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Recognizing & Addressing Implicit Bias in the Legal Profession
June 3, 2021 | 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. (CST)
Via Videoconference

BIOGRAPHIES

Debjani D. Desai

General Counsel for the Illinois Office of Comptroller

Debjani D. Desai is the General Counsel for the Illinois Office of Comptroller. She leads a team of lawyers in Chicago and Springfield to provide legal counsel on state comptroller mandates, such as ordering payments through the Treasury, managing the state's fiscal accounts, and conducting audits and reports on the state's fiscal health. She advises the office on litigation, legislation, finance, operations, compliance, and labor and employment matters. Her legal assistance focuses on making government more efficient and effective, advancing transparency, and saving taxpayers money. Debjani is currently the President of the South Asian Bar Association Foundation, a member of the SABA Advisory Council and has previously served as SABA Chicago President, VP of Programming, and General Director. She serves on several boards and committees focused on public service and diversity.

Sharon Hwang

Shareholder, McAndrews, Held & Malloy

Sharon Hwang is a member of the Executive Committee and a Shareholder at McAndrews. She practices in all areas of intellectual property law with particular emphasis on patent litigation. She helps her clients maximize the value of their intellectual property and protect their investments in research and development. She has extensive experience in a range of technologies, including medical devices, electronics, and cellular telephony.

First, and foremost, Sharon is a hands-on courtroom advocate who has tried and litigated dozens of cases and has briefed and argued numerous appeals. For more than twenty-five years, she has successfully represented parties in high-stakes patent litigation in federal district courts, the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals, and the United States Supreme Court. Sharon has also successfully briefed and argued numerous inter partes reviews before the Patent Trial and Appeal Board.

In a recent, high-profile patent case, Sharon and a team of McAndrews attorneys secured a \$70 million lost-profits damage award that was recognized as one of The National Law Journal's Top Verdicts that year. Sharon and a notably all-female team won an affirmance in the Federal Circuit on all liability and damages issues, then successfully petitioned the United States Supreme Court for a grant of certiorari on an issue pertaining to the Federal Circuit's reversal of the district court's punitive damages award against the defendant. The Supreme Court found in favor of Sharon's client and clarified the law regarding the availability of enhanced damages in patent cases. On remand in 2017, the district court once again awarded treble damages and attorney fees, entering a \$254 million judgment in favor of Sharon's client, which the Federal Circuit affirmed in late 2018. This is one of the largest enhanced damages awards in patent history.

Sharon has been awarded numerous accolades, including being listed in the IAM Patent 1000 as one of the world's leading patent professionals, the World Intellectual Property Review's Influential Women in IP 2020, and Crain's Chicago Business Notable Women in Law 2020. She has also been selected as an Illinois Super

Lawyer and IP Star every year since 2015, as a Life Sciences Star since 2019, and earlier in her career as one of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association's "Best Lawyers Under 40." She has also received the Career Achievement Award from the Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers and both the Justice Laura C. Liu Lifetime Achievement Award and the Vanguard Award from the Chinese American Bar Association.

Erica Kirkwood
Vice President and General Counsel at GMA Construction Group

Erica Kirkwood is Vice President and General Counsel at GMA Construction Group. GMA is a veteran and minority owned, national, commercial general contracting firm that focuses on building facilities in the healthcare, education and affordable housing industries. Erica provides legal and business counsel on business development, real estate development, mergers & acquisitions, corporate transactions, contracts, litigation, Human Resources, risk management and compliance. Erica negotiates notable multi-million-dollar construction contracts and joint venture agreements like the Pullman National Monument, Cook County Hospital Harrison Square project, Terminal A expansion at Midway Airport, the 95M Chicago Police and Fire Training Facility, University of Chicago Student Wellness center and the Northwestern University Blackhouse project. She is leading legal and business development efforts to expand GMA's operations to East Africa. Erica also coordinates summer internships at GMA for high school and college students from disadvantaged communities.

Prior to GMA, Erica was Deputy General Counsel of the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services. Before DCFS, her career included consumer fraud investigations for the City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs & Consumer Protection, and Kirkwood Law Group, Inc., where she handled a broad range of commercial litigation.

In 2018, Erica served as President of the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago, Inc., a 300-member bar association of attorneys, judges and law students. Through BWLA, Erica established the first annual Black Women Lawyers Judicial Reception, the first free Illinois public directory of black women attorneys and she founded The Directors Institute. This institute focuses on increasing the presence of female attorneys of color on the boards of government entities, nonprofits, and private and publicly traded companies. The Directors Institute faculty includes prominent corporate and government board directors and board recruiters from across the nation. The program has successfully graduated 25 attorneys and over 30% of them have obtained meaningful board positions.

Mrs. Kirkwood is passionate about philanthropy and works to promote diversity efforts through various community organizations like the Black Women Lawyers Association Scholarship Fund Board, Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, Chicago State University Alumni Board, Jack & Jill Incorporated and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.

