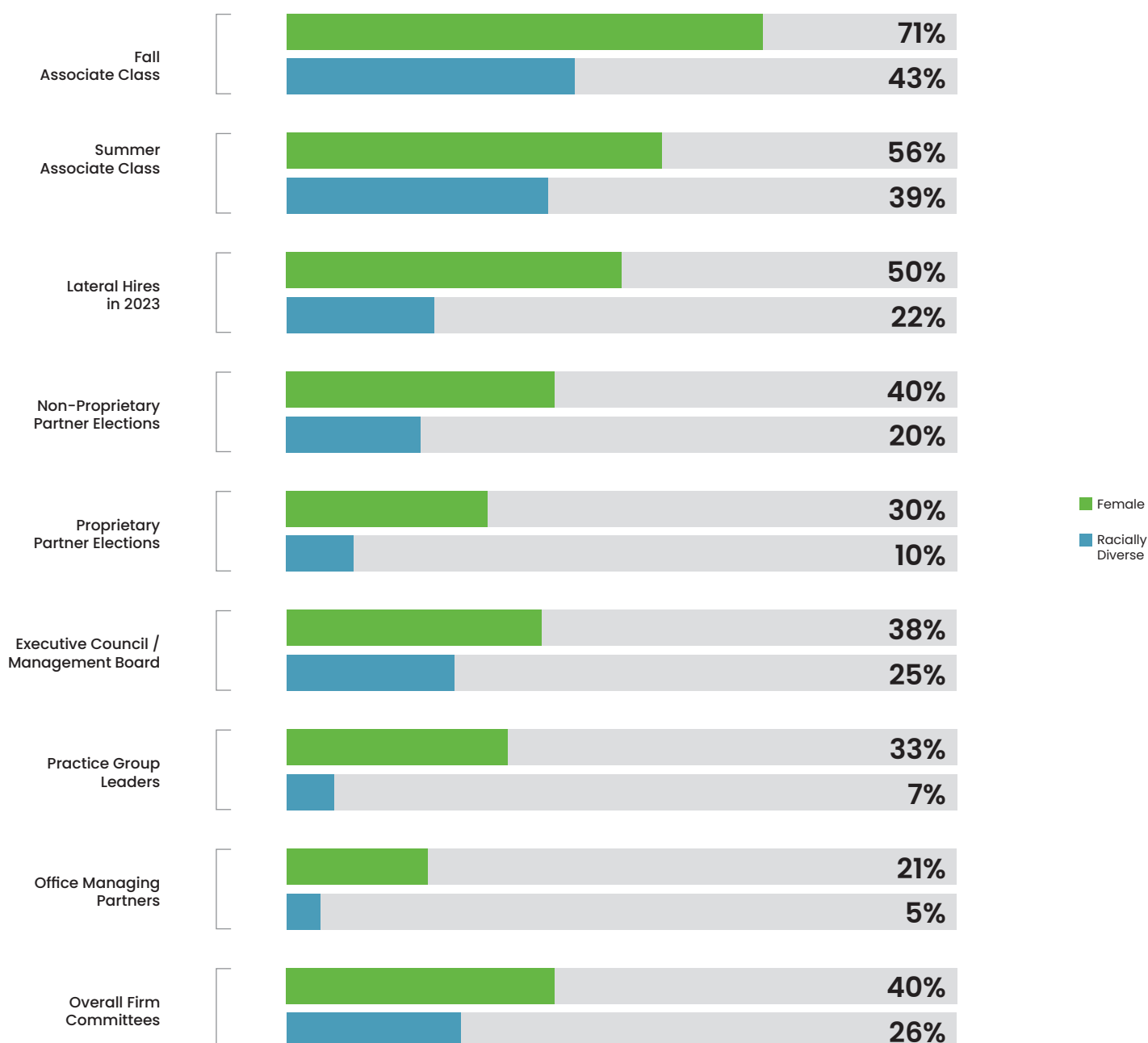
**James Crumlin**

Spencer Fane Partner and DEI Committee Chair

# Workforce Metrics

At Spencer Fane, our success is driven by our people. Throughout the 2023 calendar year, the firm continued its focus on recruiting, retaining, and promoting the brightest and most diverse talent. Through collaboration between our HR and DEI teams, the firm has seen a notable increase in its diverse pipeline of talent for both first year associates and lateral hires. While we are proud of our progress, we have still much to do and remain committed to being a diverse, equitable, and inclusive firm.

## In 2023



# DEI Committee

Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, working in collaboration with the Executive Committee and other firm leadership, assists our efforts by providing educational opportunities for our attorneys and professional staff, measuring and monitoring each success and challenge, investing in formal and informal mentorship, and supporting attorneys and professional staff with a dedicated budget. We breathe life into fundamental principles that make our law firm strong and a better place to work.

## 2023 DEI Committee

- **Mary Bacon** | Of Counsel | Las Vegas, Nevada
- **James Crumlin**, Chair | Partner | Nashville, Tennessee
- **Bill Hopkins** | Partner | Austin, Texas
- **Heather Morris** | Partner | Kansas City, Missouri
- **Nate Orr** | Partner | Kansas City, Missouri
- **Jeremy Rucker** | Associate | Plano, Texas
- **DeAndrea Washington** | Partner | Houston, Texas
- **Elizabeth Wente** | Partner | Springfield, Missouri

## Spencer Fane Names James Crumlin New Chair of DEI Committee

James Crumlin has been appointed the Chair of the firm's DEI Committee. A partner in the Nashville office, James follows attorney Elizabeth Wente, who has skillfully led the Committee since 2020, in the role.

"Diversity, equity, and inclusion are integral for building not just a strong law firm but a powerful, connected community," James said. "As such, I am honored and humbled to serve in this role and am excited to expand the firm's DEI footprint alongside my fellow committee members, firm leaders, colleagues, and professional staff."

## American Lawyer, Corporate Counsel Magazine Recognize Firm's Diversity Traction

Spencer Fane increased its position on *The American Lawyer's* Diversity Scorecard by 50 spots in 2023. In addition, the firm was recognized by *Corporate Counsel* magazine as one of two firms in the nation to receive its Diversity Team of the Year Award at the 2023 Women, Influence and Power awards ceremony. As the firm gains traction with its diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, *The American Lawyer* also shortlisted the firm for its Law Firm of the Year honor. Spencer Fane was one of only eight firms in the nation considered for this distinction in 2023.

We share these accolades not to boast our achievements – our work is far from done – but instead signal to our stakeholder community that the investment in DEI is unsurprisingly paying off. Whatever the measure, one thing is certain: we are humbled to know our commitment to culture is catching attention for all the right reasons. At Spencer Fane, our values are our North Star and underly everything we do as a firm.





# Women ADVOCATE

## **Advance. Develop. Visualize. Own. Champion. Advise. Thrive. Engage.**

Women ADVOCATE is a connect group within Spencer Fane that aims to advance women within the firm and their civic and business communities. Recognizing that the sustained success of both our female lawyers and staff supports a competitive advantage for the firm, the Women ADVOCATE group is dedicated to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of female professionals in the firm. We provide resources to develop our members and champion their interests and efforts. We encourage our female professionals to visualize the career path that they want. As a group, we then work to engage each member in leadership and growth opportunities and advise so each member can own their career path. Women ADVOCATE also implements internal and external initiatives that cultivate both individual talent development and firmwide business development. This requires the continued support of our male colleagues and allies. Our goal is to create an environment where our female attorneys and staff, and all members of Women ADVOCATE, thrive.

