

THE **RECORD**ER

Keker Recommits to Diversity Fellowships, Deepening Opposition to Trump Administration Aims

By Amanda O'Brien

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What You Need to Know

- Keker, Van Nest & Peters has announced the four winners of its annual diversity scholarship.
- The announcement comes as the president and his allies continue to target diversity efforts in the legal industry.
- Susman Godfrey, subjected to one of the president's executive orders, has doubled down on its own fellowship prize this year.

Leaders at California litigation boutique Keker, Van Nest & Peters have made no secret of their disdain for the Trump administration's stance on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Now, the firm is doubling down on its diversity scholarship, following in the steps of Susman Godfrey in defying the president's anti-DEI crusade.

Keker Van Nest's diversity scholarship, originally launched in 2011, awards a total of \$100,000 in scholarship funds to a varying number of first-year law students each year. The program additionally pairs recipients with a mentor from Keker Van Nest who will offer guidance throughout the remainder of the recipient's legal education.



Courtesy photo

Laurie Carr Mims of Keker, Van Nest & Peters.

"We are concerned about the efforts that the Trump administration has taken to disparage and dismantle DEI efforts that are lawful and that are designed to open doors of opportunity and give more people the chance to succeed based on their merits," said Keker Van Nest managing partner Laurie Carr Mims. "Now more than ever, we hold steadfast to our values and our conviction that expanding opportunities and access within the legal profession will always be the right thing to do."

In addition to the administration's overall hostile stance to any form of diversity programming, evidenced in president Donald Trump's flurry of executive orders targeting law firms earlier this year and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's request of diversity data from 20 Am Law 200 firms, diversity scholarships have also been a point of particular ire for the administration and its allies.

In a now-prescient probe of law firm diversity fellowships, conservative legal activist Edward Blum and his organization the American Alliance for Equal Rights issued a number of warning letters to firms in 2023 seeking the understand the role race played in a number of diversity fellowships and noting the AAER was considering suing over those programs. Among the targets of those letters were Perkins Coie and Susman Godfrey, who this year were the targets of executive orders issued by the Trump administration over the firms' DEI efforts.

Susman Godfrey, in response to both Blum's letter and Trump's executive order, has doubled down on its diversity efforts and its prize, expanding the program twice in the last two years to allow for more recipients. Other firms, meanwhile, have altered language around their diversity programs and scholarships in an effort to avoid the administration's scrutiny.

Keker Van Nest, meanwhile, has refused to make any changes to its program in response to the administration's actions.

"We have not changed our criteria or selection process in response to either the *SFFA v.*

Harvard opinion or to the Trump administration's actions, and we see no reason to," Mims said. "Our Diversity Scholarship program is lawful, anti-discriminatory, and aligned with our core values and professional ethics. We are proud of how the program has positively impacted the legal profession over the years."

Since its inception, the Keker Van Nest scholarship has been awarded to around 40 law students, with the firm donating \$800,000 as scholarship funds. This year, the program has awarded four law students with scholarships totaling \$100,000.

According to Mims, the firm selected UC Davis School of Law student Trinity Balla, UC Law San Francisco student Jenny Jeon and UC Berkeley School of Law students Neil Gallagher and Marisol Zarate for the scholarship as they "each demonstrated a deep commitment to service and advocacy, a passion for litigation that started well before law school, and because they embodied resilience, grit and determination."

"Our goal is to help law school students on their path to being Bay Area litigators and to give them enough financial support so that they have freedom to choose a career that aligns with their passion and is meaningful to them," Mims explained. "Too often, law students are saddled with school debt that diminishes their choices. Our scholarship program helps lessen that financial burden so our Diversity Scholars can litigate in areas they are passionate about."