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Re: Comments on Proposed Name Change of the Board of Bar Overseers

Dear Attorney Burak:

On behalf of the Boston Bar Association ("BBA"), I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed change of the name of the Board of Bar Overseers to the Board of Bar Oversight, as proposed by the Supreme Judicial Court through an amendment to SJC Rule 4:01.

Fostering a diverse and inclusive professional community is central to the BBA's mission, and for that reason we share the Court's and the BBO's concern that the Board's current name does not fully convey that all members of the Massachusetts bar are recognized and valued. We applaud the Board for establishing a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force and for creating the position of Director of DEI.

After consultation with our own BBA DEI Steering Committee, the BBA Council voted to support a name change to the Massachusetts Board of Bar Overseers by removing and replacing the word "Overseers." We concur with the explanation in the proposal that the term "overseer" has a pernicious history related to race-based chattel slavery and brutal treatment of Black people in America. Therefore, the removal of "Overseers" is appropriate and necessary.

We do wish to add that the term "oversight," while technically eliding a racist historical connotation, does not differentiate enough from the term "overseers" to effect the intended purpose of distancing the Board from racially charged language that disserves the purpose of the Board. Indeed, we anticipate that, even if the proposed change were to go into effect, many attorneys would continue to refer to the BBO as the Board of Bar Overseers.

While we understand that the term "oversight" was chosen to keep the acronym "BBO," there is nothing of note in the SJC rules that requires the use of the "BBO" acronym so as to force the use of the term "oversight." Thus, we urge the BBO to seriously reconsider the use of "oversight" as a solution to distance itself from the racist undertones of the word "overseer." The need for precise and non-racially charged language ought to outweigh the desire to maintain the consistency of an acronym. Other states use language like Registration, Monitoring or Supervision for their similar bar organizations. We believe any of these, or others, would fully eliminate any racial undertones to the name of the organization.

Thank you for providing members of the bar with an opportunity to weigh in on this important issue and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Very truly yours,

Hannah Kilson
President