

TEXAS LAWYER

Shook Launches New Practice to Advise Clients on DEI Issues

By Brenda Sapino Jeffreys

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What You Need to Know

- Shook, Hardy & Bacon has launched a diversity, equity and inclusion Counseling, Compliance & Disputes Practice.
- The new CCDP practice will advise clients on DEI issues, an increasing need in the wake of factors that have led to increased anti-DEI sentiment.
- John Lewis Jr., the firm's chair of DEI Initiatives and Strategy, leads the new practice group.

Shook, Hardy & Bacon has launched an interdisciplinary diversity, equity and inclusion counseling, compliance and disputes practice, led by Houston office managing partner John Lewis Jr., to help clients navigate legal risks related to DEI.

Clients increasingly need that advice, because of a “few inflection points” over the last few years that have led to anti-DEI sentiment, said Lewis, a former chief litigation counsel at The Coca-Cola Co. who founded and led the company's legal division diversity counsel.

The factors, he said, include social unrest in 2020 in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor; the U.S. Supreme Court's

ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, which struck down affirmative action programs in college admissions; a Nasdaq rule that requires companies to disclose information about the diversity of their boards of directors and to either have a minimum number of women and minorities on the board or explain why not; and litigation filed against law firms by anti-DEI groups.

“They are all hot-button ... top-of-mind issues,” he said.

Those issues, plus fallout from some companies “clumsily wading into the DEI conversation” — all well-intentioned — has energized the anti-DEI sentiment, he said.



John Lewis Jr.,
managing partner of
the Houston office of
Shook Hardy.

Courtesy photo

Lewis, who is chair of the Am Law 100 firm's DEI Initiatives and Strategy, said clients have questions that weave in and out of legal principles and human resources.

"It was in that swirl [we decided] we need to do some more thinking about this," he said.

The new CCDP interdisciplinary practice includes lawyers in labor and employment, investigations, public policy and crisis communications, commercial litigation and securities fraud, he said.

Lawyers on the team, according to Lewis, include Phil Goldberg, the managing partner of the Washington, D.C., office who has a public policy practice; Houston litigation partner Veronica Gromada; Washington, D.C., and New York partner William Martucci, who is leader of the firm's national employment litigation and policy practice; Carrie McAtee, an employment litigation partner in Kansas City, Missouri; and Houston senior counsel Michael Harrison, a



Photo: J. Albert Diaz/ALM

Shook, Hardy & Bacon in Miami.

civil rights trial attorney who leads the firm's civil rights and racial justice pro bono efforts.

Shook is not alone in creating practice groups to advise clients on DEI issues. For instance, in January, Cozen O'Connor announced the launch of a DEI strategies and solutions practice.