



Declaration of Candidacy

Candidates for election as Second Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, 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.

Please also see the DRI Board of Director and Officer Competencies, attached.

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

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How long have you been a member of DRI?

12 years

Areas of practice: Construction, Product Liability, Toxic Tort/Asbestos, Insurance

Please provide your employment history in chronological order beginning with the current position.

January 2022 - present: Member (Partner), Rogers Townsend; Rogers Townsend Executive Committee Member 2023 – present

October 2016 - December 2021: Associate, Rogers Townsend

October 2012 - October 2016: Associate, Barnes Alford

September 2011 - October 2012: Law Clerk/Summer Associate, Barnes Alford

May 2022 - September 2011: Summer Associate, South Carolina Attorney General's Office - Civil & Securities Division

May 2011 - August 2011: Intern, South Carolina Court of Appeals

May 2010 - May 2011: Mayor's Fellowship with Mayor of Columbia

May 2010 - August 2010: Research Assistant, USC School of Law (Prof. Brant Helwig, (Trusts & Estates project) Prof. Joel Samuels (Conflict of Laws/Forum Non Conveniens project)

May 2010 - July 2010: Intern (JOE Program), The Honorable Judge Leslie Kirkland Riddle

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.

I currently serve as a third-year National Director on the DRI Board of Directors, am Chair of the DRI Cares Committee, and Board Liaison to the Employment & Labor Law Committee where I have served for almost two years. I currently serve on the 2025 Annual Meeting Steering Committee (DRI Cares and DRI For Life). My first board year, I was the Liaison to Law Practice Management. I have been involved for several years now with the DRI Center for Law and Public Policy on its Social Inflation Task Force, and co-authored a white paper in 2022 titled *Social Inflation: Legal System Abuse*. I also am part of the DRI Foundation Board. Last year I was the Vice Chair of DRI Cares, and for two years prior to that, I was a member of the SLC Engagement Committee.

While on the SLC Engagement Committee, I along with Stacy Douglas undertook efforts to zero in on specific areas of concern for member engagement and retention in DRI's "affinity" committees. These groups face challenges that differ from practice area-focused committees. Many DRI members who have risen to become leaders in the organization obtained their start in DRI's affinity

committees, such as Diversity & Inclusion, Women in the Law, and Young Lawyers. Other affinity groups we spoke with included the Corporate Counsel Committee, ADR, Litigation Skills, Law Practice Management, and Lawyers' Ethics & Professionalism. These committees are critical to fostering the sense of community within DRI that keeps members engaged and returning to events year after year. Our "task force" findings highlighted the importance of communication with the leaders who know their committees best and have a deep understanding of their members' needs, wants, and challenges. The ultimate goal of these continued efforts is to elevate and engage the affinity committees by nurturing opportunities for collaboration both with other affinity groups and substantive law committees, and to address the unique challenges they face.

Since 2019, I've been active in the DRI Product Liability Committee, and have held roles on the Steering Committee starting with YL Marketing Liaison, YL Chair, Online Communities Chair and Vice Chair (current Chair), and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Construction Devices and Building Products SLG (current Chair).

I have been very active in the Young Lawyers Committee since 2013, and was appointed Chair of the Committee for the 2021-2022 year. During my Chair tenure, the YL Committee had the highest number of Steering applications to date, with about 131 people applying for leadership roles following the YL Seminar in Atlanta, GA. Our leadership team, Vice Chair Brett Tarver, Second Vice Chair Emily Ruzic, and I, worked together to revamp the YL Liaison program in 2022, and obtained much needed support from past DRI Presidents and other key DRI leaders, encouraging the SLCs and their leaders to "buy in" to the program, emphasizing the importance of getting young lawyers involved with substantive committees as early as possible to ensure their continued engagement with DRI. Between the three of us, we held calls with leadership for every single DRI substantive law committee to discuss their needs, opportunities, and questions, as related to bettering young lawyer engagement in their committees and supporting their leadership pipeline for years to come. The discussions were informative and enlightening, and emphasized the key points that (1) the committees are diverse in their needs, wants, and concerns; (2) there is, however, commonality in the underlying need for a robust and well-rounded membership from which new leaders can rise so that we are not "recycling" leaders and burning out those who have served in demanding roles such as seminar planning for more years than originally slotted due to a lack of available and willing members to fill those roles.

