

March 30, 2012

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Access & Fairness Programs
Attn Brandi Holmes
AwardsReception@calbar.ca.gov
The State Bar of California
180 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Nomination of Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF) for the State Bar of California 2012 Diversity Award for Bar Association

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to enthusiastically endorse the Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (“BALIF”) for the State Bar of California 2012 Diversity Award for Bar Association. Despite being one of California’s largest and most active minority bar associations, BALIF has not yet received this award. And given BALIF’s especially impressive record this past year of unprecedented membership growth, facilitation of a broader-than-ever array of educational, social, and community outreach activities, greatly expanded scholarship giving, and its achievement of many other notable successes related to encouraging, increasing, and maintaining diversity in the legal profession, this year seems a perfect time to recognize BALIF with this award.

BALIF is the nation’s oldest and largest bar association of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) persons working in the field of law. Founded in San Francisco in 1980 for the principal purpose of recruiting and supporting LGBT candidates for positions on the bench, BALIF now represents its members’ interests throughout the Bay Area and offers a broad variety of educational programming, mentoring, social events, community outreach, and political and judicial advocacy via ten active committees—each chaired by one or two of BALIF’s seventeen board members and led by current BALIF Co-Chairs, David Tsai and Chelsey HaleyNelson. BALIF members now number nearly 700, including San Francisco Bay Area judges, lawyers, law students, and other legal workers.

Please find enclosed a nomination packet detailing the various successes achieved by BALIF this past year in encouraging, increasing, and maintaining diversity with respect to LGBT individuals in its bar membership and among the greater legal profession. Highlights include the following:

- ***Unprecedented growth in membership and a new website:*** BALIF expanded its membership over the past two years both in terms of sheer numbers (by an impressive rate of 60%, from 400 to nearly 700) and in breadth (by focusing attention on better inclusion of lapsed and older members, women, and law students), resulting in BALIF membership now being the largest it has ever been. BALIF members also now benefit from individual profiles, an event calendar, and other expanded resources on a greatly improved, interactive website launched in early 2012, located at www.balif.org.
- ***Participation in the “It Gets Better” Campaign to give hope to LGBT youth:*** Twenty-five of BALIF’s best and brightest—including judges, attorneys, and law students from a range of ages, races, and gender (male, female, and transgendered)—filmed videos last year telling their individual stories to show how being bullied motivated them to fight back using the law—helping to inspire LGBT youth that “It Gets Better.” These videos are now posted on the www.itgetsbetter.org website and have been viewed thousands of times. I have personally watched some of them, including those featuring Kelly Dermody (current Bar Association of San Francisco (“BASF”) President) and BALIF Co-Chair David Tsai – and words cannot describe how moved I was.
- ***Election of Judge Kolakowski and other efforts to promote diversity on the bench and in local political office:*** BALIF continues its founding objective to recruit and promote LGBT and LGBT-friendly candidates for local office and the bench, specifically this past year by interviewing and endorsing candidates for each major Bay Area and San Francisco race for the 2011 election. An especially notable, recent success in this area was BALIF’s instrumental support in 2010 in helping to elect Judge Victoria Kolakowski to the Alameda County Superior Court, where she now serves as the nation’s first openly-transgender trial court judge. Judge Kolakowski was honored as a Community Marshall in the 2011 San Francisco Pride Parade, and she selected BALIF to march with her to show her appreciation to the organization for its assistance with her campaign.
- ***Expansion of the “Connections” LGBT law student mentorship program:*** Established in 2009, the “Connections” mentorship program grew this year to include 35 pairings of attorneys and law students and proved to be so popular, in fact, that a waitlist has been started for new participants. BALIF devoted an exceptional amount of energy to the program, carefully matching and monitoring each pair, hosting regular social and career-oriented events, and requiring frequent “check-ins.” As a result, several mentees secured job interviews or legal internships due to the help of their mentors.
- ***Successful fundraising at its annual SFMOMA Gala:*** BALIF’s major undertaking each year is its annual gala, and that event was as successful this past year as it has ever been. Hosted at the SFMOMA on March 9, 2012, the event grossed over \$150,000 to support BALIF’s various programs, initiatives, and scholarships. BALIF also recognized with special awards that night the Transgender law Center, Lambda Legal, the law firm of

Morrison & Foerster LLP, and the Berkeley Law Queer Caucus.

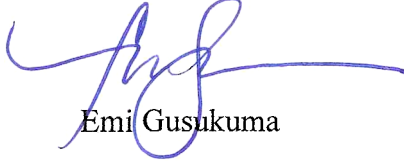
- ***Donating thousands of dollars in scholarship money to law students engaged in a wide array of public interest work:*** BALIF greatly expanded its scholarship program for law students this past year to include grants co-sponsored by each of the following groups (most for the first time): BASF, Pride Law Fund, Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Silicon Valley, Vietnamese American Bar Association of Northern California, and San Francisco La Raza Lawyers' Association. These grants totaled some \$15,000 and will benefit six law students from various Bay Area law schools.
- ***Coordination of the submission of amicus briefs in important LGBT court cases:*** This past year, BALIF coordinated the submission of two important amicus briefs in *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, the lawsuit challenging the constitutional validity of Proposition 8 in federal court. Both briefs were joined by dozens of other minority bar associations located throughout California and various other national and local non-profit organizations.
- ***Community outreach, co-sponsorship of special events, and volunteer projects:*** BALIF maintains close ties to the Bay Area Minority Bar Coalition and its individual, sister minority bar organizations, continually striving to cross-promote and co-sponsor events and increase awareness of shared issues of concern. This past year, BALIF most notably facilitated attorney involvement in the "Day of Decision" events held on February 7, 2012, in relation to the Ninth Circuit releasing its historic decision regarding the unconstitutionality of Proposition 8, and BALIF also co-sponsored events with such organizations as BASF, the Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights, the San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association, and the Rainbow Committee of the Santa Clara County Bar Association. BALIF also encourages its members to actively give back to the community by sponsoring volunteer events that have benefited such organizations as the San Francisco Food Bank and Trevor Project.
- ***Providing LGBT-related MCLE training for Bay Area legal professionals:*** BALIF hosted a number of well-attended, free MCLE events over the past year. These included trainings on prenuptial agreements, the ethical and practical implications of outsourcing legal work, and a women-focused panel about career transitions in the legal world.
- ***Providing assistance to LGBT attorneys in the current lackluster economy:*** Because the legal job market remains rough for many attorneys in the Bay Area, BALIF orchestrated a "BALIF Stimulus Package" to provide complimentary membership to any non-working attorneys, created an internal job site to post hundreds of insider job opportunities for BALIF members, and began a "BALIF Referral Directory" on its website that enables the public to search for and identify LGBT attorneys.

As demonstrated here and in the attached, more detailed nomination packet, this year BALIF is most deserving of the State Bar of California 2012 Diversity Award for Bar Association. As someone who currently heads one of BALIF's sister minority bar groups, the Asian American Bar Association of the Greater Bay Area (though I do not write to you in that capacity), I am

impressed with the incredible hard work and dedication of BALIF's board over this past year to encourage, increase, and maintain diversity with respect to LGBT individuals in its bar membership and among the greater legal profession. For these reasons, it is my honor to nominate BALIF for this well-deserved recognition. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Spencer Jones, the BALIF Board's Outreach Co-Chair (at spencerjones@omm.com or 415-984-8956), with any questions, or if you require additional information.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely Yours,



Emi Gusukuma