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Be the Change

Thompson Hine congratulates this year's Business First Diversity in Business Awards honorees. Your collective efforts and commitment are driving the positive change that is making our communities and businesses more diverse and inclusive. As a reflection of this shared commitment, our firmwide Diversity & Inclusion Initiative has chosen "Be the Change" as its 2019–2020 theme.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of the 2019 honorees, we recognize that building inclusive and diverse communities requires people from all different backgrounds to work together to effect positive change – in other words, to "Be the Change." For truly meaningful transformation to take place, the majority must help, support and advocate for the minority and serve as allies. If effectively engaged, allies hold the power and the keys to stimulate positive change.

An ally is any person who "actively promotes and takes action to advance a culture of inclusion through intentional, positive and conscious efforts that benefit a community as a whole." To put it simply, an ally is someone who is supportive of, sympathetic toward, and advocates for, a different group of people. Our 2019 honorees are excellent examples of dedicated allies we can look to for inspiration. Our communities consist of people with a broad range of backgrounds, beliefs, lifestyles, abilities and experiences, and our allies work diligently to help ensure that our businesses reflect this diversity.

There are a number of reasons one might decide to be an ally. For many people, it is simply about doing what is right. Others become allies because they are personally affected. While the motivations vary, the support of allies in driving business, societal and cultural change is essential.

So, what are some effective ways to become an ally?

- **Acknowledge privilege.** It is important for allies to acknowledge their own privilege and how it often affords them the ability to more effectively break down barriers and get the right message across on behalf of underrepresented or marginalized groups.
- **Interrupt unconscious bias.** It is critical that allies recognize and be vigilant about interrupting their own biases. They must also take it a step further by speaking up and disrupting biases they observe in others. Allies, by their sheer volume and identity, help highlight and break down barriers and amplify the voices of those they stand with.
- **Stay educated.** To be persuasive, allies must educate themselves on matters affecting marginalized communities — such as stereotyping, microaggressions and implicit bias. Having a clear understanding of the issues faced by those in these communities, and of the language necessary to speak on their behalf, allows allies to more effectively drive the positive change that advances diversity and inclusion.

Thompson Hine is dedicated to fostering environments within our firm and our communities that encourage allyship. We view allies as critical to the success of our mission to improve diversity and inclusion within our firm, the legal profession and the broader business community. We believe that a diverse and inclusive corporate culture, community and society can be realized only when individuals collaborate to promote valuing different viewpoints and advocate for equality in all settings.

To that end, Thompson Hine has developed a comprehensive action plan that includes opportunities for allies to learn and get involved. Our commitment to diversity and inclusion and the development of allies within our firm and communities starts at the top, with our Managing Partner leading the way. We applaud our internal allies, who are committed to ensuring that we have an inclusive workplace where all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully and afforded equal access to opportunities and resources, allowing them to play a vital role in our success. And they are not alone, as they routinely work with others in our communities, including those we are honoring with Diversity in Business Awards. Together we can and will "Be the Change." ■