For the 2019-2020 year, I was selected as Second Vice Chair of the YL Committee, and subsequently appointed Vice Chair in 2020-2021. Prior to 2019, I have held various leadership roles on the YL Steering Committee, including Marketing Chair, Marketing Vice Chair, Sponsorship Chair, Sponsorship Vice Chair, and several years of a Legislative Liaison position, among others.

Throughout my time in various roles on the YL Steering Committee, I have endeavored to share with other substantive law committees and their leadership some of the various tools that we as a committee found successful to member engagement, such as an application process for leadership.

Concurrently with my involvement in the DRI Young Lawyers Committee, I was the South Carolina State Membership Chair (previously existing position) from 2017 to 2021, and was also the Annual Meeting representative for South Carolina (marketing-focused role that previously existed).

DRI Presentations

This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: The Reality of the Nuclear Verdict, DRI Product Liability Seminar (2025, main stage)
SLDO/SLC Collaboration Discussion (co-leader), DRI Leadership Conference (fill-in for original speaker) (2024)
Bridging the Gap – Candid Discussion with DRI Young Lawyers, DRI Managing Partners and Law Firm Leaders Seminar (2023, panel)
Becoming A Trusted Business Partner to Your Corporate Clients, DRI Young Lawyers Seminar (2023)
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

DRI Center for Law and Public Policy Social Inflation Task Force, co-author of white paper in 2022 titled Social Inflation: Legal System Abuse
On 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 significant leadership commitment and involvement within the legal field other than DRI, including but not limited to other legal organizations.

Since 2023, I have been involved in IADC, and am currently a Steering Committee member (Vice Chair of Webinar) on its Construction Law Committee. This role may change to another position on Steering following the Annual Meeting in July, if asked, as I am ending the second year of a two-year term. I am also a member of the IADC Product Liability Committee and the Class Actions Committee.

I am a member of the SCDTAA (South Carolina's SLDO), the South Carolina Bar Association, and Richland County Bar Association, but do not currently hold any leadership roles in those organizations. I currently serve as Risk Manager Elect (role previously titled League Attorney Elect) for the Junior League of Columbia (JLC), one of the largest leagues in the United States. Risk Manager Elect is a position slated by the Nominating Committee and voted on by the membership. This position sits on the Executive Management Team of the JLC.

I currently serve on my firm's Executive Committee, a position elected by the LLC's Members/Shareholders, and am the youngest attorney to have been selected for the position. This past year, I have been privileged to have been invited by a client to be part of a tort reform group including companies, industry group leaders, and both in-house and outside counsel, focused on efforts to address and amend critical statute of repose exceptions in South Carolina statutory law that have long adversely affected construction, development, commerce, and the willingness of carriers to write Commercial General Liability policies in the state.

Why do you wish to join the board of directors or become an officer and what skills, abilities and attributes identified in the Board of Director/Officer Competencies can you bring to the role?

I would be honored to serve DRI as an officer and have the opportunity to continue to give back to the organization in a meaningful way in return for all of the things it has given me. I would bring a unique perspective to the role, new energy, and boldness in leadership. As a former Chair of the Young Lawyers Committee and a female leader in the defense bar, I bring a distinct and valuable perspective rooted in firsthand experience with member engagement, leadership development, and the evolving needs of our profession. The legal landscape is changing now more than ever, and our legal organizations need leaders who are adaptable, innovative, and versatile.

Three years ago, when I submitted my Declaration for the Board of Directors, I felt a mix of excitement and anticipation. I can only describe it as the kind of nervous energy that comes from caring deeply about something. I did not realize just how much I wanted to have a meaningful and positive impact on DRI until I walked into the Nominating Committee interview room. It was difficult to temper my

enthusiasm and I could not talk fast enough as I shared ideas I was eager to bring to the table. Three years later, my energy and excitement for this organization has not waned - it has only grown stronger. My commitment to DRI and its mission continues to inspire and motivate me to add what I can to this organization.

