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## Kean Miller Attorneys Tout Law School Pipeline Program

By **Adrian Cruz**

*Law360 (August 23, 2023, 2:12 PM EDT)* -- Most major law firms across the United States offer programs for law students interested in joining them after graduation, however, Southeast firm Kean Miller LLP goes one step further by focusing on students before they've made a decision to attend law school.

The initiative, which the firm calls Kean Miller Connection, is a one-day program focused on college students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the legal profession who have expressed interest in going to law school and learning more about what the experience entails.

Managing partner and program founder Linda Perez Clark told Law360 Pulse that she was inspired to launch Kean Miller Connection because of a few foundational moments in college.

A chance encounter with a professor who suggested she pursue law, and participation in a law school prep program that focused on people from underrepresented groups were some of the main factors in her decision to switch career paths from psychology to law.

"If you encourage people and orient them to what the law school experience is about, you're probably going to get more interest from them as they realize they're included in this opportunity," Clark said. "Someone encouraged me and I did a law school prep program and those two things combined is how we got to Kean Miller Connection."

The most recent iteration of the program took place in Kean Miller's Baton Rouge, Louisiana, office in July with a 29-person class that the firm said was the largest in the initiative's history.

Clark said that a typical program offering includes a panel of recent law school graduates sharing their experiences, mock law school classes, a career options panel featuring lawyers from a variety of areas ranging from commercial work, social justice and family law and a "speed dating" style event with Kean Miller attorneys who share information about their respective practices.

Diversity chair Victor Suane added that a main aspect of the program actually takes place after the day's proceedings conclude. Outreach efforts and keeping in touch with participants are a major part of what Kean Miller hopes to achieve with the program, he said.

"We encourage them to stay in contact, ask any questions they have about the process and tell us about their successes, if they need help with challenges or need advice" Suane said. "We try to act as a conduit encouraging diverse students to make the decision to attend law school. We're not just a once-yearly

program, but we're here to assist you. Every year, we get emails and calls from folks saying they're going to law school, and it's exciting to hear that somebody who participated in this program is benefiting from it."

From a recruitment and retention standpoint, Suane said that offering programs such as Kean Miller Connection helps draw attention to the firm both via participant feedback and by being a visible example of the focus that it places on diversity matters, which helps attract a wider range and variety of people interested in joining the firm.

"It's one of those programs that garners the spotlight," he said. "Participants always have outstanding things to say and they tell their friends. A lot of the participants join via word of mouth, coming even from different states because they heard about it from somebody. Any time you are putting resources into programming that is impactful, you receive accolades and excitement from different groups, which attracts people."

According to the firm, more than 300 people have participated in Kean Miller Connection since the program's launch 16 years ago, with a number of them deciding to attend law school and a couple even permanently joining the firm after graduating from law school.

Associate Kelicia Raya was one of those people, deciding to participate in Kean Miller Connection in 2017 while she was working at the firm as a facilities coordinator. She said that the program helped ease her concerns about law school and gave an opportunity to build connections with people at area schools.

"Attending Kean Miller Connection really prepared me for law school, because it not only gave me an opportunity to meet the admissions counselors at all of the Louisiana law schools, but also it prepared me for taking the LSAT, which was really beneficial because it calmed my nerves and made me feel like I can do this."

After attending the program, Raya ended up going to Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, taking night classes and continuing to work at Kean Miller. When it came time to decide what firm to join after graduation, she said her previous experiences working there along with the firm's focus on diversity, equity and inclusion led her to join as a practicing attorney.

"The program targets underrepresented groups interested in law school such as women and people of color, and that's something which is important to me," Raya said. "I want to help diversify the legal profession, and the fact that Kean Miller prioritizes these things speaks volumes for the type of firm it is. I clerked at and received offers from other firms in the city, but Kean Miller stood out to me because of its focus on diversity."

Raya has been an associate with Kean Miller since 2022, focusing her practice on energy and environmental law matters. She said that since joining the firm, she's continued to be active with Kean Miller Connection, participating in the actual program and promoting it at Loyola and Xavier University of Louisiana, where she obtained her undergraduate degree.

"I've been sharing my perspective both as a former law school student and as a practicing attorney," Raya said. "I really want to be a resource to everyone who attends the program and I always give the students my business card and tell them to reach out if they have any questions. A lot of them do, and that fosters a mentor-mentee relationship going forward."

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