

The Canadian Council of Business Leaders Against Anti-Black Systemic Racism



Law Firm Pledge:

It is time for anti-Black systemic racism to end.

I, as the leader of my firm, along with all similar signatories, commit to implementing the following pledge having regard to, among other things, our size, our location(s) within Canada and the breadth of opportunities available within our organization. Where companies have already implemented one or several of the commitments, the undersigned commit to support other companies in doing the same.

We acknowledge the existence of anti-Black systemic racism and its impact on Canada's 1,198,540 Black citizens (or 3.5% of the population) and the need to create opportunities within our companies for Black people.

The persistent inequities across our country underscore our urgent, national need to address and alleviate racial, ethnic, and other tensions and to promote the elimination of anti-Black systemic racism wherever it exists. As leaders of some of Canada's largest businesses, we manage hundreds of thousands of employees and play a critical role in ensuring that inclusion is core to our workplace culture and that our businesses are representative of the communities we serve. Moreover, we know that true diversity is good for the economy; it improves corporate performance, drives growth, and enhances employee engagement.

Simply put, organizations with truly diverse teams perform better.

We recognize that diversity and inclusion are multifaceted issues and that we need to tackle these subjects holistically to better engage and support all underrepresented groups within the business community. To do this, we believe we also need to address honestly and head-on the concerns and needs of the diverse members of our firm and increase equity for all. Collectively as business leaders we agree that we must do more. For us, this means committing to eight goals we believe will move Canada toward ending anti-Black systemic racism and creating opportunities for underrepresented groups.

1. **Working with the BlackNorth Initiative, we will increase our efforts to make our workplaces trusting places to have complex, and sometimes difficult conversations about anti-Black systemic racism and ensure that no barriers exist to prevent Black employees from advancing within the company.** We will create and maintain an environment that fosters open dialogue, including listening forums where our people feel comfortable to gain greater awareness of each other's experiences and perspectives. By encouraging an ongoing dialogue and not tolerating any incongruence with these values of openness, we are building trust, encouraging compassion and open-mindedness, and reinforcing our commitment to a culture of inclusivity.

2. **Working with the BlackNorth Initiative, we will implement or expand unconscious bias and anti-racism education.** We all have unconscious biases—that is human nature. Unconscious bias education enables individuals to begin recognizing, acknowledging, and therefore minimizing any potential blind spots they might have. We will commit to rolling out and/or expanding education that addresses unconscious bias and anti-Black systemic racism within our businesses and make non-proprietary unconscious bias education modules available to others free of charge.
3. **We will share best — and unsuccessful — practices.** We know that many businesses are still developing programs and initiatives around true diversity and inclusion. We commit to helping them evolve and enhance their current diversity strategies and encourage them, in turn, to share their successes and challenges with others.
4. **We will create and share strategic inclusion and diversity plans with our board of directors.** We will establish at least one diversity leadership council and make efforts to ensure these groups include diverse representation, including senior Black leaders, within our organization. The diversity leadership council will work with the Chair, Managing Partner or similar persons who will be accountable to our board of directors (or equivalent governing bodies) through the development and evaluation of concrete, strategic action plans to prioritize and drive accountability around diversity and inclusion, including as it relates to Black employees. We recognize that boards and CEOs and law firm leaders play an important role in driving action together to cultivate inclusive cultures and talent.
5. **We will use our resources to work with members of the Black community in alignment with the BlackNorth Initiative.** Working with the BlackNorth Initiative we will ensure that Black communities across Canada are aware of opportunities of employment within our organization and we commit to specific hiring goals of at least 5% within our student workforce from the Black community, as appropriate having regard to the size of the respective firm. Working with the BlackNorth Initiative we will invest directly or indirectly at least 3% of firm-supported corporate donations and sponsorships to promote investment and create economic opportunities in the Black community, both by 2025. We also recognize the economic power of the firm and the ability to influence broader change by encouraging diversity and the representation of Black people amongst our suppliers and those we choose to do business with.
6. **We will engage Canada’s corporate governance framework.** The aim of the BlackNorth Initiative is to include both board Chairs and CEOs to foster inclusiveness for Black leaders at the board level, as well as at senior management and executive levels. We are building a strong foundation of business leaders who are committed to meaningful, sustainable inclusion of Black people in business leadership. Our goal is to build a pipeline so there can be representation from the Black community on the Board of Directors and in our senior leadership. In addition, as a numeric goal provides real impetus for change, we have made a goal of, at a minimum, 3.5% of executive, board and/or senior leadership roles based in Canada being held by Black or visible minority leaders by 2025. We will look to ensure 3.5% of those roles are held by Black Leaders by 2030. We will look for opportunities to speak about these themes in internal and external programs.
7. **We will work with stakeholders in the legal community.** We will work collaboratively with law firms, law societies, law schools, organizations within the black legal community, and other relevant stakeholders and organizations within the legal community to work towards increasing the number of Black students in Canadian law schools, to encourage Black students to consider careers in law, and to share best practices on recruiting, onboarding, retaining and advancing Black students and lawyers, all of which are necessary steps to facilitate our individual and collective ability to achieve the goals of the BlackNorth Initiative set out in this Pledge. Donations to, and investments in programs or initiatives offered by these organizations, and other investments in furtherance of these goals, together with donations and investments that we make to directly or indirectly promote investment and create economic opportunities in the Black community, are some of the investments we may make towards achieving our financial investment goals set out in paragraph 5 above.

8. **We will create the conditions for success.** As in all business ventures, ‘what gets measured gets managed’, so it’s essential that we collect data on race and ethnicity, including from Black employees, to understand where we have gaps and when we are making progress. We will work with the BlackNorth Initiative to attract and retain talent from the Black community, and in partnership with our organization’s governance committee, commit to developing and advancing Black people within our organizations to ensure a pipeline of talent as we build inclusive leadership teams that are representative of the communities we serve. We will set inclusive talent management goals and include them in senior executives’ annual performance scorecards. We believe that creating opportunities for the Black community requires making those opportunities known to students who are making career and life choices and will work on initiatives to build awareness about careers in law.

We also pledge to create accountability systems within our companies, share our goals internally and externally, track our progress, and share regular updates with each other to catalog effective programs and measurement practices.

We recognize that these commitments are not the complete answer, but we believe they are important, concrete steps toward building more truly diverse and inclusive workplaces. We hope our list of signatories will grow, and we invite other Law Firm Leaders across Canada to join us.

Let’s come together to make good on the inherent promise that all of our people should be able to bring their best selves to work and unleash their full potential.

By working together toward true diversity and inclusion within our workplaces, industries, and broader business community, we can cultivate meaningful change for our society and end anti-Black systemic racism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Beth Wilson', written in a cursive style.

Beth Wilson, FCPA, FCA
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