I continue to firmly believe that DRI is crucial to the professional development of the defense bar, now more than ever, and am invested in seeing DRI lead, succeed, innovate, and grow stronger. I've "grown up" in this organization and have been lucky to spend the critical developmental years of my professional career with DRI, but am still not far removed from what matters to the current generation of new attorneys who are critical to the lifeblood of DRI, and to all similarly situated organizations. The majority of law school graduates, trending for the past several years, have been women. The number of female attorneys is also slowly climbing every year. The gender balance is shifting among college graduates as well, many of whom may later work for the clients and industries we serve. While I recognize that gender diversity is only one dimension of what makes an Executive Committee strong and representative, I believe my value also lies in the perspective and lived experience I bring. Experiential diversity, outlook, and leadership style shapes how I think, lead, and contribute to DRI. A diversity of perspectives strengthens our "team" and listening to those perspectives is essential to continued growth, both professionally and personally.

I took a moment to revisit what I wrote in my Declaration of Candidacy for my current role as a National Director three years ago. I was curious to see how it would resonate with me today. Over the past three years as a National Director, my knowledge and appreciation for all that goes into running this organization has exponentially increased. As a Board Member, I gained a much better understanding of how the EC, CEO, Board, and DRI staff work together collaboratively to ensure a strong leadership core with diverse capabilities in the way it operates. I gained a much more robust appreciation for the work of the National Foundation for Judicial Excellence (NFJE) and its critical mission. I learned about the intricacies of the work being done in regard to DRI's relationship with state and local (and national) defense organizations (SLDOs), and what we can do to strengthen these important relationships. These are only a few examples that highlight some of the insights I've been fortunate to gain in the National Director role.

In addition to a unique perspective and organizational knowledge, I bring a robust set of leadership competencies that align with the needs and demands of service in a DRI officer role. Throughout my DRI involvement, I have consistently demonstrated the ability to communicate effectively, while being attuned to situational needs. I'm known for contributing honestly and constructively, even in challenging conversations and situations where I must disagree with close colleagues. I believe there is a balance between using emotional intelligence, listening to others, and having the conviction to make decisions that may be

unpopular but are ultimately in the best interests of the organization. I don't shy away from offering a candid perspective in many ways - whether through asking hard questions and raising ideas on the DRI Board of Directors, through public speaking engagements and presentations, leading critical meetings on the Executive Committee of my firm, or navigating challenging conversations with diplomacy and resolve. Ultimately, we all have common ground in the desire to make DRI the best it can be.

I have always had a collaborative leadership style that fosters consensus and mutual respect, while still having the clarity and confidence necessary to guide strategic decisions and make the tough calls. I am lucky to be a partner at a firm that values a collaborative, transparent, and respectful culture, and actively instills those values in all who are a part of it. It has certainly impacted my leadership qualities in infinitely positive ways. My firm mentor put it best - we "jealously guard our culture", and I have endeavored to nurture that culture as a member of the firm's Executive Committee. Similarly, as a leader within DRI, I have strived to protect a culture of mutual respect, openness, and encouragement of others. The past leaders of DRI have worked to make this organization what it is today, each bringing unique and valuable contributions to mold its course. We as leaders have a responsibility to honor those legacies while aiming to always better DRI for its members and the defense bar.

I also understand marketing, particularly having grown up in the digital era and witnessing the dramatic changes that have influenced the ways we share information about organizations, and the different ways we reach people. Part of my educational background is in Public Relations, and it's still engrained in how I view marketing related opportunities. I believe in the importance of branding, which can build trust and positive associations. We want our marketing to effectively tell DRI's story and connect with key audiences. With experience in member engagement and programming promotion, I understand how to elevate an organization's visibility and value proposition. I understand the importance of clear, consistent messaging and leveraging various platforms to grow reach, reinforce value, and build community - we have a great number of opportunities to explore in this sphere. I see value in contributing to the continued growth and refinement of the DRI brand, helping it resonate with both current and prospective members while keeping true to our values and foundation.

