



Declaration of Candidacy

Candidates for election as Second Vice President or Director Elected Nationally must complete this form and submit it to the Chief Executive Officer at the principal headquarters of DRI by 5:00 PM (CDT) on July 1st of the year in which the election is held.

National Director Requirements - Directors Elected Nationally or by Region must be Individual Members of the Corporation admitted to the practice of law. Each such director must meet the following qualifications at the time of election: (a) The candidate shall have been a DRI member for a total of at least five (5) years, and (b) The candidate shall have been a member of at least one DRI substantive law committee for at least three (3) years, and (c) The candidate must have registered for and attended at least one (1) DRI Annual Meeting within the previous three (3) years, and, within the three (3) years prior to the final day of the Annual Meeting, the candidate must have 1) registered for and attended at least two (2) DRI seminars, or 2) registered for and attended one (1) DRI seminar and one (1) DRI Regional Meeting.

Position sought

Second Vice President* Secretary- Treasurer National Director

*If you have declared your candidacy for Second Vice President and are not the successful candidate, will you consider the Secretary - Treasurer Officer position?

Yes No

Name: Catherine Ava Leatherwood

Firm/Company: Rogers Townsend, LLC

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E-mail: Catherine.leatherwood@rogerstownsend.com

Education: B.S. – University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), Journalism & Mass

Communication, Sociology (double major) (2007); J.D. – University of South Carolina School of Law (2012)

Awards and achievements:

- DRI Young Lawyers Committee Unsung Hero Award (Sponsorship Vice-Chair) (2016)
 - DRI Young Lawyers Committee Outstanding Committee Chair Award (Sponsorship Subcommittee) (2017)
 - Columbia Business Monthly Best & Brightest 35 and Under
 - Super Lawyers Rising Star (2021, 2022)
 - Columbia Business Monthly Legal Elite (2021, 2022)
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Areas of practice:

My practice is focused mainly on product liability and construction defect litigation. I have defended products cases ranging from small consumer products, to cosmetics, to heavy industrial equipment. My construction defect experience includes class actions and large commercial projects, where I represent parties including developers, general contractors, subcontractors, design professionals, and materials manufacturers and suppliers. I also have a breadth of experience in general insurance defense, as well as toxic torts and environmental work, premises liability, and contractual disputes. I represent business clients ranging from local companies to global manufacturers, and a wide range of insurance providers.

Employment history:

I began practicing with Barnes, Alford, Stork & Johnson in Columbia, SC, a small defense firm, upon graduating law school in 2012. In 2016, I began working at my current firm, Rogers Townsend, in the Columbia office. I am a member of our firm's Litigation Department. In January 2021, I was elevated to partner (member). Since 2016, I have served on my firm's Law Clerk Committee and am responsible for identifying and interviewing prospective summer associates each year, as well as serving as a guide and mentor to them once hired. I also serve on the firm's eDiscovery Task Force, and its Strategic Business Development Planning Committee.

Noteworthy defense work:

- Obtained dismissal of regional aviation company in high value federal court action alleging conspiracy, fraud, and unfair trade practices based on standing issues.
- Represented a global industrial products manufacturer in a federal court matter involving multi-million-dollar injury claim and particularly egregious default. Obtained relief from default and went on to settle case for favorable value with minimal written discovery.
- Negotiated numerous favorable settlements in large scale complex commercial construction cases defending target defendant stucco companies, resulting in early dismissal where litigation continued as to other parties.
- Obtained dismissal of multiple professional liability actions on statutory and procedural grounds
- Represent large regional homebuilder in numerous individual and class action claims
- Represent national automotive dealer in cases involving premises liability and tort-based claims
- Represent several large-scale developers in cases involving construction defects, and vibration claims/nuisance.

Professional Affiliations:

South Carolina Bar

- Young Lawyers Committee
- Torts Section
- Construction Law Section

Richland County Bar

South Carolina Defense Trial Attorneys' Association (SCDTAA)

Claims and Litigation Management Alliance (CLM)

Professional Liability Underwriting Society (PLUS)

Columbia Chamber of Commerce

Environmental and Emerging Claim Manager Association (EECMA)

Have you been a DRI member for 5 or more years? Yes. I joined DRI in November 2013, and have been a member for about nine years.

