

From the Desk of the Chairperson

By Diane L. Akers



As incoming Chair of the Business Law Section, I have received a great deal of information about who makes up our Section, what kind of law and where they practice and how the lawyers in our Section compare with others in the State Bar of Michigan (SBM). This is derived from the SBM's recent

survey.

There are currently about 37,500 active members of the SBM, which is divided into thirty-five sections. With almost 3,500 members, our Section is the second largest, behind Probate and Estate Planning, which has almost 5,200 members, and comparable to the Real Property Law Section, which has about 3,350 members. The next largest section is Family Law, with about 2,500 members, and there are several sections with over 2,000 members.

Geographically, almost 59% of our Section's members practice in southeast Michigan, including Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties. About 11% practice in the Grand Rapids area, including Kent and Ottawa Counties, with about 12% in Ingham and the surrounding counties.

Many members of our Section belong to other sections as well. Almost 36% of our members report that they are also members of the Real Property Law Section, which is by far the greatest area of overlap. Twenty-four percent belong to the Probate and Estate Planning Law Section; 17% belong to the Taxation Section; 13% are also in the Litigation Section; and about 9% to 10% belong to the General Practice, Labor and Employment, International and Health Care Law Sections.

About 65% of Section members are in private practice. Of those who responded to the SBM's survey, almost 47% identify themselves as coming from large law firms with 7.6% from medium firms, 26% from small firms and 19% in solo practice. Eighteen percent of the lawyers in our Section are corporate counsel, and just under 2% work in fields unrelated to the law.

Our Section members span four generations. Traditionalists (those born before 1944) make up 11.1% of the Section, with Baby Boomers (born between 1944 and 1960) at 48.8%. Gen Xers (born between 1961 and 1980) are 39.3% of the Section with Millennials currently making up less than 1% of the Section. This is roughly comparable to the makeup of the SBM as a whole.

Approximately 67% of Section members responded to the question regarding race/ethnicity, and almost 90% report a European background. About 3.6% of our members are of African heritage, with 1% of our members reporting Asian-Pacific Islander, Hispanic-Latino, Multi-Racial and Arabic backgrounds. This is somewhat different from the SBM as a whole, where about 85.5% report having a European background with 5.9% having an African ethnic background.

When it comes to gender, there is more of a disparity between our Section and the SBM as a whole. Currently, 82.1% of the members of our Section are male, with 17.9% female. The SBM reports that 69.4% of its members are male and 30.6% are female. The survey provides statistics only, not explanations, and there may be a number of factors contributing to this result.

For a number of years, leadership of our Section has focused on reaching out –in the broadest sense of the term –to expand opportunities for everyone in the area of business law, to cooperate with other sections of the SBM to enhance the services we all provide to our members and to the public and to prepare business lawyers and the business community to meet the challenges we all face in an increasingly complex and unpredictable future. The SBM survey results show that our Section is a large and active group with much overlap in areas outside of business law. I believe we owe a debt of gratitude to those who have led our group in this direction.

As new Chair of the Section, part of my task is to continue that tradition of reaching out. If you are a Section member but have not been involved in Section activities, please consider attending a meeting or program or joining a committee. If you have ideas for how we can bring more diversity to our Section, please let me or anyone on the Council know. If you see avenues for cooperation with other organizations, whether bar-related or not, your suggestions would be most welcome.

I believe our Section is already on the right path and, with the talent and energy of our membership, will continue to provide an exceptionally high quality of leadership for business lawyers and the business and legal community.