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Data Scoop: Law firms shrink slightly; diversity still a challenge

JEREMY NOBILE □ □

Women and minorities continue to be woefully underrepresented in Northeast Ohio's legal community, which shrank slightly over the past year, according to the Crain's 2020 Law Firms list. Compared to last year, the total number of in-market lawyers decreased 1.2%. The number of local female and minority attorneys fell by a slightly higher percentage, though more of them were named partner over the past year.

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Compared to 2019, the total number of in-market lawyers decreased 1.2%, more than erasing a slight gain from the previous year, according to data from 76 firms on [the full digital list](#). They range from global firms with a presence here to boutique outfits with a couple lawyers.

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The 10 largest law firms in the market represent 41% of all in-market attorneys accounted for in the survey.

With 172 local lawyers, the largest firm in Northeast Ohio remains Jones Day, though it's dwindled in size here quite a bit over the past decade. The firm has reduced local lawyer headcount by 27% compared to 2010 levels.

Most of the market's biggest firms have shrunk their attorney benches here in the past decade with the exception of Tucker Ellis and Benesch, which have increased local lawyers by 56% and 39% in the past 10 years, respectively.

Despite the drop in attorneys, in-market partners grew by 1.5%. Those promotions contributed to small increases in the number of female and minority partners.

However, the total number of local female and minority lawyers overall decreased year-over-year a shade more than the 1.2% contraction in total lawyers. Female lawyers decreased by 1.8% and minority lawyers decreased 2.3% between May 1, 2019, when last year's data was gathered, and June 30, 2020.

Overall, among all in-market attorneys in the 2020 list: 71% are men; 29% are women; 94% are white; 6% are minorities. Among local partners: 79% are men; 21% are women; 96% are white; 4% are minorities.

Law firm diversity is something the industry at-large continues to grapple with.

A [study by the National Association for Law Placement](#) examining 1,000 offices of major U.S. law firms found that in 2018 women made up about 35% of attorneys at those firms, while ethnically diverse individuals composed 16%. Of that same group, among partners, 23% were women and 9% were diverse.

That diversity issue remains an area of focus for the [Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association](#), which has struggled to get local law firms to buy in to a plan to attempt to address it in the past. The CMBA is working on a refreshed diversity initiative that could materialize later this year.

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