Please describe your previous involvement in DRI, including but not limited to, leadership positions held. Projects contributed to, Committee memberships, presentations given, and written materials authored. Special accomplishments should also be noted.

DRI Leadership Positions

- Young Lawyers Committee
 - Chair (2021-2022)
 - Vice-Chair (2020-2021)
 - Second Vice-Chair (2019-2020)
 - Marketing Chair (2018-2019)
 - Marketing Vice-Chair (2017-2018)
 - Sponsorship Chair (2016-2017)
 - Sponsorship Vice-Chair (2015-2016)
 - Legislative Liaison (2013-2016)

- Product Liability Committee
 - Online Communities Vice-Chair (2021-2022)
 - Young Lawyer SLG Chair (2019-2021)
 - Young Lawyer Marketing Chair (2018-2019)

- State Membership Chair – South Carolina (2017-2021)

DRI Committee Memberships

- Young Lawyers
- Product Liability
- Construction
- Insurance

DRI Presentations

- *Navigating Personal Jurisdiction Post- Ford Motor Co. v. Montana*, Corporate Counsel Breakout, DRI Product Liability Seminar (2021) (late fill-in)
- *2021 Product Liability Case Law Update*, Webinar (2021)
- *Everything We Wish We Would Have Known as New Associates*, Webinar (2018)
- *Navigating Career Crossroads: Taking Charge of Your Path*, DRI Young Lawyers Seminar (2018)

DRI Publications

- *One the Record: For Young Lawyers and Beyond, Invest in You in 2022*, For the Defense (2022)
- *Young Lawyers: Now is Your Time to Get Involved*, The Brief Case (2022)
- 2021 Product Liability Case Law Update (Co-Editor)
- 2020 Product Liability Case Law Update (Co-Editor)
- 2019 Product Liability Case Law Update (Co-Editor)
- *Chair's Corner*, Raising the Bar (multiple issues, 2019-2021)
- *An Inside Glimpse of Seminar Marketing*; Raising the Bar (2018)

- *Bad Attitudes, Jerks, and Bullies: Let the Maxims Be Your Guide, For the Defense* (2017)
- *Personal or Collective: May the Duty to Defend Be Divided Among Multiple Insurers of a Common Insured*, In-House Defense Quarterly (2015)

List any leadership roles in other defense organizations. Since the start of my professional career I have been “all-in” with DRI, and placed all of my efforts and focus into this organization. At this time, I have not yet assumed leadership roles in the several other organizations with which I am involved, but plan to do so, particularly with the SCDTAA.

Describe your goals if you are elected to the above position.

I believe that to set ourselves apart from the pack as an organization that provides the utmost value to its members, we need to emphasize a greater level of skills-based training across the board when it comes to our seminars. Each SLC has unique, targeted, opportunities to engage attendees and offer meaningful training in skills such as cross-examination, opening statements, voir dire, closing arguments, expert depositions, and many more. At the 2022 DRI Young Lawyers Seminar in Atlanta, we received phenomenal feedback for a cross-examination workshop we put on along with the local SLDO in Georgia (GDLA). This was a small, 40-person session where participants actually performed a five-minute cross-examination and received real time, honest feedback from coaches (GDLA members). The benefit of encouraging each SLC to include a feedback-based skills session with the local SLDO for its Seminar location is threefold: (1) it fosters relationships with the SLDOs, (2) it adds immense value and engagement to our members, (3) it attracts and engages new members and new attendees, many of whom are actively looking for skills content as they are less than 10 years in practice. Other organizations, such as the ABA, are offering these kinds of intensive workshops, and we need to be able to present an even more superior option to our members.

