

CALIFORNIA WOMEN LAWYERS:

California Women Lawyers was founded in 1974 as a grass roots organization "to advance women in the profession of law; to improve the administration of justice; to better the position of women in society; to eliminate all inequalities based on sex; and to provide an organization for collective action and expression germane to the aforesaid purposes." These lofty goals remain the focus of CWL today.

CWL members come from all walks of life. They are politically, ethnically, and geographically diverse, with differing lifestyles, backgrounds, and areas of practice. These many voices, however, share common interests. It is these interests and resulting sense of purpose that connect all of the diverse voices of CWL members in a common bond.

CWL has consistently lobbied and supported legislation, resolutions to the State Bar, and administrative actions over the years that support and raise the status of women in society. CWL's lobbying, coupled with CWL's joining with numerous other specialty bar groups throughout the state who are committed to diversity on the bench, has resulted in the diversity of the applicant pool rising significantly.

CWL celebrates the richness and diversity of our profession and holds annual events and awards to honor those pioneers in the judiciary and as lawyers who have provided significant contributions to the advancement of women in the profession and society.

CWL continues its tradition of sponsoring events to help women (and men!) gain the skills and knowledge to enable them to advance in the profession. CWL's "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ is one example, of which we are extremely proud.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

History of the Program

The first "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ seminar was held in 1985, at the home of Alameda County Judge Marie B. Collins (Ret.). Judge Judith Chirlin of Los Angeles County interviewed the Governor's Judicial Appointments Secretary, now Supreme Court Justice Marvin Baxter, about ways to improve the gender diversity of the California bench. The seminar was such a success that Judge Chirlin, serving as CWL's judicial liaison, took the show on the road, holding programs all around the state featuring Justice Baxter and later his successor, Terry Flanigan.

Judge Chirlin passed the judicial liaison torch to Orange County Judge Marjorie Laird Carter, who continued to present these programs with Judicial Appointments Secretary, Terry Flanigan and his successors, Judicial Appointments Secretaries, Chuck Poochigian, John Davies, and Burt Pines. Judge Brenda Harbin-Forte of the Alameda County Superior Court followed Judge Carter as CWL's judicial liaison. She presented these programs with Judicial Appointments Secretaries Burt Pines and John Davies. In 2006, San Francisco Superior Court Judge Charlene Padavoni Kiesselbach became CWL's judicial liaison and continues to present the seminar with California's first African-American woman Judicial Appointments Secretary, Sharon Majors Lewis.

As the program evolved, the State Bars' Judicial Nominees Evaluation ("JNE") Commission became a regular partner in CWL's endeavor to make the appointments process more transparent. Now, the seminars feature the chair or vice-chair of the JNE Commission, in addition to the Judicial Appointments Secretary.

Another program expansion resulted from CWL's focus on the elections process as an alternate route by which qualified and diverse candidates could ascend to the bench. Today, judges who have been elected to the bench are included in the afternoon sessions and, along with judges who have been appointed, discuss their experiences with the process.

Overview

CWL's signature "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ seminar is a day-long program that has given hundreds of attorneys throughout the state insight into the judicial selection processes used by the Governor and the Judicial Nomination Evaluation Commission.

The program is designed to give attendees the "nuts and bolts" on how California's judges are chosen. Given California's process, the Judicial Appointments Secretary and JNE Commission Chair are two of the most important people in the selection of appointees, next to the Governor himself. As such, the program draws a large audience from the general bar eager to hear what attributes and qualifications are sought after, and considered by, the persons recommending judicial appointments to the Governor.

The program has taken place in hotel conference rooms, law firms, and bar associations. The venue requires a large meeting room big enough to hold all attendees for the morning session, and an additional three or four smaller break-out rooms for the afternoon sessions.

Continental breakfast is served during the registration period, which typically is about ½ hour in length, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Lunch is served and includes a keynote speaker, who is generally a sitting federal district court judge. The afternoon session includes individualized attention to the applicants' particular questions and issues, and provides an opportunity for them to ask questions and obtain guidance from a panel of Superior Court Judges and Commissioners.

CWL staffs the program with two or three members for registration and to help ensure throughout the day that participants know where they are going, such as during the transition from lunch to the afternoon break-out sessions. They also are available to provide information about the number of openings in the various counties, and reinforce the Appointments Secretary's comments on matters such as under what circumstances it is appropriate to seek appointment in multiple counties, and when applicants should provide the Governor's Office with updates to their applications.

