

## NEWS

## Law Firms Form “Carolinas Social Impact Initiative” to Support Inclusivity and Economic Mobility in the Carolinas

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Leading national, regional and local law firms have joined forces to create the Carolinas Social Impact Initiative, an effort to foster a more inclusive community and reduce systemic barriers to social and economic mobility in the Carolinas. Today they are also announcing their first program, the Charlotte Legal Initiative to Mobilize Businesses (CLIMB), which will provide volunteer legal services to low-income entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Charlotte area.

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder in May 2020, 24 law firm leaders came together in Charlotte to discuss how they could harness their energy and resources to address racial disparities and social injustices. This group eventually formed the Carolinas Social Impact Initiative, with members including the law firms Alexander Ricks; Alston & Bird; Bradley; Cadwalader, Wickersham and Taft; Hamilton Stephens Steel + Martin; Hedrick Gardner; Holland & Knight; Hunton Andrews Kurth; James McElroy & Diehl; Johnston, Allison & Hord; Katten Muchin Rosenman; King & Spalding; K&L Gates; Mayer Brown; McGuireWoods; Moore & Van Allen; Nelson Mullins; Offit Kurman; Parker Poe; Robinson Bradshaw; Shumaker; Troutman Pepper; Winston & Strawn; and Womble Bond Dickinson.

Drawing inspiration from the work of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force, Charlotte’s Leading on Opportunity Council and other community leaders, the law firm coalition is focused on four areas: supporting minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurs; advancing educational opportunities; supporting family stability and social justice; and improving access to social capital and career opportunities.

“We formed the Carolinas Social Impact Initiative so that we as legal leaders can help drive progress on racial equity and economic mobility,” said Tom Griffin, Parker Poe’s managing partner. “We recognize that these are long-term challenges that require long-term solutions, and we are committing our time and resources to work for the change that we want to see.”

“Tackling issues of race and equity is not easy but certainly necessary, especially after the events of last year and the continued impacts of the pandemic,” said Sherri Chisholm, executive director of Leading on Opportunity. “The members of the Carolinas Social Impact Initiative have been intentional about their work in the community, speaking directly with community members and leaders to determine the best approach for their unique skills and network. Leading on Opportunity is thankful to walk alongside the initiative on this journey and looks forward to the lasting impact it will make on Charlotte for years to come.”

## LAW FIRMS FORM “CAROLINAS SOCIAL IMPACT INITIATIVE” TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVITY AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY IN THE CAROLINAS

The Carolinas Social Impact Initiative’s first program is the Charlotte Legal Initiative to Mobilize Businesses (CLIMB). It was spearheaded by member firms Moore & Van Allen and Robinson Bradshaw, which will be joined by other coalition firms to provide volunteer (pro bono) business law services to low-income entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Charlotte area, with a focus on small businesses whose ownership consists primarily of people of color, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, veterans or people with disabilities. By providing access to legal services to low-income entrepreneurs who cannot otherwise afford legal services, CLIMB’s mission is to support the individuals and enterprises whose success is essential to increasing economic opportunities in historically under-resourced communities of Charlotte.

“The CLIMB model is one that will benefit our small businesses that often struggle to afford the legal protection and support needed to succeed in this economy,” said Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles. “We are grateful to the Carolinas Social Impact Initiative – and Robinson Bradshaw and Moore & Van Allen in particular – for bringing this equity-based resource to our city and investing in the success of our business community.”

During CLIMB’s pilot phase, volunteer lawyers from Robinson Bradshaw and Moore & Van Allen will coordinate the administration of the program and provide legal services. In the coming months, a broad range of coalition lawyers – as well as lawyers from other firms and legal employers – are expected to join, motivated to serve those in our community who cannot afford access to the legal system on their own.

Heath Gilbert Jr., immediate past president of the Mecklenburg County Bar, explained, “As lawyers we have a professional societal duty to aid in the provision of legal services for those unable to pay. CLIMB provides a great outlet for lawyers to fulfil the responsibility of pro bono service in a transactional setting. Moreover, through programs such as CLIMB, members of our Bar can help to support and build a foundation for success in our community.”

CLIMB initially will accept applications for help only through referral partners that include The Boost Pad, Carolinas-Virginia Minority Supplier Development Council, Charlotte Business INclusion, Charlotte LGBT Chamber of Commerce, National Black MBA Association, Inc. – Charlotte Chapter, the North Carolina Pro Bono Resource Center, Prospera, and the Women’s Business Center of Charlotte.

“The need for legal services for entrepreneurs and small businesses in Charlotte, especially minority-owned businesses, is exponential. We are pleased to see collaboration efforts like this come to fruition, particularly during these challenging times,” said José D. Alvarez, vice president of Prospera USA. “We are glad to be a part of this pilot program and bring the cultural and in-language perspective to the region’s Latino business community to take advantage of this much-needed pro bono legal service.”

The Carolinas Social Impact Initiative plans to build on CLIMB and launch other efforts focused on inclusivity and economic mobility. It will also work to expand its efforts beyond the Charlotte region.

For additional information about the Carolinas Social Impact Initiative, please contact Michael Tomsic ([michaeltomsic@parkerpoe.com](mailto:michaeltomsic@parkerpoe.com)).

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