



Kramer Levin: The Racial Justice Imperative

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On May 25, 2020, our nation — and the world — bore witness to the murder of George Floyd. His murder made it impossible for our country to continue to participate in a collective, deliberate “unknowing” of the ways racism permeates our society and leads to the devaluation and destruction of Black lives. The protests that ensued created a shift in our consciousness, an understanding of the structural nature of racism and of the multifaceted and interconnected ways that Black people in the United States are impacted and disadvantaged from birth to death.

In what is now referred to as the “post-George Floyd” era, companies and institutions nationwide continue to proclaim their support for Black lives, for racial justice, for equity and for inclusion. For Kramer Levin, it was critically important to pair our words with action, our beliefs with practice. As a result, in June 2020, Kramer Levin established the Racial Justice Initiative in order to maximize the firm’s ability to address racial and social justice issues. This important initiative, which is led by the firm’s Pro Bono Committee, pursues pro bono opportunities focused on racial injustice and inequality, including criminal justice reform, which has been a long-standing focus of the firm’s pro bono work. The two primary leaders of the initiative are partners Christopher S. Auguste and Steven S. Sparling. The initiative concentrates its efforts in four primary areas: litigation, transactional/corporate support, voting rights and community outreach.

The firm’s Racial Justice Initiative is innovative because of its size, scope and focus on work that has a definitive impact. More than 150 volunteers — staff and attorneys — are engaged in this work. The programs include:

- 1) The Veterans Assistance Project, which, in partnership with the City Bar Justice Center and others, helps disabled veterans, mostly people of color, apply for medical benefits after they have been denied;
- 2) representing LGBTQ Black and Latinx refugees fleeing persecution in a lawsuit to block the prior administration’s destructive overhaul of the asylum system;
- 3) collaborating with the Harlem and Morningside Heights offices of NYC Business Solutions to help low- and lower-income entrepreneurs as they restart, maintain and grow their businesses;
- 4) volunteering as nonpartisan poll monitors on Election Day on behalf of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund;
- 5) working with the Legal Aid Society to help guide individuals filing complaints with the Civil Complaint Review Board, particularly regarding police violence or bad arrests;



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- 6) joining the Volunteers of Legal Service in advocating on behalf of claimants at unemployment hearings;
 - 7) partnering with TrustLaw to provide a legal “health check” workshop for social enterprises that serve Black and Latinx communities;
 - 8) representing the new Universal Hip Hop Museum in matters related to the construction of museum space in the South Bronx, which is anticipated to be completed in 2023 and open to the public in 2025;
 - 9) working with the Legal Aid Society to file Article 78 proceedings in New York State Court, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, related to the New York Police Department’s Gang Database, which is 98% Black or Latinx; and
 - 10) representing the American Civil Liberties Union and its local Montana chapter in filing an amicus brief supporting a Native American woman’s respondeat superior claims against the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the rape committed by one of its officers.
- Most recently, and in keeping with our commitment to racial justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, Kramer Levin launched a Racial Justice Initiative Scholars program for 1L law students at select New York City law schools. Kramer Levin’s RJI Scholars participate in monthly, limited-scope RJI clinics focused on combating racial injustice and inequality. The RJI clinics help RJI Scholars jump-start their legal careers by exposing them to the practice of law in a real-world setting where they are supervised and supported by practicing lawyers.

Our Racial Justice Initiative will continue to evolve to address an ever-changing world. Although the challenges are great and long-standing, we are prepared to meet them, steadfast as we are in our values and our commitment to racial justice. **S**