My approach to leadership is also grounded in emotional intelligence. I listen actively, am adaptable to evolving dynamics, and want to understand diverse viewpoints before deciding a course forward. One of the aspects I value most about the DRI Board is the ability and willingness of every member to engage in meaningful and respectful discourse about hard topics where opposing viewpoints are often strongly held. Through these discussions, I have learned a great deal about a wide variety of perspectives and am very grateful that DRI has been able to foster this type of environment. My belief is that emotional

intelligence is a cornerstone of effective leadership. Strong leaders are not only results-oriented, but create a culture of respect among those they serve.

Millennials have lived through no less than half a dozen "unprecedented" world events, forced to get comfortable with change and requiring the ability to effectively pivot when the situation requires. I believe this kind of resilience is important in leadership. I bring a forward-thinking, solution-oriented mindset that considers both growth and the elevating the member experience. Whether working on new member engagement initiatives, reimagining CLE content to better align with skills-based needs and new learning styles, or exploring ways to elevate the work of the Center for Law and Public Policy, I always aim to lead with both vision and execution. When the day comes where I retire from the profession, I would most like to be known for promoting a positive, inclusive culture where creativity, professionalism, and service are equally valued.

Through my leadership roles both in DRI and outside of DRI - in other legal organizations my firm, and non-profits - I've developed strong management and governance skills that I believe would serve an officer role well. I understand the importance of operating within a sound governance framework, with a balance of transparency, accountability, and strategic oversight. I am comfortable with navigating bylaws, policy development, and financial strategy. Good governance is not just about the structure that exists within DRI, but about aligning its operations with its mission and brand.

One aspect of the meaningful management and governance experience I have gained comes from serving on my firm's executive committee, where financial oversight is a core responsibility. In that role, I've been deeply involved in reviewing and analyzing the firm's financials, contributing to strategic planning, budgeting, and resource allocation decisions. At times, these decisions have proven more difficult than I imagined, but ultimately, I understood the need to be decisive in the best interests of the firm and its people. This role and experience in particular have strengthened my ability to evaluate complex information, ask the right questions, and ensure that organizational goals are handled with fiscal responsibility.

As someone who thrives in team settings and believes in the impact of shared progress, I see this role not just as a title, but as a responsibility to serve DRI's members, elevate our mission and brand, and ensure that DRI is the preeminent voice of the defense bar for generations to come. I would be honored to contribute my experience, energy, and insight to those efforts.

What suggestions would you make to move the organization forward?

Defense attorneys and attorneys representing business today have more choices than ever when it comes to professional organizations. We owe it to them to listen

and adapt, offering ways to expand networks and support professional development, all while maintaining a high level of quality in everything we offer. The heart of DRI has always been advocacy and professional development for members of the defense bar, and the issues important to them. We need to ensure that DRI's "brand" reflects the quality and substance that has been meaningful to the organization since day one. You get only get one chance to make a first impression on someone, and we must be deliberate in ensuring that DRI's impression demonstrates the very best of what we have to offer.

Time is a valuable commodity, and more and more of us are beginning, or continuing, to guard that finite amount of time we each have at our disposal. Virtual CLE has become commonplace, and travel in the industry has declined. Engagement in DRI is not only a monetary investment, but a time investment as well. To remain at the forefront, we must be intentional about what we give our current members and what we offer to prospective members. We need to present and execute a top-quality experience from day one, and be willing to commit the resources to accomplish that. DRI's Seminars and the networking they offer are by far some of the best recruiting tools we possess. We must take a detailed look at every aspect of the seminar experience to ensure that our offerings (1) draw and attract attendees, and (2) align with what our members value most: authentic connections, practical and engaging education that pushes beyond the conventional, and opportunities that directly strengthen their practices and client relationships. Equally important is delivering an overall experience that reflects the caliber of DRI and the professionalism of our members; one that feels intentional, elevated, and worth their investment of time.

