

2023

ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION
OF
BLACK
PARALEGALS

ANNUAL REPORT

IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTORSHIP,
REPRESENTATION AND JUSTICE.

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The Beginning: Message from April Bollers

Someone once told me that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. What an amazing statement! But for many of us, there simply aren't enough people who are willing to even give us a shot.

Imagine working hard, and having so many hopes and dreams about where your hard work would take you. Then imagine that despite your hard work, you are passed over again and again for promotions and opportunities, even though your skill level and education far outweigh that of others you work with. And now imagine becoming aware, through your own observations and those of others (including non-racialized colleagues), that you are being held back because of your ethnicity.

After having to deal with this reality for a number of years, I simply got tired of it and became very angry. As far as I was aware at the time, there were no organizations or definitive resources out there that specifically addressed or acknowledged the lived experiences of Black paralegals and Black legal professionals.

One day, I had the good fortune of meeting Deborah Moriah while networking on LinkedIn. We exchanged messages and she let me in on her vision to create an organization to support Black paralegals and the rationale behind it, which spoke directly to what I'd experienced and to what I hoped the Paralegal profession would look like in the future. Royland Moriah also joined us and offered his expertise (legal and otherwise) which gave us the final push to put the vision into action. We started the Ontario Association of Black Paralegals three years ago and we have since also had the privilege of having Chantelle Campbell and Sehmani Leo to join us on the Board of Directors.

As we move into 2024, we look forward to continuing our work and expanding operations with the addition of new volunteer board and committee members. I look forward to seeing how much we will grow!



Co-Founder & Interim President **4**



Message from Royland Moriah

As I reflect on the past year, I cannot help but feel excited by what we've been able to overcome and achieve and energized for the future. This is a testament to the vision, hard work, and dedication of my fellow board members, our committed membership, and the many community partners and legal organisations we've partnered with in our mission to increase access to justice, mentor Black paralegals, and educate and uplift the legal profession.

It has been an incredible first few years of growth for our fledgling organization and this year was no different. We continue to provide mentorship and access to a community of support for members of the Black community interested in the paralegal profession. We've partnered with various organizations committed to increasing access to justice. We've implemented a new strategic plan. We've continued to work on projects that we're excited to share with our members and the legal profession in the coming year.

But this journey has only just begun, and we recognize we have so much further to go but are committed to see it through to the end. We know this requires patience and resolve. It requires vision and determination. It requires a continual self reflection and reassessment of our goals. It requires a continued commitment to serve and uplift our community by working with our community. This is a journey that will take time. But as one proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together."

We are committed to going far and we look forward to working with our community and partners to go as far as possible. We are thankful for everyone who has joined us on this journey. We know that with your commitment we will all go far.

Royland Moriah

Co-Founder & Treasurer

Our Team



April Bollers, Co-Founder & Interim President



Chantelle Campbell, Vice President



Royland Moriah, Co-Founder & Treasurer



Sehmani Leo, Law Clerk Liaison



Deborah Moriah, Co-Founder & Past President

The OABP "**PEER** Mandate" improves access to justice and combats systemic racism within the justice system by:

Providing mentorship opportunities for Black paralegals to help build capacity within the Black legal community and promote career equality and advancement;

Equipping Black paralegals with the tools to navigate systemic injustice in the workplace;

