

Denver Legal Market To Be Included in Part-Time Partnership Study

By Beth Doherty Quinn, Public Policy Committee Co-Chair

Those of you who have been reading the *Advocate* for a long time will recall the groundbreaking efforts, beginning in 1993, of the Colorado Women's Bar Association (CWBA) and the CWBA Foundation to publish *Gender Penalties: The Results of the Careers and Compensation Study* (pub. 1998) and *Gender Penalties Revisited* (pub. 2004). Those studies, researched and authored by Cathlin Donnell, Joyce Sterling and Nancy Reichman, were a response to the significant income gap between men and women attorneys identified by statewide economic surveys conducted by the Colorado Bar Association in 1993 and 1999. The studies, which involved in-depth interviews with male and female Denver-area attorneys, were intended to identify career choices and constraints potentially associated with the pay disparity.

One of the significant findings of the studies was that women lawyers were leaving the practice of law (at all levels of practice) at significantly higher rates than men. The study found that one of the primary reasons behind the attrition was that women experienced higher dissatisfaction with opportunities for advancement and compensation within their firms. When this higher level of dissatisfaction was coupled with work-life balance issues the women frequently left: "[f]aced with **both** conflict within the work organization and life changes outside the organization, women partners . . . took on new career opportunities away from private legal practice" This steady loss of women partners and associates contributed to the ongoing pay discrepancy. This departure of women attorneys is also the reason that today, in 2008, women attorneys constitute less than twenty percent (20%) of law firm partners, despite the fact that women and men have been graduating from law school in equal numbers since the late 1980s. See, e.g., *2006 NAWL's First National Survey on Retention and Promotion of Women in Law Firms*. Not surprisingly, one of the many recommendations of *Gender Penalties Revisited* was to "recognize and reward better rounded career trajectories, acknowledging the need for and benefits of better work-personal life integration."

In response to this recommendation, and the unacceptably low percentages of women law firm partners, the CWBA Foundation – with generous funding and support from the Colorado Bar Association, Faegre & Benson Foundation and the Donnell Initiative Fund – has just joined forces with the Project for Attorney Retention (PAR) to include Denver in a groundbreaking study of part-time law firm partnerships.

PAR, a nationally recognized leader in the use and value of flexible work schedules, has already developed a best-practice Model Policy on Balanced Hours that is used by many East Coast firms to stem attrition, primarily in the associate ranks.

(For more information, go to www.pardc.org.) PAR is now taking its work a step further by initiating a study of part-time partnership. A December 2007 analysis of the NALP Directory of Legal Employers (covering over 1,500 firms and more than 135,000 lawyers nationwide) showed that 5.4% (or 7,300) of those attorneys worked part-time. Seventy-five percent of those part-time lawyers were women. In the partnership ranks, 3.0% (or 1,850) of the 61,000 NALP partners worked part-time. Women partners engage in part-time work at greater percentages than men. Of the total female NALP partner population, 11.7% worked part-time compared to only 1.1% of male NALP partners. Of course, many other attorneys not associated with NALP are practicing part-time. Some estimates reach as high as 60,000 lawyers practicing part-time nationwide.

PAR, along with the CWBA Foundation, will study part-time partners in law firms to identify roadblocks they face and present best-practice solutions to overcome those challenges. The study will provide best practices that law firms can use not only to develop effective policies, but also to establish fair compensation structures and practices for attorneys who want to reduce their hours and still maintain a successful and profitable relationship with their firm. The hope is that this study will be used by law firms here in Colorado, and nationally, to create work environments that cause women lawyers to stay in the partnership ranks in greater numbers.

The study, to be conducted in Washington D.C., Denver, CO and potentially, San Francisco, CA, will involve in-depth interviews (with guarantees of confidentiality) with part-time partners. These interviews will cover professional and personal information relating to the partners' reduced-hours arrangements, their satisfaction with their arrangements, the methods used to compensate and evaluate them, their business generation, and their service to their firms. The information will be used to develop a best practices model and a report on part-time partnership that can be used nationally.

The CWBA Foundation is very proud to be part of this cutting edge effort. The CWBA is grateful to PAR, for including Denver in the study, and to the Colorado Bar Association, Faegre & Benson Foundation and the Donnell Initiative Fund, for their unwavering support and financial contributions. If you are a part-time partner or know of a part-time partner who would like to be contacted for this study, please e-mail either Beth Doherty Quinn (bdq@bairdkiovsky.com) or Connie Talmage (CTalmage@coloradolawyerscommittee.org). Also, if you would like more information about the study or want to help with the study, please let Beth or Connie know. ♦