## **2023 Women ADVOCATE Committee**

- **Linda Knight**, Chair | Partner | Denver, Colorado
- **Stacey Garrett Koju** | Partner | Nashville, Tennessee
- **Lisa Wright Murray** | Director of Administration | Kansas City, Missouri
- **Courtney Davis Powell** | Of Counsel | Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- **Gulmina Shah** | Associate | Houston, Texas
- **Heather Morris** | DEI Committee Liaison | Partner | Kansas City, Missouri

## **Linda Knight Joins Spencer Fane Women ADVOCATE Committee As Chair**

Attorney Linda Knight has joined the leadership committee for the firm affinity group, Women ADVOCATE, as its Chair.

"This group has generated thoughtful programming for the firm and provided forums to support mentorship, and for that, I am honored to be considered for this committee," Linda said. "For my part, I would like to spotlight the need for sponsorship and implement a strategic plan that encourages the firm – not just other women – to engage in such an approach to inclusiveness."

## **Women ADVOCATE Hosts Quarterly Internal Events**

In addition to its other offerings, Women ADVOCATE was pleased to host three quarterly events that were open to all Spencer Fane professionals.

On January 11, Women ADVOCATE hosted an in-person New Year's Kickoff and Happy Hour. Each office got to enjoy refreshments and conversation as members of Women ADVOCATE leadership toasted the year to come.

In May, Women ADVOCATE held a virtual meeting to welcome new members and introduce the connect group's first staff committee member, Director of Administration, Lisa Wright Murray. Participants also participated in small group breakout discussions that allowed them to share ideas and develop next steps for initiatives.

The Q3 Virtual meeting, held in late September, featured a panel centered on legal career opportunities for women. Lisa Wright Murray, Mary Bacon, Leslie Greathouse, and Kersten Holzhuetter engaged in a dialogue moderated by Courtney Powell that outlined their individual career journeys, provided advice on finding mentors and sponsors, and discussed how both women attorneys and staff members can advance their careers. The panel also shared personal stories about how they learned to balance work and home life as well as the support they receive at the firm.

## Spencer Fane Announces Affinity Group for Black Professionals

The DEI Committee is pleased to expand the firm's support of diversity-focused networks with the creation of our second connect group, Spencer Fane Black Opportunities to Network and Discover (BOND).

### Paz Haynes and Valentine Uduebor Named BOND Co-Chairs

As the Spencer Fane BOND connect group was formed in 2023, attorneys Paz Haynes and Valentine Uduebor were both elected leaders of the group by their peers.

"Looking at the acronym of BOND, we really wanted to focus on these four pillars, which was an opportunity for black professionals to network and discover and further develop the bond between the black professionals and allies at this organization," Valentine said.

"BOND is a connect group and a focal point for belonging and development for black professionals both internally and in our communities at large," said Paz. "It's a group where everyone is invited. A group that focuses on development and trying to build a supportive network here internally for all of our professionals – our attorneys and our staff. We want to build this group centered on growth, mentorship, and advocacy."

# Spencer Fane BOND

## Black Opportunities to Network and Discover

Spencer Fane BOND provides a central point of connection and belonging for Black professionals to flourish within and outside the firm. BOND seeks to foster opportunities for professional development, cooperation, and visibility for its members through a supportive network of exemplary legal leaders. Understanding the power of our voices and the value of our innovative ideas, we dedicate ourselves to cultivating initiatives centered on growth, mentorship, and advocacy. BOND also serves as an avenue to network and discover new talent, resources, and business practices. Above all, we honor the bond created by a community united in advancing the principles of diversity and inclusion.

## 2023 Spencer Fane BOND Committee

- **Wale Akinmoladun** | Of Counsel | Kansas City, Missouri
- **Paz Haynes**, Co-Chair | Partner | Nashville, Tennessee
- **Bernadette Lawson** | Client Development Manager | Kansas City, Missouri
- **Kimberly Slay** | Of Counsel | Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **Ed Summers** | Network and Server Administrator | Nashville, Tennessee
- **Valentine Uduebor**, Co-Chair | Associate | Denver, Colorado
- **Jeremy Rucker** | DEI Committee Liaison | Associate | Plano, Texas

## Spencer Fane BOND Hosts Virtual Meet and Greet

On November 7, the Spencer Fane BOND leadership committee hosted its first virtual meeting where it shared the group's origin, the important meaning behind its name, and upcoming opportunities. During the hour-long meet and greet event, each committee member had a chance to introduce themselves both professionally and personally, and Co-Chairs Paz Haynes and Valentine Uduebor shared the committee's thoughts on 2024 programming, volunteering, and specific initiatives, including open discussions on new social issues as they arise.

"Primarily, as we go into 2024, we see our committee putting on various programs for the firm at large on various topics, including specific professional development programs for things like executive presence and how to further enhance your social media presence. So, we'll be bringing in speakers to touch on those topics as further business development for black professionals that are part of the firm," Valentine said. "As a connect group, our members will also talk about various issues that are affecting them either personally or professionally. The BOND committee will serve as a liaison as it relates to social issues or professional issues that affect black professionals and allies."

# Spencer Fane+

Spencer Fane+ is a networking and resource group committed to promoting equality and belonging for LGBTQIA+ and allied members at the firm. We recognize our diverse society, and Spencer Fane+ understands what makes us unique as people also makes us valuable and should be celebrated within our legal community as well as outside of it. We champion the rights of everyone to live proudly, safely, and authentically. Through initiatives centered on professional advancement, awareness, and advocacy, Spencer Fane+ provides opportunities for members to connect and succeed while fostering a broader legal culture of acceptance and justice.

## 2023 Spencer Fane+ Committee

- **Stacy Harper** | Partner | Overland Park, Kansas
- **Olivia Hintz** | Paralegal | Denver, Colorado
- **Elizabeth Lally**, Co-Chair | Partner | Omaha, Nebraska
- **Toni Ojoyeyi** | Associate | Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **Tracey Wallace**, Co-Chair | Partner | Dallas, Texas
- **Bill Hopkins** | DEI Committee Liaison | Partner | Austin, Texas

## Spencer Fane Announces Affinity Group for LGBTQIA+ Professionals

The Spencer Fane DEI Committee was pleased to enrich the firm's commitment to diversity-focused initiatives with the creation of the firm's third connect group. Following continued support of outside organizations such as the LGBTQ+ Bar Association and the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the DEI Committee launched a group for LGBTQIA+ professionals and allies at the firm: Spencer Fane+.

## Elizabeth Lally and Tracey Wallace Named Spencer Fane+ Co-Chairs

During Pride Month 2023, the DEI Committee announced Spencer Fane+, the firm's LGBTQIA+ connect group. As the committee finalized, Elizabeth Lally and Tracey Wallace were named as Co-Chairs of the new group.