Member and prospective member value should be at the core of every initiative we undertake. DRI seminars should be experiences that attendees can't wait to write home about. We want to energize attendees and showcase DRI's very best qualities and offerings to our first-timers so they know they are wanted and valued, reinforcing the message that DRI has a place for them to succeed. We want to promote an atmosphere where attorneys and clients are eager to gather, make new connections, exchange ideas, sharpen their skills, and build relationships in exciting locations that are uniquely selected and attuned to the differing needs and goals of the various Committees. Member value begins well before you walk into the conference hotel - people want to feel personally invited, and we need to ensure the total experience from the very first outreach is top notch for every attendee. Our counsel meeting program has undergone an extensive overhaul and has shown excellent results thus far thanks to the hard work of all of those involved. We want to promote DRI seminars as a place that makes our clients excited to meet and engage, and where attention to detail and high quality in the environment we present is deliberate and apparent to each and every person who has made the choice to join us. Every person who contributes their time and money in order to attend a DRI Seminar should feel special, appreciated, and

important. The way we use our resources should reflect that. I am committed to making sure that value is the core of every initiative we undertake, as to every single member.

I also believe we (both DRI and the defense bar) can benefit from being deliberate about cultivating stronger relationships with our SLDOs. These partnerships are vital not only to DRI, but to our collective success. I see a great deal of untapped potential in enhancing collaboration, aligning objectives, and sharing our resources to better support defense attorneys at all levels. A rising tide lifts all boats, and we need to stop getting in our own way and instead find ways to help one another. While many SLDOs have a solid relationship with DRI and vice versa, we must continue to work on those relationships we want to build and improve. DRI should not be viewed as a taker but a partner, and we need to more deliberately place larger emphasis on what we have to offer the SLDOs so that we can dispel these concerns in the areas where they exist.

We are fortunate to have the Center for Law and Public Policy, who has a team of incredibly talented individuals ready to assist with amicus briefs, presentations at SLDO meetings, webinars, and share publications, white papers, and other resources to benefit all those who share the mission and vision of the civil defense bar. We support the NFJE, to combat misinformation and improper influence on the judiciary and our courts by the extremely well-organized plaintiff's bar. The work of the NFJE is important to every defense practitioner and every attorney whose work is to represent businesses, in every state, regardless of whether the clientele is local, regional, national, or global. In speaking with colleagues from other states, there seems to be a misconception by some SLDO members that the attorneys in their state whose clients are primarily local, do not benefit from being associated or involved with DRI. That could not be further from the truth, and it is up to us as leaders of the organization to get that message across and build stronger relationships that benefit DRI and the SLDOs equally.

We need to encourage all of our seminars to engage in local outreach to their host city and/or state's defense organization(s), inviting them to participate, collaborate, and be part of a relationship that is mutually beneficial. Invite them to the networking hour. Ask if they might want to participate as instructors in skills-based activities such as deposition workshops or mock openings/closings. We should be deliberate and proactive about undertaking concrete steps to not just *say* how DRI can benefit the SLDOs, but to *prove* it through action. We can check in with SLDO leaders regularly and offer help with local issues of importance, such as amicus briefing. We can offer help with tort reform efforts. We can offer to have members of the Center and its various task forces present free webinars to SLDO members, and reach out to offer to send a speaker to their meetings.

DRI has long been seen as the leader of the civil defense bar, and is in a unique position to serve not only private practice attorneys but also the corporations,

government entities, and industry stakeholders they represent and counsel. One of my primary goals as an officer would be to broaden our outreach and relevance by intentionally engaging more in-house counsel and corporate professionals. While on the SLC Engagement Committee, I gained appreciation for a number of opportunities that we have not taken advantage of when it comes to programming. Finding new ways to involve and engage corporate counsel should be part of the seminar planning process for every DRI Committee who holds one.

The Corporate Counsel Committee is an excellent resource and DRI should encourage its SLC leadership to engage with them as much as possible. Their participation will provide deeper and better insights into the challenges faced by our clients (which are constantly changing), enabling DRI to create presentations, publications, and networking events that resonate with both attorneys and our clients. Their active involvement benefits all DRI members by providing more targeted business development opportunities and ensuring that DRI offers meaningful, forward-thinking programming and networking opportunities that address what our clients want and need.

Describe one transformational/defining experience in your professional life you have been involved with and what you learned from that experience.

