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The recommendations from the Disability Independence Group

Here are several of DIG's recommendations for continuing progress:

Law School Admissions, Persistence, and Admission to The Florida Bar:

- Create a committee of law school administrators, members of Equal Opportunities Law Section's Committee of Lawyers with Disabilities, Florida Board of Bar Examiners, and DIG to make recommendations covering law school admission and bar exam testing, admissions to law schools and the Bar, the law school experience, accommodations, effective communication, and placement.

- Re-examine applications for accommodations for the bar exam and admission to the Bar to streamline the process and develop less intrusive questions. Specific attention should be paid to review application questions related to mental health and substance abuse, with consideration given to the type of information requested and time periods covered.

Employment:

- Pursue adoption of the Equal Opportunities Law Section's Statement of Principle by key employers in the state and encourage law firms and state agency human resources departments to sign a pledge to include persons with disabilities as an integral component of the definition of diversity.

- Develop a resource manual on employment resources for distribution to law school placement officers and applicable Bar seminars and meetings. This manual would include resources such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (www.eeoc.gov) Advisory Opinions and the Southeast Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center (www.sedbtac.org).

Courthouse and Community Accessibility:

- Continue to work with EOL Section on proposed changes to the accommodations rule from its present wording under Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.540 to more closely resemble the more comprehensive California Rule 1.100. The proposed rule change would include a confidential written application for the requested accommodation, and a grievance procedure if the accommodation is denied.

- Attorneys with disabilities should be active in planning, designing, remodeling, and renovating courthouses, administrative agencies, and other places where legal business is conducted. DIG should have a major role in the new Florida State Courts' Courthouse Accessibility Initiative and should recommend members on each courthouse access committee in each judicial circuit.

- Wireless gateways should be available in all courthouses and administrative agencies to make it easier for persons with vision disabilities to access information and materials.

- Teleconferencing and videoconferencing should be an available accommodation for persons with multiple chemical sensitivity disorders and persons with other types of disabilities who cannot be physically present in court, so they can participate in courthouse activities.

- DIG will review courthouses for improvements to accessibility.
- The Office of the State Courts Administrator should post signs in conspicuous locations in courthouses to inform the public that accommodations are available to persons with disabilities.

The Florida Bar:

- The Florida Bar should play a leadership role in implementing project recommendations and should appoint a disability coordinator.
- Lawyers with disabilities should serve on policy and procedure committees and seek leadership positions in the Bar, voluntary bar associations, and the Florida Board of Bar Examiners.
- Explore ways to make Bar meetings more accessible through teleconferencing to members who cannot travel because of the locations and expense.
- Continue discussions regarding reduced Bar dues for persons with disabilities.
- All CLE courses and instructors should comply with accessibility requirements, including providing handouts in alternative formats.

Training, Public Awareness and Information Dissemination:

- Disability awareness, sensitivity, and ADA training should be developed for law school staff (with particular training for library staff); employers; new lawyers in the Practicing with Professionalism program; Florida Bar leadership; the judiciary and court personnel; office management staff in public and private settings; and lawyers with disabilities.
- ADA training should cover employment rights and responsibilities, including obligations to provide equal opportunities to the disabled during hiring and recruiting, and the reasonable accommodation process.

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