"I am proud to be a Co-Chair of Spencer Fane+ and to have the opportunity to support the firm's larger commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the legal profession. I believe, and many studies show, the ability to be one's authentic self is key to greater happiness in life. Everyone deserves the opportunity to live their best life, to feel supported in who they are, and valuable as individuals both personally and professionally," Elizabeth said. "Spencer Fane+ strives to provide the safe place so many of us need, every day, as we work through both the challenges and opportunities of our daily lives within the legal profession while also striving to live proudly, safely, and authentically."

"Spencer Fane+ is not only a safe place for LGBTQIA+ attorneys and staff, but also a group that will ensure everyone has ample opportunities to succeed professionally and personally. This is just one step the firm is taking to continue supporting the LGBTQIA+ community internally as a team and externally in business," Tracey said. "I'm incredibly proud to be part of the firm's first formalized pride group. Aligning the firm's values and continued commitment to equity will drive significant impact for our LGBTQIA+ professionals, and I'm honored to partner with the firm on these efforts."



# Affinity Groups and Alliances

Our firm embraces its responsibility to increase diversity, equitable access to opportunities, and inclusion of people of color within our firm and community. We are proud to join our peers in the legal industry in this endeavor to raise awareness and eliminate practices that perpetuate bias in our community.

## Spencer Fane and the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity



LEADERSHIP  
COUNCIL  
ON LEGAL  
DIVERSITY

Spencer Fane is one of more than 350 law firms and corporate partners in support of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity's (LCLD) mission to help "a new and more diverse generation of attorneys ascend to positions of leadership."

## Spencer Fane and the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce



MID-AMERICA  
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

We are committed to fostering belonging and success for professionals of all identities. In our mission to support LGBT+ individuals and allies to exist fearlessly and advance without barriers, we are thrilled to partner with the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce in creating a "more inclusive and vibrant economy in Kansas City and the surrounding region."

## Spencer Fane and the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance



Our firm is proud to have a culture that values diversity and inclusion and continually strives to elevate the voices of people and communities of color. In our commitment to promote racial equity in the law, we are pleased to be a member of the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance.

## Spencer Fane Joins the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce

In June, Spencer Fane proudly announced the firm joined the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce, an affiliate of the National LGBT Chamber, as an executive-level corporate partner.

As a firm that considers diversity, equity, and inclusion as essential principles, Spencer Fane is committed to fostering belonging and success for people of all identities. Not only did the firm launch an LGBTQIA+ connect group for its professionals this year, but in teaming up with the Chamber, Spencer Fane unites with over 2,000 representatives and 450 organizations to support LGBTQIA+ professionals and allies in existing fearlessly and advancing without barriers.

## Brittainy Joyner and Kristen Walker Named LCLD Pathfinders

Attorneys Brittainy Joyner and Kristen Walker were each named LCLD Pathfinders for 2023. The multifaceted Pathfinder program provides participants with the opportunity to learn from top leaders in the legal profession as well as career development experts. Over the course of seven months, Brittainy and Kristen joined their fellow 2023 LCLD Pathfinders in participating in an exclusive, unique leadership and professional development curriculum. The 462 Pathfinders had several opportunities – from class meetings to group peer circles – to meet and interact with their peers, both in person and in a virtual format.

## Valentine Uduebor Selected as a 2023 LCLD Fellow

Attorney Valentine Uduebor was named an LCLD Fellow for 2023. Designed for lawyers with eight to 15 years of experience, this landmark year-long professional development program connects high-potential attorneys with leading general counsel, managing partners, and their peers for mentoring and career guidance. As Fellows selected by the general counsel and managing partners of LCLD member corporations and law firms such as Spencer Fane, Valentine and his program peers participated in training sessions and had opportunities to interact with key legal and business leaders of the country's most prestigious organizations.

# In the Media

As active thought leaders in the legal industry and those most important to our clients, Spencer Fane attorneys regularly speak and write on important diversity topics. In a year where all eyes were on DEI initiatives, our attorneys continued to serve as representatives for change.

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## Mary Bacon Authors Trailblazer Series

For almost four years, Mary Bacon has co-authored Nevada Trailblazers, a monthly column in the *Nevada Lawyer Magazine* that profiles diverse individuals who have made groundbreaking achievements in the Nevada legal community. In addition, Mary was the featured Nevada Trailblazer in the January 2023 issue.

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## Thought Leaders Through Trade and Client Presentations

Throughout 2023, Spencer Fane attorneys have served as speakers on various DEI hot topics, including attorneys Ruthie White (Implicit Bias and Employment Discrimination: Avoiding Liabilities in the Hiring, Reviewing, and Disciplining Process), Megan Clontz (International Women's Insolvency & Restructuring Confederation-Central Texas Network), Stephanie Lovett-Bowman and Ruthie White (Transgender Student and Employee Rights: What We Know and Don't Know), and Randi Winter (DEI: How Company Culture Shapes Labor & Employment Initiatives and Legal HR Compliance).

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## Theresa Becerra Hosts UCLA Welcome Event for Latino Students and Alumni

Spencer Fane attorney Theresa Becerra organized and hosted the Welcome Reception for the 2023-2024 University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Latino Alumni Association's OrgullosO Mentorship Program at the UCLA James West Alumni Center on October 12. She also attended the UCLA 2023 Latinx Welcome: "Creciendo Nuestro Futuro" event on October 9.

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## Spencer Fane Minneapolis Team Featured on Attorney-at-Law Cover

Attorneys Jessica Nelson, Karen Olson, Kimberly Slay, and Randi Winter were featured as the cover story of the November issue of *Minnesota Attorney at Law*. The article, "Spencer Fane: a Beacon of Excellence," highlights Spencer Fane as a trusted partner in various practice areas, including corporate law, litigation, real estate, and more. The article describes the firm: "A testament to the virtually unparalleled success of this firm is its uninterrupted streak of double-digit percentage growth, which reached an impressive 10 consecutive years in 2022. This feat is a result of the firm's unwavering commitment to excellence, client service, and innovation."

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## Kelly Campbell Honored by Sporting KC for Military Service

Attorney and former Lieutenant Commander Kelly Campbell was the Sporting KC Military Honoree of the Match for the MLS team's June 17 game against LAFC. Kelly was honored for her career accomplishments in the U.S. Navy and her ongoing work as Vice Chair of the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Foundation program, Military Matters. She was celebrated with big screen recognition, a stadium announcement, and a montage of photographs from her service.



# Honors and Awards

As a result of the firm's efforts and commitment to DEI, Spencer Fane was honored for its contributions by local, national, and trade media organizations in 2023. In addition to the numerous awards bestowed upon the firm, Spencer Fane professionals continue to shine in their own right.



## **DeAndrea Washington Named 2023 Diversity in Business Award Honoree**

Attorney DeAndrea Washington has been named among the *Houston Business Journal's* 2023 Diversity in Business Award honorees. This achievement recognizes DeAndrea as one of 36 Houston business leaders honored this year for showing exceptional commitment to promoting the practices that advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

## **Ayesha Mehdi Appointed Vice President of SABA Las Vegas Chapter**

Attorney Ayesha Mehdi has been named 2022-2023 Vice President of the South Asian Bar Association of Las Vegas (SABA-LV). In this role, Ayesha continues advancing SABA-LV's position as a trusted forum for the South Asian legal community.

