Employment of persons with disabilities is an essential aspect of one of the American Bar Association’s (ABA) four organizational goals: to “eliminate bias and enhance diversity.” As the national representative of the legal profession, the ABA urges all employers, but especially legal employers, to eliminate bias based on disability and to make disability a vital component of all their diversity programs, events and activities.

The ABA—through its Commission on Mental and Physical Disability Law—has held two national conferences on the employment of lawyers with disabilities in 2006 and 2009, and is planning a third in 2012. ABA President-Elect, William T. Robinson III, will host this much anticipated event. A hallmark of these conferences has been the active involvement and participation by the ABA President, along with other leaders in the legal profession representing the White House, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Association of Corporate Counsel, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, law firms, corporations, and lawyers, judges and law students with disabilities.

At the 2009 Conference, the participants unanimously endorsed Disability Diversity in the Legal Profession: A Pledge for Change, which commits legal employers, chief legal officers, and hiring partners and personnel to actively support and implement diversity efforts on behalf of persons with mental, physical and sensory disabilities. To date, over 100 employers have signed the pledge. A list of signatories is posted on the Commission’s website at http://new.abanet.org/disability/Pages/HonorRoll.aspx.

As important as diversity is to the ABA, it represents half of the equal opportunity equation. The other half—as ABA Goal III counsels—is the elimination of bias “in the legal profession and the judiciary.” This book encompasses both components of Goal III, providing employers, their human resource departments, and their general counsels with comprehensive information about federal and state disability employment laws, as well as effective accommodation strategies and diversity best practices.

Eliminating disability-based bias, especially in the workplace, has reached an historic threshold with the recent enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s imminent issuance of regulations implementing those amendments. The once narrow disability definition has been expanded to afford many more people who have disabilities with federal protections against discrimination. This book examines those new regulations in detail and provides employers with insights to avoid costly disputes and litiga-
tion, strengthen their workforces by hiring persons with disabilities, and advance the productivity of employees with disabilities. Employing persons with disabilities is not only the right thing to do, but it is sensible and wise.

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