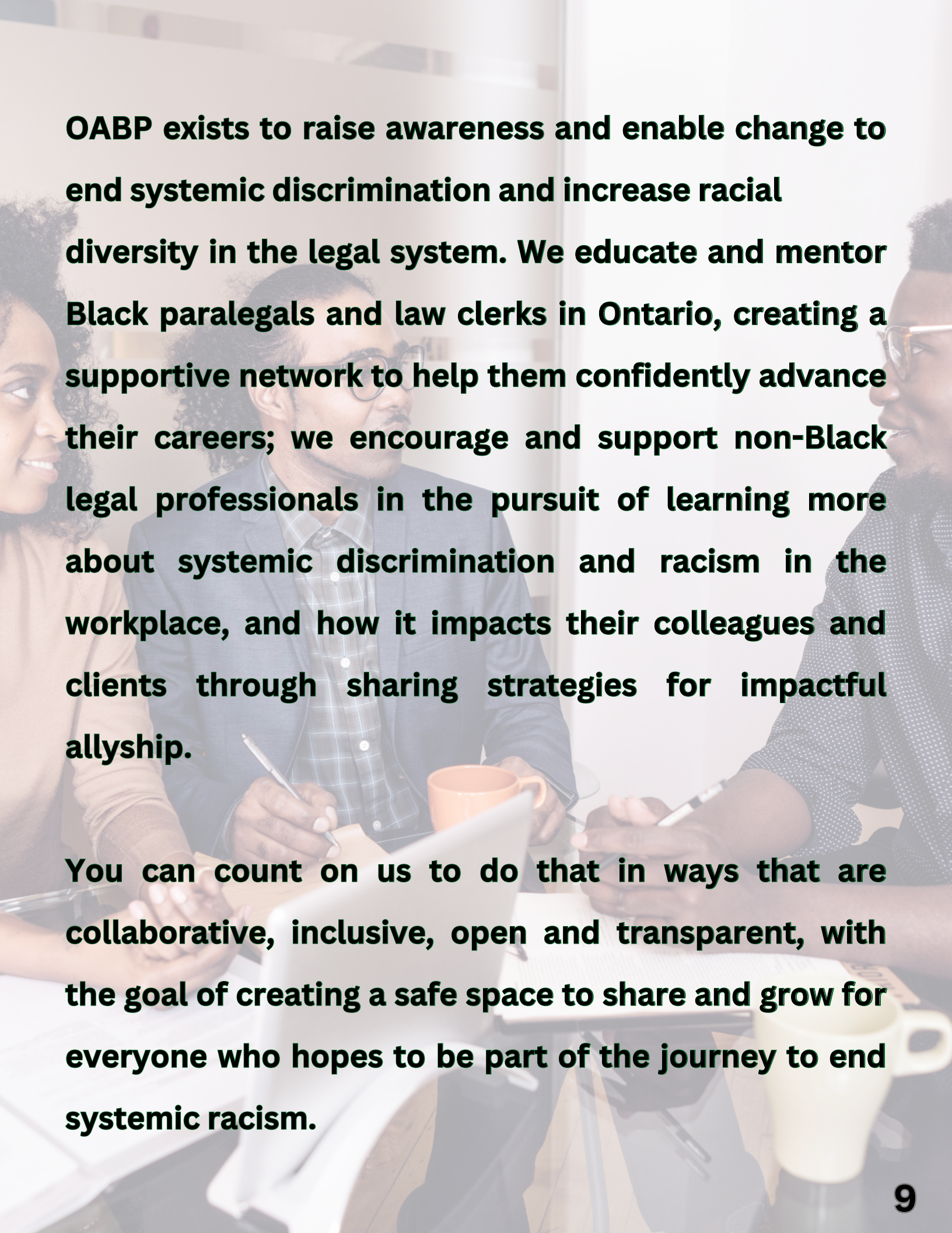
Eliminating the economic barriers which inhibit racialized Ontarians' ability to pursue civil matters related to racism, discrimination, diversity and inclusion; and

Recognizing, denouncing and combating systemic inequality in the justice system while equipping all legal professionals with the tools to do the same.

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF
BLACK PARALEGALS**



#OABParalegals



OABP exists to raise awareness and enable change to end systemic discrimination and increase racial diversity in the legal system. We educate and mentor Black paralegals and law clerks in Ontario, creating a supportive network to help them confidently advance their careers; we encourage and support non-Black legal professionals in the pursuit of learning more about systemic discrimination and racism in the workplace, and how it impacts their colleagues and clients through sharing strategies for impactful allyship.

You can count on us to do that in ways that are collaborative, inclusive, open and transparent, with the goal of creating a safe space to share and grow for everyone who hopes to be part of the journey to end systemic racism.



Strategic Planning

In 2023, OABP had the privilege of working with **Endeavour Consulting** to create our very first strategic plan. The plan sets out the organization's immediate and long-term goals for growth, capacity building, sustainability and succession.

4 Key Pillars

Over the next 5 years, OABP's key pillars are:

Governance: To establish a formal organizational structure, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, operating process, polices, controls and performance evaluation standards.

Engagement: To improve engagement and attendance from target audience and members.

Education: To develop a certain number of CPD workshops focusing on practical knowledge for legal professionals to fill the gaps between formal education and workplace need. As well, to keep ourselves up to date with general legal knowledge.