One defining moment, or rather series of related moments, in my career came very early on in practice during a contentious product liability case. A much more senior opposing counsel waved off my discovery requests, namely to inspect a specific component critical to the installation of my client's product. He made clear he did not take me seriously, and after he finally stopped ignoring my requests his conduct during the discovery process was dismissive and rude. Our state bar, though large in number, is quite a small world - one reason why we generally are very cordial and cooperative with one another. This kind of behavior was certainly an outlier.

I had heard stories from a few attorneys in my group of friends about instances of being talked down to and occasionally mistreated by more experienced attorneys, but this was the first time it actually happened to me. During this whole process, there was a moment where I felt disappointed in myself for allowing the opposing attorney to speak to me that way, but it quickly turned into resolve. In response to his dismissive behavior, I filed a motion to compel. He called me shortly thereafter, backed down, and said he "didn't think I was serious." We set the inspection.

That same attorney harassed and badgered my client, the company's representative, during his deposition so intensely, and over my repeated objections, that he finally requested to go off the record for a moment. Before I could suggest stepping outside for a break and some air, out of frustration my

client cursed at the lawyer. Albeit very calmly, my client expressed with some choice words that he felt that he was being asked the same question over and over (he was) and was not going to alter his answer so the attorney was wasting his time. Opposing counsel then immediately asked to go back on record, and repeated verbatim my client's off-the-record statements on the record—a classless move designed to try and intimidate and humiliate.

I took my client outside for a break, listened to his frustrations, calmed him down, and assured him I would protect him. Inside, I wanted to go off on the attorney and embarrass him on the record for stooping to cheap tactics to try to do his job despite touting his extensive "experience", but instead, I held my ground professionally. I then told opposing counsel, on the record, in no uncertain terms, that if he continued his unprofessional behavior, I would not hesitate to stop the deposition. This experience taught me the importance of standing up for myself, my client, and the integrity of the process, even in the face of incivility. I learned that professionalism and resolve are vital, and that being underestimated is often the best motivation to lead with strength and integrity.

The experience also strengthened my desire to take on leadership roles, both within my practice and within the organizations that support our profession. The lessons I carried forward from that case have shaped my approach to every matter since, as well as difficult dealings in organizational situations. This experience taught me that when others underestimate you, you can choose to let it drive you -- to use their low expectations as a source of motivation to be even more prepared, composed, and determined. Reframing these kinds of situations helps transform disrespect and a lack of professionalism into an opportunity to prove your own integrity and capability.

Describe the greatest challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for DRI over the next five+ years.

I see challenges as ways that opportunity presents itself. Some of the most significant challenges ahead for attorneys and organizations representing businesses in litigation stem from social inflation. We need to be firmly positioned to serve as a resource and advocate for our members and clients. The "voice" of the defense bar is needed now more than ever. This is an issue of concern to all of DRI's membership.

DRI has the opportunity to lead the defense bar in becoming more methodical and organized in response to plaintiff tactics that take advantage of shifting juror attitudes, the proliferation of social media narratives that can influence litigation, and increasing use of sophisticated plaintiff-side tactics like anchoring, safety-ism, and third-party litigation funding. We have an opportunity to offer attorneys and clients ways to combat and mitigate these problems. The plaintiffs' bar has been

well-organized for a long time, and it is high time for the defense bar to bridge its disconnect and come together.

DRI and particularly the Center, has always been a thought leader in the defense bar, and has already been making strides through task forces dealing with third-party litigation funding and social inflation, and published white papers analyzing these critical issues. Efforts across the country are being made to amend the rules to require disclosure of TPLF arrangements and we have the chance to be at the forefront of a concerted effort to advocate for this kind of transparency. DRI, through working with the sister organizations (IADC, ADTA, FDCC), SLDOs, insurers, trade associations, and other industry groups, can spearhead a more amplified advocacy that strives to benefit all practitioners and clients.

Another challenge for DRI and similarly situated organizations continues to be growing, retaining, and engaging our membership. Lawyers have a wide range of professional organizations competing for time and dues. That is just one reason why we must put greater value and focus toward the "member experience" - which includes appeal to prospective members. On top of that, millennials and Gen Z guard personal time and space, and want a tangible return on their investment - whether it be time, money, or other resources. There is a perception of less value in traditional bar associations with newer attorneys now, versus 20 or 30 years ago. We have an opportunity to differentiate DRI and show tangible benefits that are important to a changing demographic and a changing legal landscape. DRI has a chance to establish and promote mentorship, which is increasingly important.

