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## Newsroom: Johnson Wins 2nd Term as MBWA President 09/28/2016

Roger Williams University School of Law

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# Newsroom

September 28, 2016

## Johnson Wins 2nd Term as MBWA President

Deborah Johnson, RWU Law's Director of Diversity and Outreach, has been re-elected president of the Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys association.



**Deborah Johnson, Director of Diversity and Outreach** at RWU Law, has been re-elected to a second term as **president of the Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys (MBWA)** association.

Focused on the eradication of racism and sexism in the legal profession, the MBWA aims to help women of color – and particularly African-American women – advance in their careers. The group sponsors panels, community initiatives and mentorships, pairing seasoned practitioners with younger black female attorneys and law students.

Under Johnson's leadership, the diversity of RWU Law's entering class reached 26 percent this year, while the school's overall student body diversity stands at 23 percent.

"Advancements have been made within our law schools, law firms and agencies," **Johnson said**. "But the numbers are not yet where they should be. There's still a lot of work to be done. And MBWA is one of the best organizations to help in that effort."

Johnson, who has served on the MBWA's board since 2013, was its vice president in the 2014-15 term and president in 2015-16 is widely perceived by her peers as the right leader at the right time.

“Deborah is very passionate about what she is doing and she gives 100 percent effort to ensure that the mission is accomplished,” said **Tiffanie Ellis-Niles, the MBWA’s immediate past president**. “Under Deborah’s leadership, MBWA will continue to grow and make a valuable impact in the legal community.”

**RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky** agrees. He noted:

“*Deborah’s influence in Rhode Island and in Massachusetts is increasing. Her leadership of this important organization in Massachusetts is good for the Commonwealth, and it is good for our students. Her work in Rhode Island to attract and support students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the legal profession is also good for Rhode Island and our students. Our student body has never been more diverse, and we are fortunate to have as our Director of Diversity and Outreach someone who takes the lead in helping us pursue our diversity and inclusion mission.*”

Johnson strives to be worthy of such accolades.

“My vision and goal in the coming year is to increase our relevance and impact, both within the legal community and within the broader community we serve,” she said. “I’m really committed to taking MBWA to the next level of excellence.”

Even as she looks forward to the work ahead, Johnson adds she is deeply grateful for the faith placed in her by MBWA members.

“I’m excited; I’m honored,” she said. “But I serve with an amazing group of nine other women on our board, and they are *all* talented, committed and passionate about the work.”

Founded in 1981, the Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys (MBWA) is a professional bar association committed to the advancement of justice and equality for people of color, with a particular emphasis on black women and/or women of African descent. MBWA offers its members a forum to share knowledge and experiences as well as focus on issues of importance to the membership and the community. MBWA also promotes pro bono activities, community activism, and the successful balance of family and career obligations.

Before her arrival at RWU Law, Johnson served as Law Clerk to the Honorable Napoleon A. Jones, Jr., of the United States District Court (S.D. Cal.) in San Diego, and worked for six years as a Law Associate with Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris , Glovsky & Popeo, P.C., in Boston. She was Director of Youth Programs at the Boston Center for Community & Justice, and is a member of the Board of Directors for both the Center for Collaborative Education and the Elizabeth Stone House, which assists women and families suffering the effects of domestic violence and other trauma.

Johnson is a member of three state bars: California, Massachusetts, and New York. She earned her B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and her J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law.