## **Toni Ojoyeyi Recognized for Pro Bono Work by Minnesota Bar Association**

Attorney Toni Ojoyeyi has been named a North Star Lawyer by the Minnesota State Bar Association in recognition of her pro bono work. As a North Star Lawyer, Toni is one of 685 Minnesota attorneys who

provided at least 50 hours of legal services to low-income people at no fee, and without expectation of a fee, in 2022. She and her fellow honorees are listed in the May/June 2023 issue of *Bench & Bar* magazine.

## **Bill Hopkins Named a Mentor for Board Mentors of Color Program**

Attorney Bill Hopkins has been named a 2024 mentor for The New Philanthropists' Board Mentors of Color Program, an Austin-based organization that cultivates diversity, equity, and inclusion values on nonprofit boards in order for leaders of color to gain access and opportunity into board service.

## **Stacey Garrett Koju Named a Top 100 Lawyer in Tennessee by National Black Lawyers**

Attorney Stacey Garrett Koju was recently selected for inclusion into the National Black Lawyers Top 100 Lawyers in the State of Tennessee. National Black Lawyers bestows this honor only to the top 100 African American lawyers in each state or region with reputations for providing excellent legal representation in their respective practice areas. The organization bases this invitation-only membership on current member referrals and independent research.



# Honors and Awards

## **Spencer Fane Client Team Among Finalists at The American Lawyer Industry Awards**

The firm's partnership with JBS Foods was nominated as one of eight finalists in the nation for *The American Lawyer's* Best Client-Law Firm Team award. The award honors a relationship and arrangement between a law firm and client that exemplifies a true partnership that drives value for both sides.

## **Three Spencer Fane Attorneys Earn 2023 Missouri Lawyers Award Honors**

Attorneys [Leslie Greathouse](#), [Jessica Merrigan](#), and [Kersten Holzhueter](#) have received 2023 Missouri Lawyer Awards from *Missouri Lawyers Media*. Spencer Fane was the only firm with more than two honorees. Leslie (Influential Lawyer), Jessie (Law Firm Leader), and Kersten (Legal Champion) were formally recognized alongside their fellow honorees at an awards ceremony at the Missouri Athletic Club in St. Louis.

## **Spencer Fane Earns Inaugural Empowering Women Award from The Journal Record**

Spencer Fane is honored to have been among the first winners of *The Journal Record's* inaugural Empowering Women Awards. Attorneys [Shannon Davies](#), [Hilary Allen](#), and [Sarah Clutts](#), and summer associate [LeeAnn Littlejohn](#) attended the awards reception on July 13 in Oklahoma City.





# Honors and Awards

## **Three Spencer Fane Attorneys Earn Minnesota Lawyer Top Women in Law Honor**

Attorneys Karen Olson, Kimberly Slay, and Randi Winter were each named to the *Minnesota Lawyer's* 2023 list of Top Women in Law. The firm is the only organization with more than two honorees on the inaugural list.



## **Andrea Perry Honored with the National Black Chamber of Commerce's Connector & Achiever Award**

Attorney Andrea Perry was honored with the Nashville Black Chamber of Commerce Connector & Achiever Award at the organization's 25th Year Gala and Awards Celebration on November 11.



## **Four Spencer Fane Attorneys Honored with MLM Women's Justice Awards**

Spencer Fane attorneys Elizabeth Felker, Stacy Harper, Jessica Merrigan, and Charli Steed have each earned honors as part of the 2023 *Missouri Lawyers Media* Women's Justice Awards. No other firm had more than three honorees.





# External Events

Spencer Fane is proud to provide external event opportunities both virtually and in person to our professionals and clients that have a lasting impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We highlight just some of the special external events our team hosted in 2023 to accelerate the pace of change in not just our firm, but the larger legal community.



## **Spencer Fane Hosts Senator Cory Booker for Annual MLK Fellowship Breakfast**

Spencer Fane held its 22nd Annual MLK Fellowship Breakfast on January 16 at the Tennessee State Museum. U.S. Senator Cory Booker served as featured speaker for the event, a Nashville community gathering that celebrates Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on his eponymous federal holiday.

More than 500 people gathered to hear Booker share personal reflections on Dr. King's legacy which were centered on the idea that little acts create the most impact. Senator Booker encouraged attendees to abandon the "great man theory of history" because change instead comes from "foot soldiers – everyday people who live in accordance [with] their values when no one is looking."

## **Women ADVOCATE hosts International Women's Day Celebration with Ritu Bhasin**

Women ADVOCATE was excited to host a conversation with author and inclusion expert Ritu Bhasin. During her presentation, she shared that many of us feel constant pressure to mask and curate who we are – to perform as someone we're not rather than be ourselves. And it strikes at our ability to belong. But we don't have to live, work, or lead this way.

In this session, Ritu Bhasin explored concepts from her book "We've Got This: Unlocking the Beauty of Belonging." During our fireside chat, we discussed everything from the importance of embracing your identities so you can experience belonging to how leaders can create cultures of authenticity, acceptance, psychological safety, and trust.

## **Spencer Fane Launches Advantage CLE Featuring DEI Programming**

In 2023, Spencer Fane launched its Advantage CLE Series, eight 60-minute webinars aimed at helping clients, peers, and attorneys earn nearly half of the annually needed CLEs, including Ethics, Cybersecurity, and Diversity/Unconscious Bias credits.

Everyone, including attorneys who believe themselves to be fair, possess implicit biases. Furthermore, as the discussion and efforts to implement DEI practices have evolved, reasons to "push back" have also developed. The session addressed that one important aspect of the DEI discussion often overlooked is the role of ethics.

# Internal Events

Spencer Fane creates and hosts diversity, equity, and inclusion-related internal programs – both educational and social – designed to enhance our firm’s inclusive culture. Our goal is always to provide a safe space for connection and an opportunity to build multi-cultural experiences as well as support the firm’s strategic goals.

## Spencer Fane Continues Let’s Talk About It Series

This year, the DEI Committee again hosted its Let’s Talk About It series, virtual discussions that highlight diversity-related topics. Through their small group format, each event aims to create a safe, comfortable environment where every participant has the opportunity to contribute.

On June 13, attorney and Women ADVOCATE Chair [Linda Knight](#) led a session, “Persevering in the Face of DEI Doubt,” inspired by recent events, such as the elimination of DEI programs in schools and universities across states like Oklahoma, Texas, and Florida, as well as the Silicon Valley Bank collapse being attributed to diversity or “wokeness.” Then, on November 1, attorneys [Ariel Lierz](#) and [Randi Winter](#) led attendees through a discussion on the Israel-Hamas War that featured personal stories from several members of the firm.

## Spencer Fane Hosts DEI Happy Hours Across Firm Offices

The DEI Committee proudly introduced the firm’s 2023 series of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Happy Hours.

These first-of-their-kind happy hours provide an additional, internal opportunity for members of the Committee to connect with attorneys and staff at Spencer Fane. Attendees of the events – which occur at a different firm office each time – get to learn information about upcoming DEI events, programs, and initiatives at Spencer Fane. Furthermore, these sessions provide Spencer Fane professionals a chance to share ideas and feedback directly to the Committee.

The Committee has hosted four happy hour events in each of the Denver, Dallas / Plano, Minneapolis, and Phoenix offices. The DEI Committee looks forward to hosting more of these events in 2024.

