

Citizen Lawyer: Reginald M. Turner

By Margaret A. Costello

A “serial volunteer.”

That is how Reginald M. “Reggie” Turner — past president of the State Bar of Michigan, Wolverine Bar Association, and the National Bar Association, and president-elect of the American Bar Association — describes himself with respect to his lifetime of involvement in community and civic organizations. He has worked to ensure that his twin passions of access to justice and diversity and inclusion are addressed by the organizations to which he contributes his time, talent, and treasure.

How did this prominent Detroit-based attorney become a serial volunteer? Turner says his first memory of volunteering was at age seven when he joined his parents and three siblings in a project shortly after the 1967 Detroit riots. Turner, who grew up in the Bagley neighborhood in northwest Detroit, recalls feeling scared and not really



Detroit attorney Reginald Turner addresses the American Bar Association House of Delegates at the 2020 ABA Midyear Meeting.

understanding what was happening when his father, a Detroit police officer, was called away from home for days at a time during the riots. As part of Focus Hope, which was designed to encourage interaction and understanding between primarily Black families in Detroit and white suburban families, the Turners were paired with the Latanzio family of St. Clair Shores. More than 50 years

later, the vivid memories stick with Turner, who recalls the good times his family and the Latanzios, who had six children, had while socializing and visiting each other's homes. The two families had a lot in common, and Turner believes the experience likely planted the seeds of the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Turner attended Detroit public schools and his family continued its involvement with Focus Hope and started volunteering with New Detroit; both organizations exposed him to a variety of cultures and experiences. Turner's father had attended Henry Ford Trade School but heard a calling to become a police officer and served for more than 20 years in the Detroit Police Department, rising to the level of detective and deputy chief before moving on to serve in other police departments until his retirement. Turner's mother, who loved books, worked at the Detroit Public Library, making sure Reggie and his siblings were taught the value of reading, books, and education.

After graduating from Cass Technical High School in Detroit — he still serves as a Cass Tech ambassador — Turner got a job at a local drugstore and loaded trucks at

Citizen Lawyer

A citizen lawyer strives to attain the highest level of skill, improve the law and the legal profession, and exemplify the profession's ideals of public service. Whether it is service for voter registration or scouting, shelters for abused persons or school activities, drafting a constitution for an emerging democracy, or solving an environmental problem, lawyers are in a unique position to benefit individuals and organizations. The Citizen Lawyer feature of the *Michigan Bar Journal* focuses on public-service achievements by recognizing lawyers and judges who have made an exceptional voluntary contribution to community causes. To nominate a lawyer, send his or her name and the reasons for your nomination to Margaret A. Costello at costelma@udmercy.edu.

“Reggie . . . had an interest in the practice of law, but also a focus on how he might help generate respect for the rule of law and make sure those who had a legal need were able to have a lawyer.”

— Dennis Archer, former Michigan Supreme Court justice, Detroit mayor, and SBM and ABA president



Courtesy photo

Turner and his family: daughter Nia, wife Marcia, and daughter Imani.

United Parcel Service to earn money for college. Even while attending Wayne State University, he worked part-time at UPS and was promoted to supervisor. At Wayne State, he chose to major in psychology, and he's glad he did; he believes the research and analytic skills he learned helped him succeed in law school. Though sometimes working two jobs while attending college, Turner still found time for extracurricular activities, becoming a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, the oldest and largest African-American college fraternity in the nation. One of Alpha Phi Alpha's missions is preparing its members for "the greatest usefulness in the causes of humanity, freedom, and dignity of the individual," an objective Turner embodies.

Turner attended law school at the University of Michigan, where he was elected to the student senate and became its president, a harbinger of the many volunteer leadership positions he would hold in the future.

After graduating from Michigan Law in 1987, Turner became a law clerk for Michigan Supreme Court Justice Dennis Archer, a man whose footsteps he would follow in many ways. For example, during his clerkship at the Michigan Supreme Court, Archer was serving on the ABA Commission for Op-

portunities for Minorities in the Legal Profession (now the ABA Diversity Center.) Turner would later become involved in ABA activities and eventually chair its Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity. Like Archer, Turner would lead the State Bar of Michigan, serving as its 68th president in 2002–2003, and he will become president of the American Bar Association in August, a post Archer held in 2003–2004.