Attendance at the seminar ranges between 50 to 80 participants. CWL puts on the seminars two or three times per year, alternating venues between Northern and Southern California. Photographs are only taken of the volunteers and speakers, as many participants prefer anonymity in that they may not wish to have anyone know that they are considering leaving their current employment for a judicial position. CWL recognizes this and takes appropriate measures to avoid pictures or rosters of the event

being given out. As such, many participants come to seminars outside of their local area, making state-wide publicity of the seminars important.

Morning Session

The morning session begins with a greeting from the CWL President. The CWL President introduces CWL's Judicial Liaison, who will then introduce the Governor's Judicial Appointments Secretary and the JNE Commission's chair or vice-chair.

The morning session begins at approximately 9:00 a.m. and continues through noon, with a break at mid-morning.

The Judicial Liaison goes through a variety of hypothetical's designed to elicit information from the Judicial Appointments Secretary and the JNE Chair on a variety of topics relevant to the application process.

Topics covered in the morning session include the qualifications that the Governor's office looks for in a candidate such as commitment to public service; completing the application, with discussions on topics such as writing too much or too little, disclosing and explaining negative aspects, candor, discussing community involvement, and the importance of the appearance of the application; the "difficult" application, such as someone with limited experience in a particular field, or problems with opposing counsel; obtaining letters of support, including from whom the letters should come and what they should include.

The morning session includes a "behind the scenes" discussion by the Governor's Judicial Appointments Secretary regarding what happens with an application once it gets to the Judicial Appointments Secretary's office. The JNE Chair discusses the process of the evaluation conducted by the JNE Commission. There is a discussion on the JNE Commission interview, what to expect throughout the process, and what the JNE Commission seeks in an applicant.

The morning continues with discussions on whether evaluations conducted by bar associations are helpful and how they are viewed by the Judicial Appointments Secretary and the JNE Commission, and whether an applicant should update an application, when, and with what type of information. Finally, the morning ends with a brief discussion on the interview by the Judicial Appointments Secretary and the call from the Governor, followed by an approximately 20 minute segment for questions.

Lunch with Keynote Speaker

Lunch is served at noon and is a full, hot lunch. We have had lunch as a sit-down, served meal and also as a buffet. Either works well. The keynote luncheon speaker is typically a judicial officer from the federal courts, giving the participants insight into the federal process of obtaining a judicial appointment.

Afternoon Session

The afternoon session is broken into smaller groups, thus the need for 2 to 3 additional meeting rooms. Utilizing the main conference room from the morning session as well,

the afternoon session is broken into 3 to 4 small groups, each conducted by 3 to 4 local judges.

The purpose of the afternoon session is to give the participants an opportunity to ask more detailed questions to judges who have gone through the process. Thus, the small groups allow more one-on-one time for questions and answers.

There is no set agenda for the small group discussion sessions. It is suggested that the judges start the session by having everyone introduce themselves and that the judges give a brief background regarding what it is like to be a judge and what their current assignment is. Typical questions to the judge panelists include how they became a judge, how they like being a judge; the transition from bar to bench; specific challenges of being a judge; the judges' background before becoming a judge; and the assignments that they have had as a judge.

The individual break-out sessions continue until approximately 3:00 pm. The day ends after the afternoon sessions, without any formal reconvening of the group as a whole.

PROJECT IMPACT

The program has been well received by men and women alike. Comments include statements such as the program being an invaluable insight into the process of judicial appointments, that the program is a "must" for anyone considering applying for a judicial appointment, to those who have already turned in an application stating that they wished that they had attended a "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ seminar before submitting their application.

The program has been emulated by many local California bar associations. CWL's, "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ seminar, however, is the only day-long program that includes a full ½ day discussion with the Governor's Judicial Appointments Secretary and the chair of the JNE Commission.

In its over 23 year history, CWL's "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ seminar has helped change the demographics of the California bench. Currently, out of the 1745 judges in California, 483 are women (28%).¹ In addition to encouraging the growth of the percentage of women on the California bench, "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ has encouraged more diversity on the bench, including men and women of color.

California Women Lawyers sincerely hopes that its excellent "So, You Want to be a Judge?"™ program will serve as a pilot project which other women's bar organizations will adopt and adapt to their own regions and use to increase the diversity of the bench in other areas of the country.

We thank you for your consideration of our program for the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations' Outstanding Member Program Award.

¹ Statistics from the National Association of Women Judges, 2009.