## Black History Month Book Club Returns to Spencer Fane

The DEI Committee was pleased to host our second Annual Black History Month Book Club throughout February. We were happy to welcome back [Vic Sorrell](#), VicWork LLC CEO, to co-lead these weekly book club discussions with attorneys [James Crumlin](#), [Bill Hopkins](#), [DeAndrea Washington](#), [Julia Vander Weele](#), and [Elizabeth Wentz](#).

## Spencer Fane Celebrates Juneteenth and Pride with Firm Events

The DEI and BOND Committees were pleased to welcome guest speakers [John Drake](#) and [Brad Pritchett](#) to commemorate Juneteenth and Pride Month, respectively.

On June 21, the firm welcomed [John Drake](#), Chief of Police of the Nashville Metro Police Department, for the firm’s second annual Juneteenth event. Conversing with [James Crumlin](#), Chief Drake shared stories about his decades-long career in law enforcement and discussed recent political events and how he has risen above challenges such as media and racial tension.

The following week on June 28, the DEI Committee hosted a discussion with Equality Texas Field Director [Brad Pritchett](#) for Pride Month. In his conversation with [Bill Hopkins](#), Brad shared insights gained from his efforts driving cultural change in Texas through LGBTQ+ advocacy. He also discussed the reclamation of the word “queer” to “disempower bigotry,” the importance of intersectionality, how this generation of activists stays motivated, and more.

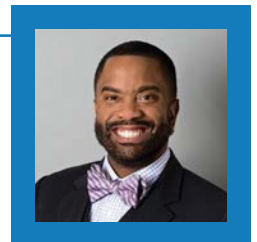
# Spencer Fane Connects

SF Connects is a series of virtual conversations featuring colleagues and special guests who focus on improving DEI at the firm and in the community on a daily basis. Through these virtual sessions, our attorneys and staff are able to spend an hour with DEI leaders and other guests as they answer questions on their background, career highlights, diversity efforts, and more.

This year, our Connects series sessions featured:

## Meet Our New DEI Chair: James Crumlin

As the DEI Committee underwent a leadership change in January, the committee hosted a special SF Connects featuring the new DEI Chair, James Crumlin, on January 31, which was moderated by the Immediate Past Chair Elizabeth Wentz.



As an introduction, James shared his background with the firm and explained his commitment to giving back to his local community. A Louisville-native, James has been practicing law for more than 25 years. He actually worked for fellow attorney Paz Haynes's father, a former U. S. District Judge of the District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, right out of law school.

During the hour-long conversation, James discussed a wide variety of topics including the importance of legacy events like the Nashville office's annual MLK Day event, new budget available for DEI-related events and programs, co-hosting Black History Month Book Club, and upcoming programming from DEI Committee in 2023.

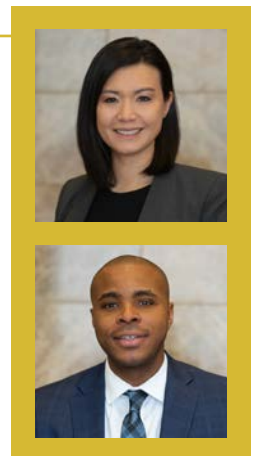
Elizabeth also pressed James about the increasing questions from clients around diverse teams as well as hiring and retaining diverse talent.

"Well, our clients are demanding it. Our clients want to know our DEI efforts, and they're asking for numbers. They're asking for who on the case files; is it a minority partner? How many minorities are going to be working on the file? I've even had a client ask me if there are any minority staff members that are going to be doing the support work behind the scenes? It's increasingly becoming the norm that our clients demand that. That is something that if we're not out in front of it, we'll be lagging and trying to play catch up. And nobody wants to play catch up in this space because you can easily get behind," James said.

## Mentorship: Linda Knight and Valentine Uduebor

On April 4, the DEI Committee hosted an SF Connects session showcasing Denver attorneys Linda Knight and Valentine Uduebor. Attorney DeAndrea Washington moderated the discussion which centered on the importance of mentorship and sponsorship, particularly for diverse attorneys.

Linda and Val began by summarizing their career trajectories and how Linda's decision to invite Val to Spencer Fane kickstarted their mentor/mentee relationship. Linda shared that she was given the opportunity to recruit an associate for the Denver office. Committed to finding a diverse attorney, she remembered Val's impressive resume from years earlier while at another firm. After receiving a call from Linda, Val met with the team and joined when it became obvious that he would fit in seamlessly.



# Spencer Fane Connects

Val then talked about how he's been able to grow at the firm since making the transition. He was able to build confidence from knowing he was sought after, being trusted with a lot of responsibility right away, and being encouraged by Linda to take opportunities such as a presentation for the Colorado Defense Lawyers Association's annual conference.

"It seems as if I have as many opportunities as I want," Val said.

Next, Linda emphasized the importance of not just mentorship but sponsorship when it comes to retaining diverse talent. "The word sponsorship, to me, needs to replace mentorship," Linda shared. "[Taking] the opportunities that you may have and bring [your mentee] along...just promote them in a way that advances their career, opportunities, and learning." She then used her sponsorship of Val and Terence Ridley's sponsorship of her as examples of taking an active role in a fellow attorney's success.

## AAPL Month: Jay Ji and Tiffany Santhavi

As part of the firm's celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month, the Spencer Fane DEI Committee hosted a special SF Connects featuring attorneys Jay Ji and Tiffany Santhavi Watts on May 23.

Moderated by James Crumlin, the discussion between Jay and Tiffany spanned several topics, including their respective Chinese and Thai/Laotian heritages, the uptick in discrimination against AAPI communities since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ability of AAPI attorneys to advance in the legal industry. Attendees also had the opportunity to participate in live polls about statistics.

When asked how she thinks the law can better protect AAPI and other marginalized individuals against racism, Tiffany replied: "one of the things specifically for civil rights laws is redefining what an attack is. The way the law is written right now, people can do a lot and get away with a lot because you're not crossing this very specific line that they have. And people are not taking into account that just because it doesn't get to the physical violence does not mean that you're not hurting someone else, that someone else is not having a fear of leaving their home."

The discussion drew to a close with Jay and Tiffany talking about their experiences as Asian attorneys. Jay said that while AAPI attorneys only make up 4% of equity partners at law firms nationwide, he has never felt barred from advancement at Spencer Fane. "When we talk about what Spencer Fane represents, DEI is at the forefront," he said, also noting how happy he was that the firm's 2023 class of summer associates included multiple Asian attorneys.



## Summer Associates

On July 25, attorney and summer associate liaison Heather Morris moderated a special introductory SF Connects featuring the 18 firm summer associates.

This includes Kate Daus, Ursula Davy, Alexis Denny, Ivana Easley, J.B. Fishman, Marcus Gould, Jackson Hasty, Henry Hong, Andrew Hua, LeeAnn Littlejohn, Victoria Narezo, Kate Pearce, Hunter Quinn, Doug Reynolds, Lexie Rook, Mykaela Delgado Schluter, Matthew Swords, and Grace Taskinsoy. In 2023, the summer associate class featured 10 women and two racially diverse attorneys.



# Spencer Fane Connects

## Hispanic Heritage Month: Theresa Becerra, Servando Sandoval, and Ginger Gonzales-Sotelo

The DEI Committee celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with a special SF Connects on Tuesday, October 10 featuring attorneys Theresa Becerra, Servando Sandoval, and Ginger Gonzales-Sotelo. Each shared overviews on their practices and backgrounds, including explaining their individual journeys into and through the legal industry.