Communication: To build brand awareness and clear messaging of OABP offerings within the community, to have a functional system in place to support those from racialized communities and to build intentional, value-adding relationships, establish stronger collaboration and more effective resource sharing with legal or cross-profession organizations.



**Navigating Racism in the
Workplace Workshop
Series & Documentary**

In 2022, with the assistance of **STR Consulting**, OABP designed and delivered a workshop series entitled **Navigating Racism in the Workplace**. This **trauma-informed, strength-based program** was designed to **support Black legal professionals while closely considering their strengths, experiences, values, and learning needs**. The course also explored the responsibility of all legal professionals to recognize, denounce and prevent systemic injustice directed at clients and colleagues. Although the program was designed for Black legal professionals, it was well received and attended by community members navigating discrimination in their daily lives. The program was held at York University from September - November 2022. As a result of its success and demand, OABP is holding additional sessions (one in person and one online) in January 2024.

OABP is currently **filming a documentary**, based on the program, for which we are seeking additional funding. The **film explores the experiences of Black legal professionals in the justice system**. Interviewees include paralegals, law clerks, lawyers and judges.

Interested in participating in the documentary? Contact us at info@oabp.org regarding interview opportunities or if you would like to provide a donation you may do so **[HERE](#)**.

[Watch the Navigating Racism Series Video Recap Here](#)



[Watch the Trailer for Judged Before the Judge Here](#)

Demonstrations over Declarations...

Black North Pledge

- There was a 2020 pledge for Black North's call to action to tackle systemic racism over 5 years
- Out of 481 companies that signed on only 10% have reported an improvement in the number of Black employees, Black Directors and Black Executives
- The Median average for Black employees improved from 3.7% to 4.8% of the 145 companies that responded Glob's survey in 2020

Two years after signing BlackNorth Initiative, majority of companies have failed to make substantial progress on diversity, survey shows

Corporate Canada pushed to see BlackNorth Initiative two years ago, but a new Globe survey shows that enhancing diversity is still a challenge

7 prong pledge

- 3.5 % of Board and Executives occupied by Black people by 2025
- Black student interns make up 5% of overall intern pool
- 3% corporate donations that create economic opportunities in the Black community







Foundations of Racism

ning. Dialog



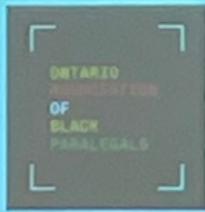




A group of approximately eight women are seated around a long, dark table in a restaurant. They are engaged in conversation. The table is set with various dishes, including a large wooden platter of appetizers like sliders and small pastries, a green bottle of beer, and several glasses. The background features large windows looking out onto a city street with buildings and umbrellas. The restaurant's interior has a modern, industrial feel with exposed ceiling beams and decorative wall panels made of dried leaves or paper. A menu board is visible on the left side of the frame.

Networking

Boukan Restaurant
July 2023



YWML

FASKEN
Own tomorrow

Women in Law: An Evening of Networking



Jacqueline Horvat,
Treasurer - LSO



Atrisha Lewis, Bencher -
LSO



Michelle Lomazzo,
Bencher - LSO





Boukan Restaurant
July 2023

OABP held several networking events in 2023 with a focus on bringing members together and providing the opportunity for them to meet each other and other individuals within the legal profession.

In February, the organization in collaboration with **Young Women in Law** and **Fasken LLP** held an event entitled “**Women in Law: An Evening of Networking**”. Despite an ice storm, more than 80 women attended the event.

In March and July, we held our first member-only networking events. These were held at Black-owned restaurants in the GTA. It was a wonderful opportunity for members to engage with each other in a casual and relaxed setting.







Sugar Kane Restaurant
March 2023



Sugar Kane Restaurant
March 2023

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white sleeveless top, is standing and speaking to a group of people seated around a conference table. The setting is a modern meeting room with large windows in the background. The text "BOARD ROOM" is visible on the glass wall behind the seated individuals. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a warm, professional atmosphere.

Board Governance & Organizational Expansion

In 2022, OABP worked with **Black Box Institute** to draft a **Board Governance Manual**. The manual outlines the organization's mission, vision and values and provides clarity of the OABP governance structure. It also serves as a tool for the board to govern decision-making and direct the organization. The manual helps to ensure consistency and coherence in practices with OABP policies and allows staff and volunteers oversight and understanding of operations and their roles.

