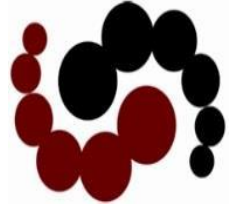




WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
Civil Rights Law Section



On the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday: The work ahead in 2017

The WSBA Civil Rights Law Section honors the legacy of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by continuing to advocate for equity in our society. On this anniversary of Dr. King's birthday, the WSBA Civil Rights Law Section encourages everyone to remember Dr. King's and other civil rights activists work, insight, sacrifice, and the work that is still needed to make our society just.

January 15 is the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which is observed as a national holiday on Monday, January 16. As we observe this year's holiday, we share our alarm that various groups are being targeted for emboldened expressions of bigotry and hate, including a recent fire set at the Islamic Center of the Eastside in Bellevue, Washington. We are increasingly concerned by rising hate crimes and anti-Semitism, labeling of the Muslim community as "terrorists", talk of deportations and dreamers, targeting of transgender people, pitting religious freedoms against protections for members of LGBTQ communities, and agendas to limit women's reproductive freedom and reduce health care access that, for people with disabilities, is literally a matter of life and death. We are also concerned that recent advances made in combatting domestic and sexual violence and ensuring police accountability for communities of color may lose traction and even reverse direction.

If we are to truly honor the life and work of Dr. King, the Civil Rights Law Section believes that, as legal professionals, we are called to do more than chronicle events and react after hard fought for civil rights protections are lost. We must act affirmatively, speak out, and work to prevent civil rights reversals. We must defend, protect, and advance the principles of the United States' and Washington State's Constitutions, and critical civil rights legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Washington Law Against Discrimination. We cannot shrink from speaking out on such issues outside of courtrooms, because the efforts to revise, reverse, limit or eliminate protections are first fought in the court of public opinion and political arenas.

To maintain the integrity of our profession and that of democracy itself, the legal community must ensure fairness and equity in our institutions. We must be willing to discuss and fight for civil rights, not just in the courts, but in other branches of government where policies are made, prioritized, and enforced. We must also engage with the media and with our communities about the importance of civil rights, voting rights and political access, and fair and equitable civil and criminal justice systems. We are guided in this work by the following observation by Dr. King:

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

In the coming months, the leadership of the Civil Rights Law Section intends to engage with WSBA leadership, staff, and other sections to set a course that keeps us all engaged in the important work ahead to preserve and protect hard fought for rights and protections. As we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and reflect on the road ahead, we are reminded of one of Dr. King's famous quotes as guidance for the times we live in:

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others. In dangerous and hazardous pathways, he will lift some bruised and beaten brother to a higher and more noble life.

To honor Dr. King, we must heed the call to stand in times of challenge and controversy, to respond and serve the common welfare of others, and help lift all to a higher and more noble life.

This is the charge for all of us who support civil rights, human rights, equality and justice...for all.

About the WSBA Civil Rights Law Section

The mission of the WSBA Civil Rights Law Section is to educate and advocate for civil liberties and equal rights in the context of the legal issues of Washington State residents. The Section focuses on the civil rights of racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual-orientation minorities, immigrants, those with mental or physical disabilities, the socioeconomically marginalized, and those experiencing homelessness. The Section also focuses on issues involving civil liberty issues including the freedom of speech, freedom from state-promulgated religion, and privacy rights. Legal professionals who practice in any of these areas of law, or who are interested in public policy or these topics, are encouraged to join the WSBA Civil Rights Law Section.

If you'd like more information about the Section and how to join and get involved, visit our webpage:

<http://www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Sections/Civil-Rights-Law-Section>