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Husch Blackwell Hires Houston Lawyer For 'Mountaintop Work' on Racial Justice Project

As the firm's pro bono counsel, Quincy McNeal will provide support for minority-owned businesses to make a difference that "compounds over time."

BY BRENDA SAPINO JEFFREYS

Husch Blackwell has hired Quincy McNeal as pro bono counsel in Houston, a newly created firmwide position. McNeal's hiring is part of **HB Communities for Change**, a program aimed at having a positive impact on racial justice.

Litigator McNeal's task is to lead a firmwide effort to help minority-owned businesses achieve economic success. Margaret Richards, Husch Blackwell's director of pro bono services, said in a press release that the goal is making a difference that "compounds over time."

The kind of pro bono work that McNeal and others at the firm will do to assist minority-owned businesses is one way business-focused firms can leverage their expertise to advance racial justice efforts. Husch Blackwell has 21 offices across the country, including a **virtual office**.

"In short, we will offer the services across the country that already make Husch Blackwell a destination firm for the many clients who have given us their trust and confidence. With my role,

we will do it exclusively for these important minority companies," McNeal said.

Prior to joining Husch Blackwell, McNeal was a senior associate at Mayer Brown in Houston. Earlier in his career, he was a television reporter in Texas and Wisconsin. McNeal recently spoke with Texas Lawyer about his new position at Husch Blackwell.

The conversation has been lightly edited for length and style.

Brenda Sapino Jeffreys: You are now pro bono counsel at Husch Blackwell's Houston office, a new position. What will you be doing in that role?

Quincy McNeal: I will be representing minority companies, working to help minority companies gain a footing in the marketplace, greater than they have. The work itself will be as varied as the companies. ... Surely there will also be access-to-capital type of work. These are companies that are meeting their financial obligations now. ... We hope to give them a lift. They are contractors,



(Courtesy Photo)

Quincy McNeal, Pro Bono Counsel, Husch Blackwell, Houston.

minority contractors. They have to be certified as minority businesses to get this work. It's a whole lot easier for them to get this work if they are certified.

BJ: How will you identify clients?

QN: One of the ways is ... partnering with nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups. We want to hear from them [about] the companies that exist in the communities where Husch Blackwell lives. This is a firmwide position. It's an ambitious position. It's a lot of work.

The other part of it is we will hear directly from companies ourselves. We need to get the word out as robustly as we can [that] we bring good news, and we want to be helpful to you. Right now we are internally discussing how to do that. It will probably take some sort of intake mechanism, probably directed to a website.

BJ: How would you describe these pro bono clients?

QM: In my mind we are talking about a company that is providing value to the community. It's minority-owned, it's minority-operated, it has minority employees. It provides some sort of value. It's a company that's meeting its obligations. It's a company that has a vision and wants to go somewhere.

BJ: What specific assistance do you expect to provide to the minority-owned businesses?

QM: We will be helping with a host of the minority companies' legal needs, depending on the industries in which they operate. We envision that these services will be as varied and diverse as those services we provide our fee-paying clients in the same industries. We will provide help accessing capital and seed money for existing companies and for startups. We will counsel on intellectual property protection. We will help minority contractors obtain the certifications they need to help them obtain the government bidding work that is a staple of their businesses. We will surely aid with corporate and nonprofit entity formation, governance and compliance.

We will aid minority entities with advice on contract drafting, transactional agreements and legal assistance with their day-to-day operations. We will provide support in dispute resolution to help these clients settle disputes or, when necessary, go to court to vindicate their rights.

BJ: Will this require you to travel a lot?

QM: We are in a COVID situation right now. I don't think that travel is foreclosed even now. [But] it's got to be safe. It's got to make sense and be reasonable. This position will require me to go to the different places where we have offices, at least initially, because we have to build relationships.

BJ: How committed have you been to pro bono throughout your career? What have you done in the past at your prior firm?

The firm really wanted us to do 60 to 70 hours. I was doing 300 hours.

The stuff that really resonated to me was the prisoner work, also working on immigration cases, people seeking asylum. I worked for a nonprofit that worked with battered women. I also worked for Texas Appleseed and represented a guy on an actual innocence claim.

My regular litigation was high-stakes, bet-the-farm oil and gas, pharmaceutical defense, mortgage lending deference, and contracts.

BJ: Would this position have been created if not for the recent emphasis on racial justice nationally, in the wake of the death of George Floyd and other minorities?

QM: Yes. This is really a no-brainer because the minority company has been on the front lines of social justice reform for years, and it seems to me that law firms or other organizations seeking reform in that area would be a part of this.

What we are really doing is simply strengthening that longtime institution which has provided economic and racial justice for minority companies. ... This is mountaintop work [to] help them flourish, help them prosper.

BJ: What kind of support will the firm provide?

QM: The firm is certainly going to give me administrative support. I can't tell you all the calls I have gotten from lawyers who want to be a part of this. There may be a perception I will do all of this work [but] part of this job is me reaching out to the terrific lawyers and staff here and recruiting. A part of what I'm going is reaching out to my pro bono liaisons ... I'm saying, 'Guys, get at it.'

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