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### Diversity

## Comcast Helping to Bridge Law's Diversity Divide

**A** Latham & Watkins LLP diversity fellow helped Comcast Corp. to align the disclosures on its website with regulatory requirements.

University of Virginia law student Tuba Ahmed—who spent five weeks in the summer working at Comcast—dug deep into the new regulations within the Federal Communications Commission's Open Internet transparency rules. Ahmed summarized their key aspects and brought the main rules to the attention of Comcast's legal regulatory affairs group. Ahmed also checked to see whether Comcast's related disclosures on its website accurately reflected the new rules, then tested the site to determine whether they were easily searchable, said Ryan Wallach, Comcast's senior deputy general counsel.

Based on Ahmed's advice, Comcast fixed its website so that the disclosures popped up at the top of the search results. Ahmed worked at Comcast as part of the 1L summer fellowship Latham & Watkins offers for diverse law students.

"I would like to make it clear that I think what Latham's doing here is tremendous and they deserve a lot of kudos for it," Wallach told Bloomberg BNA Jan. 29.

### Law Firm Programs

Many major law firms have recognized a barrier to entry in the legal profession for diverse students and are greasing the wheels with pipeline programs they've created to train, groom and, in some cases, hire promising law students or expose them to their clients' counsel.

Latham & Watkins's 1L summer fellowship program is now in its second year. Students participating

in the program make \$3,080 a week and spend about half of the 10-week program working at the firm and the other part working for one of the firm's corporate clients, including Comcast. Both the client and the firm provide the fellow with training, guidance and mentoring.

### 'Abysmal Numbers'

When it comes to U.S. corporate legal departments with more than 75 attorneys, just 19 percent of attorneys in those departments are people of color, while 81 percent are white, according to a study the Minority Corporate Counsel Association released in 2011.

Exact figures for openly LGBT people and disabled people in the larger legal departments were not available in the study. This survey analyzed responses from 344 corporations. The results were based on self reporting and self participation.

"The numbers are pretty abysmal when you consider the volume of attorneys in the legal profession," Aracely Munoz Petrich, the association's vice president of strategic development, told Bloomberg BNA Jan. 8.

Latham & Watkins set up the fellowship program in 2015 after years of working on efforts to diversify the legal profession as a whole, Manu Gayatrinath, global chair of the firm's recruiting committee and a finance partner in the firm's Washington, D.C., office, told Bloomberg BNA Jan. 12.

During that process, the firm, also aware of clients' desire to diversify, was impressed with the caliber of students they encountered, and decided they'd translate their earlier efforts into a pipeline program. The firm invites fellows who successfully complete the program to return the following year as summer associates, which qualifies them for a \$10,000 scholarship toward law school. While Latham &

Watkins doesn't release information about how many fellows it accepts for the program, its goal is to hire the fellows as full-time associates once they're finished with law school.

"They're an amazingly talented group of people and we wanted to be sure we could harness some of that talent as well," Gayatrinath said.

### How it Helps Comcast

Comcast treats the fellows like they're part of the family, Wallach said, and the corporation benefits from the program in three ways.

First, it helps forge a stronger relationship with Latham & Watkins, which operates as outside counsel for Comcast and works on Internet-related compliance for the corporation. Second, the program helps Comcast build a relationship with a diverse person who works for that outside counsel. Third, the program exposes Comcast to talented, diverse people that the corporation could hire well into the future—corporations rarely hire inexperienced attorneys right out of law school. The last benefit, Wallach said, would satisfy the company's own goals for diversity.

"It can only mean that we're going to get the best candidates out there," Wallach said, adding that he looks forward to welcoming another fellow this summer.

Meanwhile, the program fits in with Comcast's overall commitment to diversity, said Maria G. Arias, the company's vice president of diversity and inclusion. It's also another example of the corporation embracing a business culture that "respects and includes different thoughts, choices, philosophies and experiences," she told Bloomberg BNA in a Jan. 29 e-mail.

"We recognize that diversity and inclusion is the company's compass for success—not just as a value, but

as a business philosophy central to our operations,” Arias said. “As a global media and technology company, we have a responsibility to re-

flect the customers and audiences we serve in all aspects of our business.”

BY LENORE T. ADKINS

To contact the reporter on this story: Lenore T. Adkins in Washington at [ladkins@bna.com](mailto:ladkins@bna.com)

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Yin Wilczek at [ywilczek@bna.com](mailto:ywilczek@bna.com)