

## Robinson & Cole Launches New D&I Initiatives

By **Adrian Cruz**

*Law360 (June 4, 2021, 4:23 PM EDT)* -- Hartford, Connecticut-based Robinson & Cole LLP has launched a number of new diversity and inclusion initiatives including embracing the use of preferred personal pronouns and giving billable credit to attorneys who engage in D&I activities, the firm announced Friday.

Managing partner Rhonda J. Tobin told Law360 Pulse that the effort is part of Robinson & Cole's strategic plan, which is in year two of a three-year process. Following the firm's hire of its first chief talent officer, she said it was placing new emphasis on developing and implementing new ways to promote diversity and inclusion.

"It's a central part of our strategy plan, and one of the core elements of that focuses on our talent, which includes increasing our diversity," she said. "Right before COVID hit a little over a year ago, we hired our first chief talent officer to ensure that everything we're doing in terms of talent recruitment, development and retention is furthering our D&I action plan."

At the beginning of June, Robinson & Cole started giving attorneys the option of including their preferred pronouns in their email signatures and firm website profiles, which Tobin said was launched to coincide with LGBTQ Pride Month.

"We recognize the historical efforts to achieve equality by the LGBTQ community, that's something we felt was important to do, to support not only our own lawyers and staff, but clients and the community in general," she said.

Along with recognizing the LGBTQ community this month, Robinson & Cole started a program to recognize Juneteenth, hosting a town hall meeting featuring author Shawn Rochester, who wrote a book called "The Black Tax: The Cost of Being Black in America." As part of the town hall, the firm agreed to cover the costs of the book to any attorneys and staff who wanted a copy in advance of the event.

"We did one last year as well. I know some firms are looking at Juneteenth as a day off, but because it falls on a weekend this year, we couldn't do it that way," Tobin said. "Either way, it would be better to bring our people together to educate them and bring them into a setting to participate."

Earlier in the year, attorneys were given the option of receiving up to 50 hours in billable-hour credit for any activities related to diversity and inclusion, which Tobin said includes activities such as mentorship of law students and lawyers from underrepresented groups, work for affinity bar organizations and

other internal and external D&I initiatives.

Robinson & Cole also started a program giving nursing mothers access to a breast milk delivery and storage service, which Tobin said was inspired by an associate who found access to breast milk a challenge while on a work trip.

"When traveling, she ran into issues that none of us certainly would've thought about while traveling for business, having to figure out ways to store and travel with breast milk, dealing with TSA at the airport raising questions about it, and we're really happy to have discovered companies who can facilitate that for our people," she said.

The latest diversity initiatives continue what has been a major focus of the firm over the last few years. Last September, Robinson & Cole became Mansfield Certified after agreeing to consider at least 30 percent "historically underrepresented lawyers" for leadership positions and the firm also joined the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, a group that works on creating large pro bono projects to address the issue of systemic racism.

"We continue to try to adopt best practices and include new voices in management," Tobin said. "Our Mansfield Rule certification has really allowed us to diversify people who are in leadership by having us assess more diverse lawyers and lawyers of color. I think by broadening the people in leadership and who are bringing new voices to leadership and the D&I committee, we're really hoping to have these different perspectives and ideas."

--Editing by Peter Rozovsky.