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for defense,
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and corporate
counsel

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Women in the Law & Life, Health and Disability

Including . . .

**Be a Better Biller in 2025:
Say What You Mean
and Mean What
You Say**

**Also in This
Issue . . .**

**The Ever-Evolving
Landscape of
“Deemed Denials”
under ERISA**



And More!

DRI's Women in the Law Committee: Our Next Chapter



C. Meade Hartfield of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings represents clients nationwide in a variety of industries, including mortgage servicing, auto finance, farm credit, automotive, insurance, and construction. Her financial services practice includes representing financial institutions, auto-finance lenders and mortgage companies in defensive litigation and regulatory/compliance matters throughout the country. She also serves as outside general counsel for several clients. Her product liability work includes personal injury and class action defense for various manufacturers. Meade has been admitted to practice before all state and federal courts in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. She is an active member of the DRI - Lawyers Representing Business, where she serves as Chair of the Women in the Law Committee, as well as the Women in the Law Liaison to the International Law Committee. Meade also has served as the inaugural chair of the Women in the Law Committee for the Alabama Defense Lawyers Association.

What's next for the *Women in the Law Committee*? In large part, that is up to each of you. As DRI's Women in the Law ("WITL") Committee embarks upon its fifteenth anniversary, we reflect on how far the committee has come, and, collectively, how much further we wish to go.

Looking back, strong women built this committee.

WITL has always been a member-centric group. Born from the idea of its inaugural members and leadership, WITL has evolved organically through its members' bright ideas, ingenuity in execution, and a deep commitment to the genuine friendships developed through our time together. Over fifteen years, members have led by example. At every level of leadership, through contributions big and small, our members have consistently made WITL a committee worth the commitment.

Special thanks to our past Chairs, on whose shoulders we stand today:

- Evelyn Davis
- Cheryl Diaz
- Lana Olsen
- Heidi Friedman
- Diane Averell
- Kelly Williams
- Marie Chafe
- Sandy Wunderlich

As I now step into the treasured role of Chair of WITL, I honor the strong foundations of leadership laid before me by these women. Each one has become a hero of mine. They will always be WITL Ambassadors by virtue of who they are, what they contributed to our committee, and how they have continued to share their many talents with the world around them. Their role as an Ambassador will forever transcend the committee, long after they made their mark.

Looking forward, your opportunity awaits.

At its core, WITL values inclusivity and creativity. When our members see a need we can address, we come up with a proposed solution. Shortly thereafter, we jump into action. Historically having no shortage of good ideas and "can do" spirit, WITL continues to serve as a think tank and thought leader to DRI as a whole. Many of the good ideas adopted across committees originated from a WITL committee member, including, but not limited to the following:

- Pathways to Leadership Program;
- Committee leadership toolkit;
- SLDO toolkit;
- Rainmakers e-book;
- Speakers workshop for young lawyers;
- Wellness, philanthropic, and unique networking opportunities at seminars;
- Opportunity Calling webinars on practical issues within the profession;
- And so much more.

WITL has always made space for new ideas, including creating leadership positions for those that want to contribute to the larger strategic conversations happening within the committee.

Whether you work for a big or small firm, whether you have decades of experience or consider yourself a young lawyer, and whether you want a larger or supporting role, we have a spot perfectly suited for you. WITL offers the opportunity to lead at a new level. Reach out to me, or to one of our current leaders, and tell us your idea or leadership interest. We will help you find your way within the committee and beyond. Once you get engaged with the committee, some say you can feel the difference.

Experience the WITL difference.

People who attend our annual WITL Seminar talk about how different it is from other seminars they attend with DRI, and beyond – how they walk away inspired and energized, and how it is the one seminar that “you do for you.” By focusing on our personhood in addition to our profession, we contribute to meaningful conversation and connection that underscore our individual journeys through this world, in both law and life.

Once you experience what it feels like to communicate with other like-minded women from across the country, something within clicks into place. You find members to support, promote, and encourage you in your present circumstances, and the result becomes alignment more towards your desired outcomes inside and outside of the profession.

One thing I know from experience: Good things happen when we get in a room together. We share common ground; we expand our perspective; we bear witness to each other’s life moments, full of celebration, hardship, and sometimes grief. We stand in the gap for one another where we can, and, where helpful, we give each other a safe space and permission to breathe – something we may not always give ourselves. All you need do is simply show up and engage with those around you.

Anyone – and everyone – can benefit from this committee.

WITL continues to pioneer the evolving landscape of not only what it means to experience being a woman in the law, but also how we can support all women in the law. I would say “how we can support each other,” but the truth is, our inclusive committee has contained within its roster several strong, fair-minded men over the years. The gender-neutral invitation to healthy dialogue and learning from one another remains open to all.

WITL members bring diversity of thought to the table, respecting that – politics, geography, and backgrounds aside – we have our profession in common. Turns out, we share, or can work towards finding, a lot of common ground across the spectrum of life choices. We have such respect for each other as individuals that we focus more on the strength, resilience, and bravery that it takes to make it as a woman in this profession, over any “check the box” category of discussion, such as age, marital status, or parental choices.

We choose to focus on one another and, in turn, what matters to each of us, however different that may look across our various career paths. How do we succeed in this profession? How can we be our most authentic selves in this profession? How can we find fulfillment in this profession? How can we be heard and seen in this profession? How do we get a seat at the table in this profession? How do we have less scripted “conform” and “perform,” and more “transform” in this profession?

WITL members are more than lawyers – we are changemakers.

Indeed, I have watched so many WITL members become trailblazers not only in this organization and in their firm, but also in their world.

Members of our committee have served as DRI president, on DRI’s executive committee and board, as chairs of substantive law committees, and as productive members within the organization. Many of our committee’s members serve in leadership within their respective firm’s management committees and boards. Of course, the committee also has numerous in-house counsel members serving across a variety of industries.

Not only do our members lend their talents to their firms, companies, and clients, but also, to the world at large. Our committee of talented women in the law – a.k.a. women in this life – includes:

- Authors;
- Filmmakers;
- Philanthropists;
- Podcasters;
- Small business owners;
- And more.

Women of wonder, wonderful women, wonder-women, for sure: Any way you want to say it, personally, I remain inspired. Serving as WITL Chair is one of the professional highlights of my career. I treasure the opportunity to lead this group of special women leaders and friends. I also trust in the future leadership of this strong committee. I relish experiencing the magic for myself, while helping to stir the group’s secret-sauce combination of resilience, realism, and resourcefulness. We balance one another. We support one another. We accept one another. We lift each other up. Together, we rise.