"I watched and tracked Reginald Turner as a law student at the University of Michigan...and even more closely when the Hon. Wade McCree asked me to consider him for one of my law clerks when I was on the Michigan Supreme Court," Archer said. "Reggie was an excellent law clerk and had an interest in the practice of law, but also a focus on how he might help generate respect for the rule of law and make sure those who had a legal need were able to have a lawyer."

Following his Supreme Court clerkship, Turner became an associate lawyer at Sachs Waldman where, in addition to practicing labor law, he would develop his skills in governmental relations — he was named Best Lawyers in America Lawyer of the Year in government relations practice in both 2019 and 2021. After working on Dennis Archer's

successful run for Detroit mayor, Turner was awarded a prestigious White House fellowship in 1996–1997 during the Clinton administration, serving under Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros. The connections he made as a White House fellow, including his relationship with Harriet Miers, White House counsel to President George W. Bush from 2005–2007, played a major role in his volunteer efforts lobbying the Bush administration to assist Gulf Coast residents devastated by the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

For the past 21 years, Turner has practiced with Clark Hill in Detroit and serves on the firm's executive committee. One wonders if he has mastered cloning technology — while pursuing a highly successful career as an attorney, government affairs advocate, and strategic advisor; holding leadership positions with a number of bar associations; and serving on the board of directors of Comerica and Masco Corporation, Turner still manages to contribute to numerous civic and community organizations in a variety of ways. Though he recently has cut back on some of his community efforts in preparation for his role as ABA president, he reportedly works 80 hours every week to accomplish the tasks in which he is involved.

As a tribute to his father's law enforcement career, Turner and his wife, Marcia, were founding members of the Detroit Public Safety Foundation (formerly known as the Detroit Police Foundation.) The foundation supports Detroit's first responders by providing necessary supplies and technology and developing programs and awards. In honor of his mother, he served on the Detroit Public Library Foundation board and made significant contributions to that organization. And in keeping with spirit of volunteerism his parents ingrained in him as a youngster, Turner is a patron life fellow of the American Bar Foundation, which funds research and programs supporting diversity and inclusion and access to justice, ideals that have resonated with him since his experience with Focus Hope.

Turner's list of civic, community, and cultural involvement doesn't stop there. He's worked with the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan, the Hudson-Webber Foundation,

and the United Way of Southeastern Michigan. In fact, in 2007, he became the first African American to chair the United Way Board of Directors. His public service efforts include a stint as Archer's representative to the Detroit Public Schools Community District during Archer's term as mayor. Turner was appointed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm to the Michigan State Board of Education and was elected to that board in 2006.

Turner worked in a pro bono capacity on the University of Michigan affirmative action cases which culminated in the 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Gratz v. Bollinger*. Despite the Court's decision finding the university's admission policy to be unconstitutional, Turner describes the experience as an important point in his legal career.

Turner believes it is important to give back to the city in which he was raised, lives, and works, and his efforts haven't gone unno-

ticed. He received the Neal Shine Award for Exemplary Regional Leadership in 2019, was named Michigan Lawyer of the Year in 2005, and was presented with the Community Peacemaker Award by the Wayne State University Center for Peace and Conflict Studies.

"Reggie decided early on that he would be the best kind of lawyer — one who makes a difference," said current ABA President Patricia Lee Refo. "He leads in his community, he leads in the organized bar, and he happens also to be an extraordinary lawyer. Reggie inspires all of us!"

Indeed, Reggie Turner has used his education and skill to improve the law and the legal profession. He has made exceptional contributions to a host of community causes, exemplifying the legal profession's ideal of public service. The self-described serial volunteer is also well deserving of the title of citizen lawyer.

Said Archer: "Reginald Turner is a lawyer's lawyer who cares deeply about our profession and those we serve." ■



Margaret A. ("Peggy") Costello is an associate professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law and was instrumental in establishing the Veterans Law Clinic in 2007.

An experienced litigator and mediator, she previously was a member of Dykema, where she chaired the firm's Pro Bono and Diversity committees. She is a former SBM commissioner, past president of the Detroit Bar Association and Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, and recipient of the Cummiskey Pro Bono Award.

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Kevin M. Cronin
Principal