

Pryor Cashman Women Leaders On Leadership And Diversity

By **Adrian Cruz**

Law360 (March 29, 2021, 4:52 PM EDT) -- New York-based Pryor Cashman LLP has seen a substantial number of women get promoted in the early months of 2021, appointing three new co-chairs, two partners, three counsel and a new member of its executive committee to go along with an existing contingent of women leaders.

IP litigation partner and newly appointed executive committee member Ilene Farkas told Law360 Pulse that each attorney has earned their new position at the firm and that she's excited to see the large number of women being recognized for their hard work and accomplishments.

"First and foremost, the individuals that have been promoted have shown incredible dedication to the firm and are incredible lawyers whose promotions are very deserved irrespective of gender," she said. "It's great that more focus has been placed on the promotion of women and I think it's important for young female lawyers to see that with hard work and dedication, you can have a truly meaningful and challenging career."



Executive Committee member Ilene Farkas, left, and Diversity Committee Chair Rachel Shaw

Among the promotions this year, Pryor Cashman named the first Black woman partner in the firm's 60-year history, when real estate attorney Rachel Shaw was elevated to the role in January.

Along with Farkas' and Shaw's new roles, Kimberly Grant was named partner, Desiree Goldfinger, Kaveri Arora and Shusmita Chowdhury were elected counsel, Andrea Gendel became co-chair of the leasing practice, Dyan Finguerra-DuCharme was named trademark practice co-chair and Shveta Kakar was appointed nonprofit and tax-exempt organization practice co-chair.

"I think it means that we're taking a meaningful step forward to being a multicultural and inclusive place," Shaw said. "Of course with that comes a lot of responsibility and I need to make sure that I'm mindful of the development, retention and advancement of other diverse women. The recognition and

acknowledgement that I've received from other women both at the firm and across the nation has been wonderful and really meaningful and special to me."

On top of her work in real estate, Shaw has also served as chair of Pryor Cashman's diversity committee for the past year. Since its inception, she said some of the initiatives put in place include mandatory implicit bias training for all firm attorneys and staff, a firmwide survey used to help develop affinity groups, and phonetic spellings of diverse attorney's names listed on their online profiles.

"If you're mispronouncing someone's name, you're basically disrespecting their heritage," she said. "Maybe you don't mean to, but it really does matter to people to have their names pronounced correctly."

Pryor Cashman has also featured a women's leadership initiative for over a decade, which co-chair Finguerra-DuCharme says is a "behind the scenes" group that gives the firm's woman attorneys access to education materials and tools to help them become better lawyers while also giving them a safe space to address their concerns or issues.

"Our goal is to provide a safe haven for women at the firm and to help them develop the skills and tools that are needed for them to succeed," she said. "Our doors are open to women to use us as sounding boards and give them advice and guidance as to dealing with any kind of legal situation that you just want to kick the tires on in a nonjudgmental and constructive environment."

Gendel said the different groups are the heart of Pryor Cashman's firmwide effort to create a diverse and inclusive workplace that meshes well with its core values of flexibility and entrepreneurship.

"It really makes everyone feel welcome and accepted, which I think is the most important thing in the workplace," she said. "You can't have a modern workplace that's all stiff, old and stodgy guys, you need people who are diverse and different who bring ideas to the table."

Finguerra-DuCharme agreed the firm prioritizes inclusivity, noting its open and accepting culture.

"Pryor Cashman is an incredibly progressive firm," she said. "People are kind and tolerant and I think that there's no specific mold of someone who works at Pryor Cashman other than we're all a bunch of quirky people. We take pride in our quirkiness and I think that we've always had an open, tolerant and progressive style which comes from the top of management down."

As a whole, all the attorneys interviewed agreed that although the legal industry has made major advancements since the beginning of their careers, more work needs to be done in the legal industry as a whole and that even today, things still happen to hammer that point in.

"I still think misogyny is alive and well and gender discrimination still happens every single day," Shaw said. "Even after being named partner, I had an interaction with an adversary just a few weeks ago where he called me a 'Mean Girl' on the record and in front of clients. There's still a lot of old-time guys who assume that when a woman walks in the room, she's a paralegal or assistant."

Finguerra-DuCharme said one thing she hopes to continue seeing is more firms placing women in positions of real leadership, instead of placing a single woman to serve a token leadership role for image reasons.

"I think they should continue to have women be real leaders within firms," she said. "A lot of law firms put a woman on an executive committee just to say that they have a woman on, so I think to see that continued change is important for junior women associates, to have them see women partners becoming chairs of departments, on the executive committee."

--Editing by Orlando Lorenzo.