



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

DANIEL S. ROBINSON

Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine, especially the many families emigrating in the midst of this brutal and unjustified war. The OCBA encourages all members who want to help support nonprofits providing critical resources and relief to those in need to visit our Community Outreach page at www.ocbar.org/Get-Connected/Committees/Community-Outreach

April Is Celebrate Diversity Month

Celebrating diversity is as important as ever, given the recent rise in hate-related incidents locally and across the nation. Diversity is an essential pillar of any functioning democracy. As stated in the beautiful words of Dr. Maya Angelou, “in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.” Certainly, our Orange County community is stronger for it. I am honored to serve on an OCBA Board of Directors that values diversity and is comprised of leaders from so many diverse backgrounds.

Different perspectives, experiences, and viewpoints in our Orange County community present a valuable asset that needs to be recognized and cherished. Our diversity enhances the richness of our lives, helps us to become more tolerant and open-minded, and promotes deeper community, connection, and discourse on critical issues. As President Jimmy Carter said, “We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.”

Recent events in Ukraine and across the world have shown how fortunate we are to live in a country (and county) where discourse is encouraged and where we can celebrate differences in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. Russian citizens now face threat of imprisonment for defending Ukraine’s separate culture and autonomy, or for protesting Russia’s attacks on civilians, hospitals, schools, and Babi Yar. History is replete with tyrants who rise to power by silencing dissent and targeting minority perspectives. We depend on leaders who understand the importance of diversity in our society. As former U.S.S.R. President Mikhail Gorbachev once said, “Peace is not unity in similarity but unity in diversity, in the comparison and conciliation of differences.”

Yet, we cannot support diversity without at the same time recognizing and addressing the increase in instances of hate where we live, even right here in Orange County. The Orange County Human Relations Commission (OCHRC) issued a 2020 Hate Crimes Report last fall that showed a 35% increase in reported hate crimes from 2019. (See Orange County Human Relations Commission, 2020 Hate Crimes Report 6 (2020), <https://www.occommunityservices.org/sites/occs/files/2021-09/Hate%20Crime%20Report%202020.pdf>.) This included a 114% increase in antisemitic incidents, an 1800% increase in anti-Asian incidents, and a 23% increase in anti-Black incidents. The most commonly reported hate-based criminal offenses were anti-Black (27%), antisemitic (11%), and anti-Hispanic (8%). In 2020, approximately 10% of reported hate crimes and incidents were directed at the LGBTQ+ community. (*Id.* at 8.) Between 2016 and 2020, reported hate crimes in Orange County overall rose 224%, and reported hate incidents rose 365%.

Peter Levi, Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), has thought long and hard about why we’re seeing record highs in antisemitic and anti-minority instances:

There are many reasons, including the disintegration of

civility and the normalization of bigotry in the public sphere from both elected officials and the general public. Hate groups have increasingly come out of the shadows and are becoming bolder in their recruiting efforts and use of social media to spread disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories. The effect is to normalize extremism and hate against marginalized groups.

Clearly, there is a lot to be done. I applaud the work of the ADL, OCHRC, and all groups that are helping to bring awareness to this disturbing trend and are addressing it with developing anti-hate initiatives.

I am proud of the OCBA’s efforts to support diversity and raise awareness about how members can help. For example, the OCBA presented a free, three-part webinar titled, “Unity in the Time of COVID Crisis—A Global Community Against a Global Threat” that included esteemed panelists discussing bias and diversity issues. The OCBA recently added “Equity” to the name of its Diversity and Inclusion Committee to become the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. The OCBA’s Racial Justice Task Force was recently incorporated as a permanent part of DEI, focusing on awareness, programs, and dialogue on issues unique to Black students and attorneys. Under the leadership of 2022 co-chairs Rick McNeil, Mei Tsang, and Dimetria Jackson, the DEI Committee has composed a plan for 2022 that includes providing anti-hate education programs. On May 4, 2022, the OCBA Masters Division and the Orange County Association of Affinity Judicial Officers will be co-sponsoring an important webinar titled “Diversity: Then and Now.” On June 28, 2022, the OCBA will be hosting its annual DEI Summer Mixer with OCBA affiliate and affinity bars. At this event, we will be awarding the very first annual “Lei Lei Wang-Ekval Award,” named in memory of the late OCBA Past President Lei Lei Wang-Ekval, a longtime leader and passionate champion of diversity.

I am pleased to share that the efforts of our OCBA community have not gone unnoticed. On March 11, 2022, the OCBA was honored by the Orange County Coalition for Diversity in the Law as one of the “Top Legal Organizations for DEI in Orange County.” I want to thank all OCBA members who’ve helped support our DEI priorities.

However, our work is far from done. If you’re interested in getting more involved with the OCBA’s DEI Committee, visit our DEI web page at www.ocbar.org/Get-Connected/Committees/Diversity. We ask that all OCBA members join us this month in celebrating the diverse cultures, identities, and traditions of Orange County legal community.

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