June 4, 2014

Dear Colleagues:

One of the most important projects undertaken by the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession has been its Women of Color Research Initiative, which was launched in 2003. It is clear that while all women attorneys continue to confront obstacles in their effort to advance and succeed in the profession, women attorneys of color face a unique double-bind of both race and gender.

The Commission has examined the daunting challenges faced by women attorneys of color in three groundbreaking “Visible Invisibility” reports, published in 2006, 2008 and 2011. These comprehensive and groundbreaking reports have focused on the experiences of women attorneys of color in law firms and corporate law departments. They addressed four critical aspects of the careers of women attorneys of color: recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion.

The statistics continue to paint a distressing picture. Women attorneys of color represent only 2% of law firm partners and less than 4% of the General Counsel of Fortune 500 companies. Our research has found that, in both law firms and corporate law departments, women attorneys of color receive less compensation than men and white women; are denied equal access to significant assignments, mentoring, and sponsorship opportunities; receive fewer promotions; and have the highest rate of attrition. The “Visible Invisibility” reports set forth specific recommendations and strategies for individual women attorneys of color and their employers to ameliorate these inequalities and increase their opportunities to achieve success.

It is clear that much work remains to be done to create a level playing field for women attorneys of color. In order to continue to shine a much-needed spotlight on these issues, the Commission has created this Toolkit, which synthesizes the findings and recommendations contained in our “Visible Invisibility” reports. This Toolkit is intended to assist state and local bar associations, minority and specialty bar associations, law firms and corporations in presenting programs designed to improve the recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion of women attorneys of color. It contains everything needed to present a program: Powerpoint slides, discussion scenarios and talking points, a bibliography, and even suggested program speakers.

It is our sincere hope that this Toolkit, like the Visible Invisibility reports, will serve as a valuable resource that will facilitate dialogue and spur concrete actions to ensure that women attorneys of color are afforded the same opportunities to flourish and achieve their potential as their other colleagues in the profession.

Sincerely yours,

Roberta D. Liebenberg
Chair, Commission on Women in the Profession
American Bar Association