While honing in on how we can attract and serve those newer to practice, we cannot and must not forget those on the other end of the spectrum - our past leaders. We have leaders at every level of DRI who should be encouraged to share their institutional knowledge. Engaging past leaders is crucial for organizational continuity, and also for providing the benefit of hindsight. Some of the leaders I have looked up to the most have been those who reflect not only on the successes they had, but also the lessons they learned and what they would do differently.

DRI can face this engagement challenge head-on by creating more opportunities at different levels for past leaders to have a formal role as advisors, giving them a platform to share experience and guide strategy without heavy time commitments. Program Chairs and SLC Chairs should be encouraged to ask past leaders to moderate panels, introduce speakers, or "host" some of the small group networking sessions at seminars. This honors their legacy and helps strengthen connections across generations of members. Getting them involved in mentorship efforts with newer or younger leaders to provide guidance, professional advice, and leadership pointers, would also go a long way. Their credibility carries a great deal of weight.

Last, the proliferation of AI and its increasing capabilities in the professional sector are a growing concern to the defense bar. Some clients are challenging the traditional billable hour model. Expectations surrounding efficiency have changed. Routine, high-volume tasks (such as pleadings, discovery, and regulatory compliance reviews) risk becoming commodities through AI tools, reducing the traditional revenue expected from these areas.

The concerns don't end there. Lawyers may face ethical and malpractice risks from improper reliance on or misuse of AI tools that result in errors or biased outputs. We have already seen an example of this type of mishap before the nation's highest court. One concern that exists for newer law school graduates is the threat that AI poses to their job prospects and careers. AI is now used for tasks like legal research and contract review, which were traditionally entry-level work. There is also a worry that AI could "break" the traditional career ladder by automating tasks that once allowed young lawyers to gain experience and climb the ranks. This also impacts more senior associates and partner-level attorneys due to leaving a large gap in knowledge and skills in the newer associates with whom they work.

Even though the employment rates for recent law school graduates are currently high, and AI isn't eliminating the role of the attorney altogether, the challenges and concerns associated with its use are likely to grow as it gains more sophistication. DRI has an opportunity to prepare and equip its members to handle the technological landscape and its challenges. Expanding on the task force established by the Center, we are poised to be in a position to offer guidance and practical solutions that attorneys and clients can rely on to navigate the changing times. Providing CLE, publications, and panels on ethical, practical, and strategic use of AI in defense practice, some of which is already being presented, ensures that members are informed of the wide array of pros and cons that exist with the intersection of AI and the legal practice. We can change the way we view AI from a technological development that is at times unsettling, to a tool in our toolkit that can be used strategically to better our practice.

Continuing with DRI's tradition of advocacy for the defense bar, we can help shape regulatory and ethical guidelines around AI adoption, ensuring lawyer oversight remains central to client representation. This is an opportunity to further collaborate with SLDOs, our sister organizations, policymakers, and government stakeholders to ensure that these emerging rules governing AI use in legal practice are balanced, practical, and preserve the critical and necessary role of human lawyer oversight. We need to advocate against policies or practices that allow non-lawyer entities using AI to perform legal tasks without accountability, protecting the integrity of legal services and protecting the integrity of our profession. DRI has the resources and the brilliant minds to position itself as a leader in these efforts.

DRI strives to be governed by a diverse board of directors—in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, location, and/or professional level, and other facts that enhance diversity and inclusion --- who can and will help advance DRI's goals through the power of collaboration. In what ways have you demonstrated a commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in your work, and how will your DE&I experience inform your contributions as a Board member?

I have always valued DRI's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and have made efforts to honor that commitment through my actions both within the organization, and in my professional life. I helped lead my firm's Diversity Committee for several years and developed "lunch and learn" presentations to inform and educate our attorneys on topics such as microaggressions. As a member of the firm's Executive Committee, I have spoken up for and promoted inclusive practices in hiring and recruitment, and how we conduct business (e.g., ensuring diverse perspectives are present at meetings, scheduling flexibility, encouraging open communication and inclusion to foster an environment where everyone feels free to share viewpoints).

