

The Paraprofessional Pathway

October 30, 2023

Amy Barnes

Shelley Lambert

Patrick Maxwell

Wesley Warren

Executive Summary

- Despite decades of focus, attention, and investment, there is a persistent lack of diversity in the legal profession ***among attorneys***.
- However, within the legal profession, the field of ***paralegals and legal assistants*** is significantly more diverse than the field of attorneys.
- By targeting paraprofessionals for advancement and growth, the Milwaukee legal community has an opportunity to provide promising individuals from diverse backgrounds with mentorship, networking opportunities and financial support to pursue a legal career and become lawyers within the community.

Demographic Background

Legal Profession - Demographics

Occupation	2022					
	Total employed	Percent of total employed				
		Women	White	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino
All U.S. Workers, Age 16 and Over	158,291,000	46.8%	77.0%	12.6%	6.7%	18.5%
Lawyers - Nationwide, Public and Private	1,141,000	38.5%	87.8%	6.3%	3.8%	6.5%
Lawyers - Milwaukee Area Law Firms	1,180	32.2%	90.3%	1.7%	1.7%	3.0%

Sources:

(1) Bureau of Labor Statistics - Current Population Survey (2022)

(2) National Association of Law Placement (NALP) - NALP Directory of Legal Employers (2023) (limited to law firms that disclosed demographic data to NALP in 2023)

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Lawyers - Milwaukee Area Law Firms	1,180	32.2%	90.3%	1.7%	1.7%	3.0%
Paralegals and legal assistants - Nationwide, Public and Private	445,000	83.2%	77.9%	12.3%	5.7%	20.2%

Sources:

(1) Bureau of Labor Statistics - Current Population Survey (2022)

(2) National Association of Law Placement (NALP) - NALP Directory of Legal Employers (2023) (limited to law firms that disclosed demographic data to NALP in 2023)

Our Proposal: The Paraprofessional Pathway

The Paraprofessional Pathway

Mentoring & Networking

Attorney Mentors: Experienced attorneys willing to provide guidance to mentees

Paraprofessional Mentees: Paraprofessionals currently employed by law firms, other private employers, or public employers in Wisconsin who are interested or curious about potentially attending law school sometime in the future, or who are interested in developing a deeper understanding of the law.

Matching:

- Paraprofessionals can be matched with an attorney at their existing employer, or at a different participating legal employer in Wisconsin.
- We would aim to pair paraprofessionals with attorney based on shared interests, career goals, and compatibility, considering the attorney's expertise and experience in the areas of law the paraprofessional is interested in.

Orientation and Training:

- Conduct an orientation session to introduce mentors and mentees to the program's structure and expectations.
- Provide mentors with training on effective mentoring techniques and best practices.
- Offer resources and materials to support mentors in their role.

Guidance and Resource Sharing:

- Establish a schedule for regular meetings between mentors and mentees.
- Encourage open and honest communication between mentors and mentees.
- Share information about law school admissions, scholarships, and financial aid opportunities.
- Offer guidance on preparing for the LSAT, writing personal statements, and selecting law schools.

Networking:

- Organize events or activities where mentees can network with other legal professionals.
- Facilitate introductions to lawyers, law school faculty, and alumni.
- Encourage mentees to attend legal conferences, seminars, or workshops.

Evaluation and Feedback:

- Conduct periodic evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the mentorship program.
- Seek feedback from both mentors and mentees to identify areas for improvement.

Continued Support:

- Encourage mentors to provide guidance and support throughout the law school journey.

The Paraprofessional Pathway Scholarship Fund

Annual Scholarship Fund: \$[_____]

Source of Funds: DEI Hack-a-Thon Sponsors and other Potential Sponsors

- Eligibility:**
1. Paraprofessionals with backgrounds that have been historically excluded from the legal field who either:
 - A. are currently employed by law firms, other private employers, or public employers in Wisconsin; OR
 - B. were employed as paraprofessionals in Wisconsin during the prior three (3) years and are already enrolled in law school.
 2. Applicant must have completed 4-year Bachelor's degree.
 3. The scholarship funds will only be released pursuant to a registrar's bill.

- Application Requirements:**
- Current resume
 - Relevant transcripts – undergraduate, paralegal studies, etc.
 - Personal Statement –
 - Why is applicant considering law school?
 - How will your prior experience as a paraprofessional be relevant to your future career as an attorney?
 - Reflect on how applicant has been affected by diversity / has contributed to diversity / hopes to contribute to diversity in the future
 - Personal Recommendation (encouraged but not required)
 - Other items TBD

Administration: Scholarship fund will be administered by a neutral third party (potentially, the Milwaukee Bar Association (MBE) or the State Bar. Representatives from each of the DEI Hack-a-Thon Sponsors will be eligible to serve on the scholarship selection committee.

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Personal Statement

The personal statement is an extremely important factor in the selection process and should reflect how an applicant:

- has been affected by diversity,
- has contributed to diversity, and/or
- hopes to contribute to diversity in the future

The Paraprofessional Pathway

Promotion and Enhancement

The strength of this program will depend on:

- ***Financial Commitment***: If the size of the scholarship is significant, it will provide a greater incentive for prospective candidates to apply for law school.
- ***1L Summer Associate Commitment***: If the sponsoring law firms agree to provide the scholarship recipient with a 1L summer associate position, this will give paraprofessionals greater confidence to apply for law school.
- ***Promotion/Referrals***: Paraprofessionals must be told about the program and encouraged to apply. MBE/Sponsors to consider hosting events on site at law firms, during MATC paralegal courses, with Paralegal Association of Wisconsin, via webinar, etc.
- ***Paraprofessional Mentorship***: Employers should encourage defined mentoring and networking opportunities for all paraprofessionals, which will help paraprofessionals to better understand the legal profession and make informed career choices. Mentoring can also help employers to better understand the career goals of paraprofessionals.

The Paraprofessional Pathway : *Potential Benefits to Legal Community*

- ***Improving Attorney Diversity in Wisconsin Legal Community:*** The paraprofessional pathway will encourage promising individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue a legal career and become attorneys. Because the scholarship is open to paraprofessionals who currently or previously worked in Wisconsin, there is a greater likelihood that the paraprofessionals will return to Wisconsin after law school.
- ***Recruiting, Retention and Advancement:*** The paraprofessional pathway demonstrates that the Milwaukee legal community cares about the professional development and advancement of its paraprofessionals. This may attract new candidates to the paraprofessional profession.
- ***Early Exposure to Law:*** This program enables paraprofessionals to get a close look at the legal profession before deciding to attend law school. Scholarship recipients will be more aware of the vocation and will (hopefully) have fewer illusions about life as a practicing attorney.
- ***Employers Benefit from Experienced Junior Attorneys:*** Employers in Wisconsin legal community will benefit from the strength of candidates that this program produces. Graduates of this program may in some circumstances be far more advanced than the typical first year attorneys.

Questions?