This important project was completed just in time for OABP's call for new board members and members who will form our inaugural committees.

The first board of directors was formed in 2021 and, with plenty of interested applicants, we look forward to welcoming new members in February 2024.

Funding



Since 2021, OABP's main funder has been the Government of Canada via the **Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative**. Funds are dispersed through an intermediary--**Tropicana Community Services**.

The federal government has provided a total of \$101,997.50 between 2021-2023:

2021 - \$30,637.50

2022 - \$26,360.00

2023 - \$45,000.00

This funding has supported the following initiatives:

- ✔ Development & delivery of the Navigating Racism in the Workplace Series
- ✔ Professional Accounting Services
- ✔ Social Media Consulting
- ✔ Development of OABP Governance Manual
- ✔ Pre-production of the Documentary



Our Partners

The following companies and organizations have provided support to OABP through collaboration and/or providing valuable discounts to our members.

Berkeley Chambers, The

Black Box Institute

Canadian Association of Black Lawyers (CABL)

CPD Online

Emond Publishing

Endeavour Consulting for Non-Profits

Fasken LLP

Intuit Quickbooks

Journal That Talks Back, The

Law Society of Ontario, The

Paralegal Pathway Ontario

Potential Films

Storwell Self Storage

STR Consulting

UDocs Media

York University-TD Community Engagement Centre

Young Women in Law

A young Black woman with long, dark braids is sitting at a wooden desk in a modern office. She is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and is smiling broadly while looking at a silver laptop. Her right hand is resting on a stack of papers on the desk. The background is a blurred office environment with a bookshelf and a potted plant.

Social Media: Growth & Impact

Our History

VIOLET KING HENRY

October 18, 1929-March 30, 1982

- The first **Black** female lawyer in Canada.
- The first **Black** person to graduate from law school in Alberta.
- The first **Black** person to be admitted to the Alberta Bar.



The first of many to inspire a generation.

#ourhistory #ourfuture

In January 2021, OABP launched our first social media campaign entitled “Our History”. Weekly posts highlighting trailblazing, Black legal professionals were uploaded to LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter/X. This campaign was the catalyst to our Navigating Racism Series as we imagined the barriers these individuals successfully faced and overcame.

Despite being entirely managed by volunteer board members, and having a very niche target audience, our social media following has multiplied significantly since our humble beginnings in 2021. OABP is most active on LinkedIn and Instagram and also has a member-only forum on the website.

LinkedIn: 685 followers

Instagram: 318 followers

200+ Newsletter Subscribers

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY!

Forums
Groups
Networking
Online Events

SIGN UP TODAY!

WWW.OABP.ORG

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Forward Looking: Message from Deborah Moriah

In 2018, when I founded my practice, I was initially apprehensive and had many unanswered questions. Despite my efforts to find a mentor, it became evident that locating a suitable one who shared similar experiences would be challenging and near impossible.

Although I encourage individuals to seek mentorship from various sources, I acknowledge that the journey for Black legal professionals is unique. Creating a supportive space where Black paralegals and law clerks can voice their concerns, seek guidance, and advance their careers was the primary goal when I co-founded OABP with April and Royland in 2020. I'm proud of the strides we've made and excited about the organization's future.

The future for OABP and Black legal professionals is promising, and I am confident that our voices will be heard, and our concerns will be acted upon. The change we desire must start with us, and we should continue to speak up boldly and fearlessly. There are barriers and stereotypes Black legal professionals face that require a collective to overcome. Not just collective protest, but collective action to facilitate systemic change.

In 2023, I stepped down as OABP's first president after being elected as the first Black paralegal bencher at the Law Society of Ontario. Although it was a difficult step for me, given my passion for grassroots work, it's a move that I believe will open doors for other Black paralegals. As a bencher, I've had the privilege of meeting hardworking Black legal professionals across the province and look forward to supporting their career growth.

In 2024, OABP has an exciting array of activities planned, including screening a documentary on discrimination in the legal workplace, offering additional navigating racism workshops, providing useful social media content, as well as valuable continuing professional development opportunities.

It's been only three years since we were officially incorporated, and it's hard to believe how far we've come. I'm thrilled to be a part of history and eagerly look forward to the future.

I encourage all Black legal professionals and students to join us and take advantage of the valuable work OABP is doing. I'm confident it will positively impact your life.


Co-Founder, Past President & Emeritus Board Member