Theresa, Servando, and Ginger discussed a number of topics including everything from their personal community involvements to the benefits of active mentorship and the importance of business development in growing a legal practice.

During their discussion, the trio was asked what advice they'd give their younger selves, and each provided poignant responses. Theresa advised that young attorneys should be very intentional about finding a mentor, especially those who don't come from a family of lawyers. Next, Ginger shared the power of believing in yourself. After being told she couldn't get into her dream college, then law school, and then her legal practice, Ginger learned the power of believing in herself and encourages others to follow suit. Servando, who borrowed his advice from Richard Montañez, the alleged creator of Flamin' Hot Cheetos, combined both previous responses for his. He said, "Sometimes minorities are too humble to take ownership or to seek the recognition they deserve. Don't be humble. Ask for help. Don't just sign up for a mentorship program; take full advantage and ask questions. Then, when you get in a difficult position, don't forget to reach out and ask for that help."



## Transgender Awareness Month: DJ Healey

The DEI Committee celebrated November's Transgender Awareness Month with a special SF Connects on Tuesday, November 14 featuring attorney Danielle (DJ) Healey. The session was moderated by attorneys Stacy Harper and Nate Orr, who both share a personal connection to the month-long celebration with gender nonconforming individuals in each of their families.

The discussion started with clips from DJ's 2021 documentary, *Our Dad, Danielle*, which follows DJ who, at 57, came out as a trans woman in 2017 and is now navigating LGBTQIA+ issues and fighting for trans rights, as she and her family challenge the idea of what modern love looks like.

DJ then shared her overall journey as a transgender woman and covered everything from how the prevalence of anti-trans bills is reminiscent of previous attacks on same-sex couples from the last decade and her hopes for future acceptance of transgender, gender nonconforming, or nonbinary people to the overall impact of transitioning on her legal career and what law firms and, specifically Spencer Fane, can do to make the workplace more welcoming.

"Make me part of the group. Let me do what I do. Erick [Robinson] recruited me not because I'm trans or LGBT, but he saw my history and knew I'm the same person no matter how I dress now. Spencer Fane walks the walk by just letting me be me," DJ said during the event.





# Social Media Campaigns

In 2023, Spencer Fane launched a DEI social media campaign where we welcomed both attorneys and staff to share personal stories about the DEI holidays and observance months that matter the most to them. From Jewish American Heritage Month to Transgender Day of Remembrance, we celebrate how much we learned through these social media spotlights.

- **Martin Luther King Jr. Day:** James Crumlin
- **Black History Month:** Jeremy Rucker, Bill Hopkins, DeAndrea Washington, and Wale Akinmoladun
- **International Transgender Day of Visibility:** Erika Howard, Nate Orr, and Stacy Harper
- **Women's History Month:** Julia Vander Weele, Courtney Powell, Sonja McGill, and Nicole Zaworska
- **International Women's Day:** Natalie Washington and Jamie Cotter
- **AAPI Heritage Month:** Christine Chasse and Jay Ji
- **Jewish American Heritage Month:** Jane Fedder and Marti Maurer
- **Mental Health Awareness Month:** Allen Darrah and Kristen Petry
- **Loving Day:** Bernadette Lawson
- **Juneteenth:** Kristen Walker and Brittainy Joyner
- **Pride Month:** Jim Patterson, Leslie Greathouse, and Joe Bednar
- **Disability Pride Month:** Taylor Hayslett and Clint Armistead
- **South Asian Heritage Month:** Gulmina Shah, Mavish Bana, Kunal Shah, and Ayesha Mehdi
- **Women's Equality Day:** Diane Minear
- **Hispanic Heritage Month:** Raciel Perez, Evangelina Cantu, Theresa Becerra, and Servando Sandoval
- **Veteran's Day:** Mike Delaney, Kelly Campbell, and Austin Ciuffo



At the end of each year, we ask the members of each of our Connect Groups to reflect on the lessons of the past year and to share what they're most looking forward to in 2024. After formally launching both Spencer Fane BOND and Spencer Fane+ and facing unique DEI challenges in the forms of litigation and negative media coverage, our committee members share insight and advice.

## DEI Committee



**Mary Bacon** | Of Counsel | Las Vegas, Nevada

***Tell us about a major event or trend in the news that impacted you this year. How did it reaffirm your commitment to DEI?***

Last year, organizations initiated litigation over DEI programs and that litigation reaffirmed my pledge to DEI efforts. It highlighted that while some meaningful DEI efforts have been made in the past several years, we are so far away from where we should be. The litigation heightened my personal and professional commitment to policy-based, lasting change. It is unfortunate that there has always been such a fight to create positive change. Fortunately, the baton was passed to Spencer Fane as a firm – and to the DEI committee in particular – and we are prepared to get in some “good trouble.”



**James Crumlin**, Chair | Partner | Nashville, Tennessee

***How does the firm plan to maintain its momentum in the DEI space?***

We plan to maintain our law firm’s momentum in the DEI space by having all attorneys and staff continue to show their commitment and identify DEI as a strategic priority. To do so, we must focus on our initiatives 100% of the time; identify issues, evaluate efforts, setting measurable targets for improvement, and celebrate our successes; implement DEI education, training, and programming for all attorneys and staff; continue to support our Connect Groups and ensure their success; respond to suggestions and programming ideas; help underrepresented individuals succeed in their roles at the firm; and focus on empathy and sharing experiences.



**Bill Hopkins** | Partner | Austin, Texas

***Tell us about a major event or trend in the news that impacted you this year. How did it reaffirm your commitment to DEI?***

I think there are numerous issues in the news where individual rights are being challenged in unprecedented ways, and some of the court decisions and community changes are forcing us all to step back and evaluate what kind of world we want to live in and what type of future we want to set up for our children. Recognizing how far we have come as a society, but then still seeing these inequalities still happening today, is just a reminder that we cannot ever allow ourselves to assume the work is done or that these issues can be neglected because the oppression of one community’s rights today, might result in oppression against another community tomorrow.

# Q&A



**Heather Morris** | Partner | Kansas City, Missouri

***How are you and the firm guiding your communities to respond to the recent pushback against DEI initiatives?***

For me, it is just keeping things basic. We want Spencer Fane to be a great place to work for everyone, and we want to provide the best service possible to our clients. As a firm, we are focusing on that and making decisions that we believe will get us to that point, which include the changes and programming the DEI committee has and continues to support.



**Nate Orr** | Partner | Kansas City, Missouri

***How are you and the firm guiding your communities to respond to the recent pushback against DEI initiatives?***

We know it's important to continue the fight for DEI because all data, client messaging, and sense of humanity are unequivocal about that. The keys to increasing support for DEI initiatives are education and communication. The more we get a chance to talk to our various constituents, the more we see pushback decline.