In order for DRI to grow and thrive as an organization, we need to ensure we are retaining and engaging our members. In planning for the 2022-2023 YLC Steering Committee, we made the decision to split up our Membership Subcommittee into two separate groups – recruitment and engagement. These two efforts require somewhat different skill sets, and we felt the importance of engagement was too great to be subsumed. Recruitment is critical, but we need to ensure we are engaging our members. Membership and involvement in DRI is a choice, and we cannot lose sight of that. Defense attorneys across the globe have many choices when it comes to professional memberships, and we need to ensure we are

keeping our members' needs at the forefront of what we do and what we offer. One of the issues that can be addressed is member drop-off after year 10 in practice. Too many members who were involved in the YLC and held leadership positions on that committee either dwindle or cease their involvement in DRI all together once they "experience out" of the committee. I have personally seen this happen, and it is disheartening that we are losing potential leaders who could make a difference in other SLCs and DRI as a whole. I am encouraged by the new SLC Engagement Committee, and I believe we need specific, targeted directives from the top down, asking SLC leadership to ensure there are opportunities for young lawyers to begin their involvement early. I, along with my two Vice-Chairs from the YLC, have called every single SLC Chair and Vice Chair to identify ways we can get YLs plugged in early and allow them to make the connections they need in order to become contributing, engaged leaders of those SLCs. I am particularly passionate about this effort, and have much more to say about it, but for the sake of brevity and respect for your time, I feel these are the key points in that regard.

Tying into member engagement, we need to continue to push our leadership and membership on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). I think including the "belonging" portion is critical to member retention and our success as an organization. The members who truly "buy-in" to the organization and eventually become our leaders are typically those who feel a sense of belonging in DRI. Members who feel connected to other members are the ones who make a greater effort to take on roles within DRI, who message others about attending Annual Meeting, and who encourage their own associates to join DRI. We need to make it clear through our actions that everyone who is a defense attorney belongs in DRI. No matter where you came from, your ethnic background, your gender orientation, what school you attended, how big or small of a city you practice in, and whether you have been in the profession for one year or 60, you belong in DRI. There is a difference in belonging "to" an organization and belonging "in" an organization. We need to ensure our members feel they belong "in" DRI, and that they feel welcomed – recruiting diverse members is only the first step.

What do you believe is the most important issue confronting the defense bar?

Now more than ever, the defense bar has been confronted with an increasing number of attorneys (namely associates) leaving their firms, and some leaving the profession altogether. Associate retention is a critical issue, and has become even more so as many people are evaluating their priorities and work environments after the COVID pandemic. Many have come to the realization that they lack meaningful connections at their firms, as well as a culture fit. There is a lack of strong professional relationships, which leads to lateral transfers. I myself am a prime example of someone who made such a change almost four years into practice. We need to equip our members to be good law firm leaders, and

understand the dynamics, needs, and concerns of practicing attorneys so that valuable talent is not lost from the defense bar. Involvement in DRI itself can foster this kind of connection, whereby attorneys can encourage others in their firms to attend DRI events and apply for leadership roles. By supporting their involvement in DRI, it becomes a source of connection and loyalty.

Define the appropriate role for DRI as the national defense bar organization.

DRI is uniquely positioned to be an organization that can truly be the voice of the defense bar for *all* members because it lacks most barriers to entry. Brand new attorneys are not excluded since there is no “years in practice” requirement, and we don’t require a member referral or recommendation to join. We are vastly inclusive, and that sets us apart. This gives DRI an advantage in that we can advocate for issues that are meaningful to the complete range of defense practitioners and be truly representative of the defense bar.

Additionally, since I became a DRI member in 2013, the organization has made great strides in its amicus brief activity, and this should be a continued and expanded area of focus. We need to find ways to better parlay this activity into member recruitment and engagement. DRI would benefit from greater promotion and visibility when it comes to these efforts, and they are not discussed among the SLCs nearly as much as they should be (and particularly among those newer to practice). By using cross-promotion, social media, and other tools, we can incorporate marketing strategies to spread the word to both members and non-members about these efforts and make this important work yet another reason people want to be a part of DRI.
