

Legal Update Article

Construction Industry Seeks to Diversify Its Workforce

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In September 2021, Congress continues to debate a bipartisan infrastructure bill. The Biden Administration estimates that if its \$1 trillion plan is enacted, the legislation will create up to two million new jobs per year for a decade. Many, if not most, of those new jobs would be in the construction industry.

Even if the final dollars authorized is smaller than requested, and if the Administration's job-creation estimates turn out to be overly optimistic, finding workers to fill the newly created jobs is going to be a problem for an industry that had more than 300,000 unfilled jobs as of July 2021.

Many industry leaders have recognized that one way to recruit new workers to the industry is to intensify efforts to enhance the appeal of construction jobs to groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the industry, including minorities and women.

Based on the latest statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women comprise approximately 10% of the construction labor force. While Hispanic and African American construction labor force participation rates are closer to their representation in the overall population, 19% and 11.5%, respectively, Hispanic and African American construction workers tend to be clustered in the lower paying jobs with fewer advancement opportunities.

Many large construction employers are taking action to combat discrimination and prejudice in the industry and to encourage more minorities and women to consider careers in construction.

A good example of leadership in construction industry diversity is the Time for Change Consortium. Time for Change was created by six of the largest construction companies in the nation with the goals of:

- Helping to create a unified construction industry that attracts and retains the best talent.
- Boosting employee morale.
- Increasing employee productivity.
- Improving client relations.

In furtherance of these goals, Time for Change will host its first "Construction Inclusion Week," October 18-22, as its "first effort to harness the collective power of general contractors, specialty contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers." It states, "Our objective is to build awareness of the need to improve diversity and inclusion in the construction industry by providing content and resources."

These efforts to increase diversity at all levels of the construction industry, and to improve the work environment for women and minorities, will help construction employers build the workforces they need to sustain future growth.

Please contact a Jackson Lewis attorney with any questions.

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