As former Chair of the Young Lawyers Committee, I can say that this group has been one of the leaders in putting forth and encouraging a visible commitment to DE&I efforts. During our seminars in Minneapolis and Charlotte, we made concerted efforts to feature the most diverse groups of speakers possible. Not only that, but we presented sessions directly related to DE&I topics and challenges newer lawyers may encounter. We encouraged diversity in our Steering Committee by emphasizing our application process, a level playing field, and committing to ensuring that anyone who has the desire to get more involved in YL would have a place with us.

My DE&I experiences have enabled me to be better equipped to recognize voices that may be absent from the table and to ensure that DRI leadership, at every level, seeks out and listens to those perspectives. They have grown my ability to find common ground, navigate complex dynamics, and advance shared goals without diminishing individual identities or those characteristics that make our members diverse. As an officer within this organization, I would help cultivate a leadership culture where inclusion is not just aspirational but operational; where diversity is not tokenized, but meaningfully integrated into leadership and decision-making on a consistent basis.

I have always believed that actions from the top down set the tone for the rest of the organization. People pay attention to actions more than they do words. When leadership embraces and reflects diverse identities and champions inclusive practices, those actions send a message: diversity is not just welcomed here, it is essential. This inspires members at all levels to bring their authentic selves,

contribute their perspectives, and engage fully, knowing they are seen and valued. It also signals to our membership that inclusion is a shared responsibility, not just the work of a DE&I committee. We all need to be accountable.

Board and Executive-level leadership shapes organizational goals, strategic planning decisions, and programming. Leadership that is informed by DE&I principles will advocate for initiatives that broaden access to leadership, elevate marginalized voices, and ensure that educational content and membership benefits reflect the wide range of members' professional and personal realities. Members are more likely to engage deeply with an organization when they see leadership that reflects their identities and experiences. Inclusive leadership builds trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement because it validates members' sense of belonging and assures them their contributions will be respected, valued, and welcomed.

Is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been previously stated?

Pursuing an officer position in DRI is a meaningful choice to help shape the future of our organization and strengthen the community that has already given so much to me, both personally and professionally. As leaders, we have a responsibility not only to represent but to uplift; to capitalize on our strengths for the benefit of others and to ensure the organization remains forward-focused, responsive, and relevant. At the heart of this organization are the personal relationships we form. Like many of us, I am here because someone once saw potential in me, offered encouragement, and opened a door. I view this opportunity as a way to pay that forward and to be that person for others. It's not just about leadership titles; it's about creating belonging, empowering the next generation, and making sure people feel seen, heard, and valued.

I also believe that Board and Committee leadership engagement and transparent communication are critical to the long-term success of DRI. We are most effective when our leaders are accessible and when we foster a culture of collaboration and accountability.

That means listening to members. That means being present and responsive. That means making space for diverse voices and perspectives. It also means taking ownership and pride in our responsibilities, following through on our commitments, and being open about our challenges as well as our successes. When leaders lead with authenticity, emotional intelligence, inclusivity, and a shared sense of purpose and vision, members feel more invested and are inspired to stay actively involved.

Lastly, we cannot lose sight of the importance of our SLCs, where so many members find their "home" within the organization. I found it in the Young

Lawyers Committee and later was welcomed by the Product Liability Committee. DRI's many Committees offer a sense of identity and purpose, and I'm committed to supporting and growing those spaces so that every member, regardless of where they are in their career, feels connected and invested.

This role is about stewardship, which means protecting what makes this organization special while also guiding it forward with intention and care. I am prepared to lead with integrity, enthusiasm, and a deep commitment to the people who make this organization so meaningful. From the members who volunteer their time, the leaders who pave the way, the mentors who invest in others, to the new faces looking to find their place, every individual plays a vital role in shaping the spirit and future of our organization and are ultimately the core of DRI. As a leader, I feel it is my responsibility to recognize, amplify, and support that energy, and commit to doing so as an officer. I will strive to create opportunities for engagement, ensure every voice has space to be heard, and foster an environment where all members feel valued and empowered to contribute.