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Contact: Jackie Heard
+1.312.902.5450
jackie.heard@katten.com

Leonor Vivanco-Prengaman
+1.312.577.8371
leonor.vivanco-prengaman@katten.com

Katten Chief Talent Officer Highlights Firm Diversity and Parent Support Programs at Well-Being Conference

(CHICAGO) Katten announced today that its Chief Talent Officer Melanie Priddy touted during the Institute for Well-Being in Law (IWIL) inaugural conference the firm's Kattalyst sponsorship program and Parents Affinity Group launched during the pandemic as ways that have helped address some challenges diverse attorneys face in the workplace.

"We knew how important it was for underrepresented attorneys — for attorneys of color, for women — to create these relationships that organically were challenged anyway, but then you add the pandemic on top of that, and people aren't having that face-to-face interaction," Priddy said.

Priddy was a featured speaker on Thursday's panel discussing the impact of COVID-19 and the return to a hybrid work environment for marginalized attorneys. Hers was one of 30 sessions offered at the virtual IWIL conference: Redesigning the Legal Profession for a Better Future. Katten is an IWIL inaugural founding champion.

Katten's Kattalyst program pairs senior associates and income partners with firm leaders and senior-level partners as their sponsors who use their insights and business relationships to open more doors to opportunities. The program is focused on retaining and advancing underrepresented attorneys by offering training and coaching opportunities to help enhance their leadership and business development skills.

Priddy said the program's sponsors and protégés are encouraged to be honest in their conversations without fear of vulnerability.

"Talk about your failures just as much as you talk about your success. It's that resilience and that ability to rebound and comeback from difficult situations that we're all experiencing right now in the pandemic, but obviously can be even more powerful in your careers. Especially for our attorneys of color, for our underrepresented attorneys, the things they are often challenged with

and deal with — and I’m sure we know with regard to biases — that second chances are often not there,” she said.

Another source of support Priddy pointed to is Katten’s Parents Affinity Group, which serves as a resource for working parents to connect and discuss approaches to navigating work and family responsibilities.

“We were hearing initially about the challenges of daycares being closed and schools moving to virtual and women lawyers, specifically, struggling with handling and taking care of billable obligations and their work,” Priddy said.

“I would say [parents experienced] exhaustion, being overwhelmed, frustration because people still wanted to be able to provide optimal client service and do their jobs and they felt like — and I can speak personally — like you were failing on all fronts,” she said. “As an organization, we were trying to figure out ways that we could [offer] support in a situation where there really weren’t any easy answers.”

To that end, Katten provided career coaching to enhance productivity, reduce stress and improve performance, as well as access to a series of webinars on topics including preparing to go back to school and strategies to reduce working parent guilt.

Roz Pitts, Katten’s Director of Professional Development and Well-Being, moderated the IWIL conference’s session on Thursday titled “Well-Being Working Session: Tackling the Tough Issues,” focused on systematic challenges to lawyer wellbeing and how best to tackle them.

Katten is a full-service law firm with approximately 700 attorneys in locations across the United States and in London and Shanghai. Clients seeking sophisticated, high-value legal services turn to Katten for counsel locally, nationally and internationally. The firm’s core areas of practice include corporate, financial markets and funds, insolvency and restructuring, intellectual property, litigation, real estate, structured finance and securitization, transactional tax planning, private credit and private wealth. Katten represents public and private companies in numerous industries, as well as a number of government and nonprofit organizations and individuals. For more information, visit katten.com.

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