Mrs. Kirkwood has received the following awards: 2020 Chicago Daily Law Bulletin & Chicago Lawyer 40 under 40 Illinois Attorneys to Watch, 2020 Crain's Chicago Business Notable Women in Construction & Design, 2020 National Black Lawyers Top 100 Black Attorneys in Illinois, 2019 Crain's Chicago Business Notable General Counsel, 2019 Diversity MBA Top 100 under 50 Executives and the 2018 National Bar Association 40 under 40 Nation's Best Advocate award. Erica was a 2018 Chicago Urban League IMPACT Leadership Program Fellow, a program in conjunction with the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. She earned a B.S. cum laude in Criminal Justice at Chicago State University and a J.D from Western Michigan University Thomas Cooley Law School.

Hon. Jesse G. Reyes
Illinois Appellate Court – First District, Fourth Division

Jesse G. Reyes is currently a Justice on the Illinois Appellate Court, First District. He previously served as the Presiding Justice of the Fifth Division, as the former chair of the First District's Settlement Conference Committee, and a former member of the Executive Committee. He has been a member of the judiciary since

December, 1997, having previously served as both an associate judge and elected judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County. His previous judicial assignments have included the Chancery Division's Mortgage Foreclosure/Mechanics Lien Section, Domestic Violence court and the Sixth Municipal District. Justice Reyes, while assigned to the First Municipal Division, assisted in the production of the Circuit Court's educational DUI Video "Que Precio Tiene La Vida." He also served on a number of Circuit Court committees during his tenure on the trial court.

Before his election to the bench, Justice Reyes was employed with the Law Department of the Chicago Board of Education and represented the Board in litigation matters, and was responsible for the development and implementation of policies and procedures pertaining to school reform. Prior to joining the Board of Education, he was a Senior Supervising Attorney with the Corporation Counsel's Office representing the City of Chicago in complex civil litigation matters in state and federal court.

Justice Reyes is the current President of the Diversity Scholarship Foundation. He is the past President of the Illinois Judges Association, Illinois Judges Foundation, John Marshall Law School Alumni Association, and the Latin American Bar Association, past Regional President of the Hispanic National Bar Association and former Judicial Chair to the Hispanic National Bar Association Convention. He served as Secretary of the Chicago Bar Association and is a former member of the Assembly of the Illinois State Bar Association. He was also named as an honorary member of the DuPage County Bar Association and an honorary board member of the Asian American Bar Association and the Filipino American Bar Association. Justice Reyes is the recipient of several awards for his distinguished service to the bench and bar, with special recognition for his efforts in promoting diversity in the legal profession. He received his B.A. from the University of Illinois at Chicago and his J.D. from John Marshall Law School.

Adam Zebelian
Associate, Schiller DuCanto & Fleck

Adam Miel Zebelian joined Schiller DuCanto & Fleck after 7 years as an Assistant State's Attorney litigating countless criminal and civil matters. As a prosecutor, Adam made charging decisions, conducted in-depth investigations, handled pre-trial hearings and motions and conducted over a hundred trials, including both bench and jury trials. Adam's extensive trial experience, including financial crimes cases, gives him the ability to try complex matters, as well as the ability and creativity to achieve out-of-court resolutions.

Adam began as a prosecutor in the Criminal Appeals Division, where he litigated cases before the Illinois Appellate Court. Adam also served in the Domestic Violence Division, where he prosecuted intrafamily violent crime. Adam then advanced to the Special Prosecutions Bureau of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, where he handled matters involving complicated thefts, public corruption, gun crimes and gang involved murders. Adam also served in the Civil Actions Bureau of the State's Attorney's Office, defending the county in both state and federal court.

Adam's wide-ranging prosecutorial experience enables him to uniquely serve his clients' emotional and financial needs. Working closely with victims of domestic violence gives Adam a unique perspective on intrafamily relations and abuse and the complex issues involved. Prosecuting financial and violent felony matters taught Adam the importance of preparedness and attention to detail throughout every stage of litigation. Adam's sensitivity, good nature, and open mind allow his clients to have a sense of ease during one of the most difficult times of their lives.

After joining Schiller DuCanto & Fleck, Adam continues his dedication to community service. For the last several years, Adam has volunteered for the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network ("Network"), organizing and executing its annual fundraiser as host committee chair. In 2015, the Network recognized Adam by presenting him with the 2015 Outstanding Partnership award. Adam has lectured at Chicago – Kent College of Law regarding the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ domestic violence survivors. Adam also serves on the Board of the Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago; the Jr. Board of the Chicago Lighthouse; the Board

of Trustees for Chicago House and Social Service Agency; Host Committee Chair for the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network's annual benefit; Unity Award Dinner planning committee for the Diversity Scholarship Foundation; and is currently the Co-Chair of the Chicago Bar Association Young Lawyers' Section Family Law Committee and past Chair of the Criminal Law Committee. Adam is also a founding member and board member of Stonewall Sports Chicago.