

Finding, Building & Growing Community

There is something exciting happening in Madison that holds the promise of profound impact, not just for our capital city but also for Wisconsin and the legal community.

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

This past Juneteenth Day, leaders across the state, including the legal community, gathered on Madison's south side to break ground for what will be the Center for Black Excellence and Culture. The center will create a cultural space to celebrate and advance Wisconsin's Black community. Located in the heart of a historically Black neighborhood, the center will be a physical space where people from Madison and throughout Wisconsin can gather to build and grow community and interconnections.

Seeing an opportunity, a group of area attorneys and statewide law firms and the Wisconsin Association of African American Lawyers (WAAL) joined the initiative. They recognize the center as a much-needed solution to help address long-standing underrepresentation within the legal community. Only 2% of all attorneys in the greater Madison area identify as Black, in part, according to the group of attorneys, because of

reputational and quality-of-life barriers that inhibit recruitment.

A coalition of attorneys and WAAL are rolling up their sleeves and helping make the center a reality. As a first-of-its kind cultural and innovation destination, the group sees the center as "helping the legal community's efforts to attract and retain Black legal talent, which has broader impact on creating a more equitable justice system and society for all residents. Diversity in legal representation and resources has a direct relation to entrepreneurial, educational, financial, and professional opportunities and access to justice for the Black community."

Brittani Miller, past president of WAAL, said that "the center has enormous potential for meaningful connection, collaboration, and to give back to and empower communities. The center's significance stretches statewide to foster Black excellence both professionally and personally. Law firms will have a powerful tool to help encourage Black talent in Wisconsin law schools and elsewhere to practice in Wisconsin."

"When the Black community thrives, everyone benefits," said Melissa Caulum Williams, an attorney at Husch Blackwell LLP and co-founder of the Attorneys for Black Excellence initiative.

With the concept that the center will be a statewide resource and community gathering space, all attorneys and law firms are encouraged to donate and show support for the center. A specific goal of raising \$250,000 from Wisconsin's legal community has been targeted to help bring the center to reality.

To learn more about the center, visit <https://www.theblackcenter.org>. To contribute to the Attorneys for Black Excellence effort, visit <https://www.theblackcenter.org/attorneys-for-black-excellence/>. **WL**



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When the Center for Black Excellence and Culture opens in late 2025, the legal community takes another step on the path toward building community and creating a critically important resource that will help in ongoing efforts to attract, retain, and increase the number of Black attorneys in Wisconsin.