**Jeremy Rucker** | Associate | Plano, Texas

***Tell us about a major event or trend in the news that impacted you this year. How did it reaffirm your commitment to DEI?***

The year 2023 witnessed a series of counter initiatives aimed at impeding the progress of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts. This prevailing trend profoundly affected me on a personal level as it underscores the notion that, despite achieving significant milestones in DEI as a nation, these achievements may remain vulnerable and uncertain in the foreseeable future. Consequently, these adversities have reignited the sense of urgency and imperative nature of DEI initiatives. I earnestly yearn for a future where DEI becomes an obsolete concept, as its objectives seamlessly integrate into the very essence of our societal fabric. Regrettably, the events of 2023 have reinforced the realization that we are still a considerable distance from realizing this aspiration.



**DeAndrea Washington** | Partner | Houston, Texas

***Tell us about a major event or trend in the news that impacted you this year. How did it reaffirm your commitment to DEI?***

The recent legal attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion was extremely eye-opening for me this year. The backlash has operated to have a chilling effect on corporate efforts to address workplace inequality that surged after George Floyd's murder. My fear has always been that the momentum would lag, and DEI would no longer be a topic of interest or corporate goal. I am incredibly proud that our firm continues to value inclusivity and equity and the collective work that is required by all to make this core value and tenant of our firm a reality despite setbacks. This has certainly reaffirmed and reinvigorated my commitment to DEI this year.

## Women ADVOCATE



**Linda Knight**, Chair | Partner | Denver, Colorado

***What Women ADVOCATE initiative or event are you most excited to see in 2024?***

While we have many great programming ideas in the works for 2024, what I am most excited about is our Spencer Fane Women Spotlights. Our female colleagues are excelling both professionally and personally, and we want to celebrate those accomplishments. At all of our meetings and especially during the month of March, Women ADVOCATE will be spotlighting these amazing women for their contributions to our firm, our clients, and the legal profession.



**Stacey Garrett Koju** | Partner | Nashville, Tennessee

***How are you and the firm guiding your communities to respond to the recent pushback against DEI initiatives?***

Despite the recent pushback to DEI initiatives around the country, I am pleased but not surprised that Spencer Fane has continued to support and emphasize the importance of DEI. DEI is not simply something Spencer Fane says but a palpable cornerstone of the firm's culture. So, while there is currently pushback to DEI initiatives, Spencer Fane is leading by example, proving that DEI initiatives result in overall employee satisfaction and improved financial growth.



**Lisa Wright Murray** | Director of Administration | Kansas City, Missouri

***How do you, the committee, and the firm advocate for women in the legal industry and beyond?***

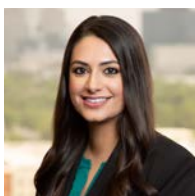
As the committee representing the interests of the female population at Spencer Fane, we have the unique opportunity to positively impact our women on both the attorney and staff level. Our programming focuses on the whole person from career development to a work / life balance. We support and celebrate women in legal as a committee and as a firm, and that support then allows our colleagues to positively impact women in all areas of their lives.



**Courtney Davis Powell** | Of Counsel | Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

***How are you and the firm guiding your communities to respond to the recent pushback against DEI initiatives?***

There will never be anything wrong with working to make our workplace and community more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The recent pushback against DEI initiatives strengthens my resolve in ensuring that Spencer Fane continues to work harder and stay true to the values and goals of the DEI Committee. By not backing down in the face of pushback, Spencer Fane continues to show its commitment to DEI programming, internally and externally.



**Gulmina Shah** | Associate | Houston, Texas

***What Women ADVOCATE initiative or event are you most excited to see in 2024?***

In 2024, I am excited to see Women ADVOCATE create and roll out a Resource Bank for our internal colleagues. The Resource Bank will serve as a starting point where women can connect with other colleagues who have experienced similar life challenges and directly receive peer support, advice, and guidance on issues that are both work-related and non-work related.

## Spencer Fane BOND



**Wale Akinmoladun** | Of Counsel | Kansas City, Missouri

***How has being a leader for Spencer Fane BOND supported the way you think about DEI?***

Our firm's DEI goals are supported by connect groups like Spencer Fane BOND. The firm's commitment to DEI over the past several years has allowed our firm to better understand complex issues within and outside the workplace through needed discussions. Spencer Fane BOND builds on those discussions by focusing on targeted issues, which is critical to keep moving our firm forward.



**Paz Haynes**, Co-Chair | Partner | Nashville, Tennessee

***What are your goals for the newly created Spencer Fane BOND connect group?***

To make this firm a resource and forum for dialogue and development for its Black professionals. To strengthen a sense of belonging, empathy and hope throughout the firm. And, to help retain and attract more talented professionals to Spencer Fane in the years ahead.



**Bernadette Lawson** | Client Development Manager | Kansas City, Missouri

***What are your goals for the newly created Spencer Fane BOND connect group?***

I am most excited about engaging our staff members – often times in law firms, affinity groups are designed around attorneys. My intention and goal for all BOND members is to feel seen, heard, and connected. Whether colleagues join because they identify or they want to show up as an ally, it's important that we feel fully supported and share a deep connection. We know that it's because of our differences we make a stronger team – we see things clearer and understand perspectives – and make better decisions for everyone.



**Ed Summers** | Network and Server Administrator | Nashville, Tennessee

***How has being a leader for Spencer Fane BOND changed the way you think about DEI?***

Being a leader in the BOND group has allowed me to actually feel that I have a voice. Previously I have had a chance to attend the excellent programming presented by the various DEI groups. However, being on the inside has given me the opportunity to see the hard work put forth in producing programming but also that the voice given to the groups is a real one.



**Valentine Uduebor**, Co-Chair | Associate | Denver, Colorado

***What DEI initiative or event are you most excited to see in 2024?***

I am particularly excited about our upcoming speaker program focused on personal branding and executive presence. This initiative is designed to embody one of our core missions by providing a workshop that explores the concept of what it means to have executive presence, covering critical aspects such as the importance of authenticity, the art of commanding respect and attention in any setting, the significance of decisiveness, and the impact of mindset on leadership behaviors.



## Spencer Fane+



**Stacy Harper** | Partner | Overland Park, Kansas

### *How has being a leader for Spencer Fane+ changed the way you think about DEI?*

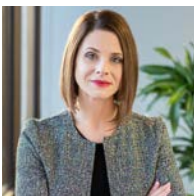
Joining the leadership team for Spencer Fane+ has taken my role as an ally from abstract to concrete. Rather than just generally supporting my LGBTQ+ peers, this position challenges me to think about how we can best quantify the inclusion in our firm to be able to track measurable results.



**Olivia Hintz** | Paralegal | Denver, Colorado

### *What are your goals for the newly created Spencer Fane+ connect group?*

We need to spread the word. The more people we can get involved the better. I am going to continue to provide a staff members' voice and perspective to the group. This year, our goal needs to be to show members of the firm and public the firm's commitment to support members of the LGBTQ+ community.



**Elizabeth Lally**, Co-Chair | Partner | Omaha, Nebraska

### *What DEI initiative or event are you most excited to see in 2024?*

I am most looking forward to Lavendar Law in 2024 because it is a safe place for members of the LGBTQIA+ legal community and provides opportunities for professional advancement as well as overall education and awareness of the legal issues facing members of the greater LGBTQIA+ community.



