

insights

Thompson Coburn partners with Diversity Lab to welcome women attorneys back to the workforce

When family demands prompt attorneys to take a career break, it can be difficult to return to the legal workforce. Women, who are disproportionately affected by caregiving responsibilities for children and aging parents, face even great hurdles. A 2019 study by the ACC found that one in four women in-house attorneys has taken leave to provide dependent care, compared with one in 20 men.

Thompson Coburn has joined an industrywide effort to address this “leaky pipeline” issue in law firms, legal departments, and banks by replenishing the number of mid- to senior-level women in the leadership ranks. Diversity Lab has launched a new version of its OnRamp Fellowship that aims to bring 200 women lawyers back into the legal profession by 2025 in a bid to reverse the number of women who have left the workforce in the last few years. Thompson Coburn is one of 35 law firms and legal departments engaged with the OnRamp 200 fellowship, which will connect those businesses with experienced women lawyers who have had a career hiatus and want to return to the profession but are finding it challenging due to gaps in their work history.

Through November 30, women attorneys [can apply for the fellowship](#), which offers one-year paid positions with firms beginning in February 2022. Due to its overwhelming success, the Fellowship has expanded into legal departments and financial services firms. This unique experiential learning program gives returning women an opportunity to demonstrate their value in the marketplace while also broadening their experience, skills, and contacts. In turn, the organizations benefit by engaging with a previously untapped pool of high-performers and by increasing gender diversity in the profession.

Caren Ulrich Stacy, founder of OnRamp Fellowship and Diversity Lab, said: “We hear from so many talented women lawyers who want to return and are not able to find a path back into law. Especially now, law firms and legal departments cannot afford to overlook this talented pool of candidates. We are introducing this bold goal to bring back 200 women lawyers in the next several years to create a measurable, transparent, and collaborative framework that will keep us all accountable and make real progress on diversifying the legal profession’s leadership ranks.”

The OnRamp 200 program also seeks to address the need to increase the representation of women in legal leadership roles.

Thank you to Thompson Coburn partners [Sara Melly](#), [Emily Murphy](#), and [Maria Zschoche](#) for introducing the Firm to this effort during their prior participation in the Firm’s Women’s Leadership Academy.

Emily Murphy will also serve as the “Partner Champion” of the Firm’s fellowship program. In this role, she will oversee the Fellows’ experience and help guide the Firm’s approach to OnRamp generally.

[authorsTest](#)