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## New Group Supports Attorney Mothers

**By Rachel S. Black and  
Lorraine Lewis Phillips**

The statistics are staggering: Although for years approximately half of graduating law students are women, fewer than 18% of law firm partners are women, according to the National Association for Law Placement. Only 15.7% of Fortune 1000 general counsel are women, according to a 2006 MCAA survey.

Hundreds of articles have been authored on this issue, law firms have created diversity committees specifically to address the problem, and organizations have been created across the nation to promote the advancement of female attorneys - yet the numbers don't seem to be improving that much.

Anyone who has attempted to juggle primary child-rearing responsibilities and a legal career should understand why, at least in part. The practice of law can be extremely demanding and inflexible, generally involving long work hours, pressure to generate business and heavy travel, among other challenges. Add to that childbearing/rearing responsibilities and many women find themselves off the partnership track - either by choice or otherwise.

In an effort to empower attorney mothers and encourage them to succeed, while celebrating their roles as attorneys and mothers, we formed the Mother Attorneys Mentoring Association of Seattle (MAMAS). It started with an email we sent to the handful of attorney mothers that we personally know, asking women to join with us in forming the organization and requesting that they forward the email on to other attorney mothers. The response was overwhelming: just over two months later, the organization has more than 125 members, including partners, associates, in-house counsel, general counsel and public service attorneys.

Although the organization is evolving, as members continue to voice their needs and provide vision for the group, MAMAS is designed to promote networking among members, as well as to provide a safe and supportive forum for sharing experiences, problem solving and discussing issues relevant to attorney mothers. To this end, we meet once a month with our children, which sets us apart from any other attorney organization in Seattle. These monthly events are designed to permit children of various ages to play, while providing attorney mothers with a forum for networking, socializing and problem solving.

The first such monthly event was a huge success, with approximately 50 attorney

mothers and 75 children attending. The group plans to continue meeting monthly at the KidsQuest Children's Museum in Factoria Mall on the first Saturday of every month during private hours. Law firms and organizations including Bar/Bri, Garvey Schubert Barer, Heller Ehrman LLP, Keller Rohrback L.L.P., Perkins Coie LLP, Summit Law Group, Susman Godfrey L.L.P., and Williams, Kastner & Gibbs PLLC have graciously agreed to sponsor these monthly events.

MAMAS also intends to host brown-bag lunches, which will include panel discussions addressing topics of particular interest to attorney mothers. We also are considering implementing a formal mentoring program to provide junior attorney mothers with more seasoned mentors to help them navigate unfamiliar waters.

Although the two of us on our own aren't able to mold the profession so more and more women choose to stay in the practice, we're hoping we can make a difference by providing women the anchor they need to stay in the profession during a time when finding a life balance is perhaps the most challenging. By providing mentoring, support, encouragement and networking opportunities during this critical time period, we just might be able to make a dent in those statistics.

For more information about MAMAS, contact Rachel Black at [Rblack@SusmanGodfrey.com](mailto:Rblack@SusmanGodfrey.com) or Lorraine Lewis Phillips at [LPhillips@KellerRohrback.com](mailto:LPhillips@KellerRohrback.com).

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