**Toni Ojoyeyi** | Associate | Minneapolis, Minnesota

### *Tell us about a major event or trend in the news that impacted you this year. How did it reaffirm your commitment to DEI?*

The U.S. Supreme Court's holding in the Students for Fair Admissions case and the subsequent demand letters / lawsuits that several law firms received demanding that they shutter diversity fellowship programs had a substantial impact on my approach to DEI initiatives. As the only African American female in my law graduating class, I have first-hand experience with the effects of failing to prioritize DEI in the legal profession. I hope to continue advocating for DEI initiatives with Spencer Fane+ and look forward to the committee's 2024 accomplishments.



**Tracey Wallace**, Co-Chair | Partner | Dallas, Texas

### *What are your goals for the newly created Spencer Fane+ connect group?*

My goal for the newly created Spencer Fane+ is to give a voice to those LGBTQ+ members of the firm regarding issues that are important to the community as well as identify resources that our LGBTQ+ members can engage when needed.



# Sponsorships

Active leaders in the legal industry and our communities, Spencer Fane is compelled by the desire to reach beyond the firm when championing diversity. We lend our support to diversity-focused networks and initiatives not just through membership and volunteering but also through formal sponsorship. From networking events to award ceremonies to educational opportunities, we are honored to financially support DEI networks in their missions.

## Highlights of our 2023 sponsorships include:

- Duo Dogs – A Fetching Affair: Marching Forward
- Arizona Theatre Company's production of "Private Lives"
- Leadership Nashville: Justice System Day
- Midwest Innocence Project's Faces of Innocence
- Lavender Law Conference & Career Fair
- Global Ties Arizona: Towards a More Safe and Secure World
- Band of Angels' Art That Blows
- South Asian Bar Association of North America National Conference
- Colorado Hispanic Bar Association En el Jardín Annual Banquet
- Minnesota JCC For the Kids Golf Tournament
- Institute of Real Estate Management Nebraska Chapter Special Olympics Golf Event
- Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors OyeVecino LIVE
- Braden's Hope for Childhood Cancer Gala
- United WE Listen: We Work For Change
- HumanGood Focus & Lead Conference
- Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers Gala
- Folds of Honor Red, Wine, and Blue
- Legal Aid of Western Missouri's Generous Associate Drive





# Spencer Fane Mourns Passing of Partner Ruthie White

**It is with profound sadness that our firm mourns the passing of Ruthie White, a friend, a great colleague, and role model to all. A legal and community trailblazer, Ruthie will be greatly missed by all who were lucky enough to know her.**

"Ruthie exemplified the highest and best qualities as a practitioner and leader over the course of her trailblazing and decades-long career. She had an immeasurable impact on our profession and the thousands of colleagues and clients to whom she served as a mentor, confidant, and trusted advisor," Spencer Fane Chair Patrick J. Whalen said.

After joining Spencer Fane in January 2020, Ruthie was immediately named Co-Chair of the firm's labor and employment team. In her legal practice, she helped employers resolve labor and employment disputes in and out of court. She established a track record of favorable outcomes in discrimination, harassment, and retaliation cases while defending educational entities, local governments, and clients in the energy, banking, technology, retail, health care, and construction industries in legal venues throughout the state. Ruthie served as a board member and an adjunct professor at South Texas College of Law and regularly contributed pro bono legal services to the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program.

In 1997, Ruthie founded The Downtown Group, a 300-plus-member networking organization based in Houston and open to African American female attorneys. The organization has helped and impacted the lives of hundreds of female attorneys in the decades since.

In short, Ruthie always found a way to give back to those looking to grow as a professional regardless of where they were in their career. She was recognized for her efforts as a *Houston Business Journal* Women Who Mean Business (2022), *Texas Lawyer* Best Mentor Award (2020), Texas Minority Counsel Program Trailblazer of the Year finalist (2019), Texas Minority Counsel Program Outside Counsel of the Year finalist (2016), and Association of Women Attorneys Foundation Premier Women in the Law Award recipient (2014).

"Ruthie had a larger-than-life personality and touched the lives of so many along her journey. She also had one of the most brilliant legal minds and could captivate any audience with her charm and wit. In the 11-plus years that I worked with her, I learned the true meaning of client service and how to be a fearless advocate from her unwavering commitment to the practice of law and the clients she served. Ruthie had an immense impact on countless colleagues and peers in the Texas legal community during her distinguished and accomplished career," attorney DeAndrea Washington said. "What truly defined Ruthie as an attorney was her ability to invest in others while serving as a powerful example of an African American woman in leadership. She was truly a force to be reckoned with and made a lasting impression on the hearts of many. While we could never fill her shoes, her legacy will live on for generations to come."



# A Letter From Pat Whalen

As you have read in this report, the last year has been marked by extraordinary contributions from Spencer Fane colleagues who are tirelessly committed to both fulfilling their own individual potential and seeing our firm realize its collective potential. Through those relentless efforts, our firm earned results over the last year that truly stand alone in the profession, including:

- Shortlisted as a finalist for Law Firm of the Year by *The American Lawyer*;
- Selection as one of two law firms in the nation to receive the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Law Firm Team Award from *Corporate Counsel*;
- Recognition as one of eight finalists in the nation for *The American Lawyer's* Best Client–Law Firm Team award;
- Selection as one of the inaugural winners of *The Journal Record's* Empowering Women Awards; and
- Achieving the tenth consecutive year of double-digit increases in revenue while simultaneously climbing more than 50 spots on *The American Lawyer's* Diversity Scorecard ranking.

Everyone at Spencer Fane shares in these honors and accomplishments while also recognizing that our pursuit to realize our ultimate potential must persist. Guided by our core values of intellectual humility and fierce resolve, we seek to further elevate our performance over the next year by re-imagining the ways in which law firms support their people and deliver solutions to their clients.

## Serving Our People

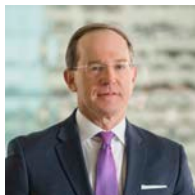
Led by a diverse team of partners, our internal structure will evolve to respond to the overwhelming appetite from leading talent across the profession for opportunity, social connection, and a sense of belonging. Regardless of job title, office location, or practice area, every Spencer Fane attorney will be connected with a dedicated team of talent leaders who are solely focused on creating career development opportunities, expanding individual networks and skillsets, and supporting personal growth at every career stage.

## Serving Our Clients

Similarly, we will opt-out of the traditional organizational structure that places unnecessary bureaucratic roadblocks between the law firm's frontline legal practitioners and the solutions they are expected to deliver to clients. The outdated hierarchical structure adopted by most law firms is misaligned with our cultural values, the desire of high-performing talent, and the expectations of clients, and so we will deploy decentralized and autonomous market teams that will hold themselves accountable to the highest possible service standards and the creation of exceptional value for clients.

Together with the phenomenal work of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Committee, these initiatives will move us closer to realizing a culture that merges uncompromising excellence, equal opportunity, and kindness, and will also stave off the complacency and inertia that work against both individual and collective growth.

We are thrilled by this opportunity to re-imagine the law firm model, and eagerly await to see what this next year has in store for Spencer Fane, our communities, and our clients.



**Pat Whalen**

Spencer Fane Chair





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Spencer Fane is a full-service business law firm focused on providing results that move clients and their businesses forward. With direct access to firm leadership and a different approach to client engagement, its attorneys instill confidence and certainty that the clients' interests are the firm's priority.

For more information on Spencer Fane DEI initiatives, please visit [spencerfane.com](https://spencerfane.com).