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MCCA Announces National Winner for the 2021 Employer of Choice Award and Charlotte E. Ray Award Honoree

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) announced **AbbVie** as the national winner of the 2021 Employer of Choice Award, and **Sherrilyn Ifill** as the honoree of the 2021 Charlotte E. Ray Award.

AbbVie is a biopharmaceutical company committed to discovering and delivering innovative medicines. Through research and philanthropy, AbbVie focuses on providing concrete resources and support to patients, employees, and society at large. AbbVie recognizes that true productivity and progress requires a tolerant and inclusive workplace—one where every employee feels heard, celebrated, and able to be their authentic selves.

AbbVie has dedicated significant company resources into bolstering an already robust diversity effort within the legal department—and hired a dedicated leader to help drive progress. These efforts have yielded results: within AbbVie’s global legal department, more than half of attorneys are women and more than a quarter come from underrepresented backgrounds. And in the intellectual property law department—a field where women and attorneys from marginalized backgrounds are historically underrepresented—half the attorneys on staff are women.

AbbVie’s commitment to diversity extends beyond the walls of its own offices. In 2018, the company started the Outside Counsel Diversity Initiative, an effort to accelerate diversity in outside law firms. The initiative tracks metrics and sets targets to increase diversity at 25 partner firms that account for nearly 80% of AbbVie’s legal expenditures. By the end of 2020, AbbVie had met the initiative’s goals.

“At MCCA, we believe that progress requires transparent, concrete data,” said **Wanji Walcott, Executive Vice President, Chief Legal Officer & General Counsel at Discover Financial Services and MCCA’s Board Chair**. “AbbVie’s use of data to set metrics for outside law firms proves that measurable goals matter. AbbVie is a model for corporate America and law firms on how to use data to drive real change.”

After hitting their targets in 2020, AbbVie continued its internal work by launching IP Group Intern Academy, a first-year law school internship program in intellectual property law geared towards students from diverse



backgrounds. That program placed 100% of its first group of diverse interns in top firms for future summer positions or full-time roles after graduation.

“We’re proud to recognize AbbVie as our 2021 Employer of Choice because of its commitment to diversity inside and outside the company,” **said Jean Lee, President and CEO of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association.** “After each of my interactions with AbbVie leaders attending MCCA’s programs, I’ve come away more and more impressed by their commitment to building an inclusive work environment—especially given that their efforts started well before the pandemic, and before race featured so prominently in our national discourse.”

The Charlotte E. Ray Award is given to a Black woman who has been blazing a trail for the next generation of women of color and breaking down barriers to achieving success in the legal field.

This year’s honoree, **Sherrilyn Ifill**, has worked for decades to pursue racial justice in the law. As President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), Ifill works to eliminate barriers for marginalized communities in the workforce, the criminal justice system, and the ballot box. She has been an especially exemplary leader over the past year, as she has built coalitions between communities harmed by the murder of George Floyd, the anti-Asian shootings in Atlanta, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

She began her career at the LDF as a new assistant counsel in 1988. Three years in, she argued *Houston Lawyers’ Association v. Attorney General of Texas*, a landmark decision that guaranteed protections for Black and Latinx voters at the state judicial level.

In recent years, Sherrilyn has helped the organization build coalitions with other social justice organizations, like Color of Change and Asian Americans Advancing Justice. Internally, she has more than doubled the number of staff attorneys and brought on a diverse group of historians through the Thurgood Marshall Initiative.

“Sherrilyn Ifill understands that social justice does not exist in a vacuum—and so, neither can those pursuing it,” **said Wanji Walcott.** “She understands that real change, like any case in an American courtroom, requires teamwork. It requires diversity of perspective. It requires, as much as it creates, inclusion.”

The Charlotte E. Ray Award Honoree, Sherrilyn Ifill, and Employer of Choice Award national winner, AbbVie, will be honored at MCCA’s Virtual Diversity Gala on October 13, 2021.

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The Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) is the preeminent voice on diversity, equity and inclusion in the legal industry. It was founded in 1997 with a mission to recruit, retain and promote diverse attorneys by publishing research to providing professional development opportunities to offering advisory services. Today, MCCA empowers members with the tools needed to disrupt business as usual – and to blaze a path forward for their company, industry and corporate America.