

Legal Momentum to Honor BorgWarner, Brighthouse GCs

By NACD Editors

Legal Momentum, the Women’s Legal Defense and Education Fund, will recognize two leading general counsels (GC) with the 2020 Legal Momentum Aiming High Award, each woman nominated by the board of her company: Tonit Calaway, executive vice president, chief legal officer, and secretary of BorgWarner, and Christine M. DeBiase, executive vice president, chief administrative officer (CAO) and GC of Brighthouse Financial. *NACD Directorship* is the exclusive media sponsor of the awards luncheon which, because of the global pandemic, is being rescheduled to later this year.

DeBiase believes it is essential for young women to have role models and advocates. Growing up, she was the youngest of three daughters in an Italian-American family where, she said, men were expected to be heard. Her mother had a different idea. She felt it was very important for her daughters to have a voice, and made it clear to them that they could do anything. She supported DeBiase’s plan to go away to college, even though her father wanted her to attend college closer to home, and later backed her decision to go to law school. Her mother’s support and the strength she modeled inspired DeBiase to follow her ambitions no matter the obstacles. She joined the senior leadership team of Brighthouse Financial after serving as lead attorney for the 2017 spin-off of Brighthouse from MetLife, where she worked for 20 years, ultimately as GC to MetLife’s US retail business.

Calaway’s path to corporate law was influenced by her parents’ support, she said. Because of them, she was driven to get into

a top law school and become a lawyer for a large public company. Calaway joined BorgWarner in 2016 after 18 years at Harley-Davidson, where she served as vice president of human resources and president of the Harley-Davidson Foundation. Calaway

versity and inclusion starts at the top, and BorgWarner’s CEO, Frédéric Lissalde, and the board believe strongly in this. To be nominated by the board for this honor—it cannot be higher than that in terms of support and belief.” She also noted that



Christine M. DeBiase

says she shares the Aiming High Award with all who came before her, all who have traveled with her, and those that will follow.

Over the past 20 years, Legal Momentum has honored more than 100 of the most powerful and respected business leaders who have been allies in the fight for gender justice. GCs, according to the award’s founder, Karen Kaplowitz, tend to be recognized because of their significant roles in implementing their companies’ diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives.

Calaway emphasized that the award is “another proof point of how support of di-



Tonit Calaway

BorgWarner’s overall culture is one that recognizes and celebrates talent and diversity. Lissalde recently signed onto the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion, the growing coalition that pledges to advance diversity and inclusion across the globe.

In addition, BorgWarner was included on the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index, by *Forbes* as a Best Employer for Diversity 2020, and on the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index for LGBTQ workplace equality.

Calaway said she has been “fortunate to have a seat at the table” and to have been

recognized for her business acumen and legal expertise when the chair of the board asked her to consider becoming general counsel. She is committed to creating a world-class legal department that is highly diverse without compromising on talent or performance. “BorgWarner will continue to improve diversity and inclusion, and we are committed to simply doing the work,” she said, adding that “conversation is important, but taking quick, decisive action to hire diverse talent and never compromising on excellence and ensuring inclusiveness is the true work.”

Calaway noted that participating in the Legal Momentum Aiming High awards program reinforces BorgWarner’s values. “There is clear alignment in our shared values,” she said.

As Brighthouse Financial’s CAO and GC, DeBiase focuses on ensuring that the organization places a high priority on cultivating diverse and inclusive teams. She is also an executive sponsor of Brighthouse’s diversity and inclusion efforts. DeBiase said she is honored to be recognized by Legal Momentum because “the award strongly aligns with the high ethical standards that we promote in not only the law group but across the entire company. We are committed to doing what is right for all employees, which is reflected in our ongoing focus on diversity and inclusion and advancing women.”

DeBiase reports that Brighthouse Financial’s CEO, Eric Steigerwalt, and the executive management team are committed to increasing diverse representation and embedding inclusion into the cultural fabric of the company. She said she is proud to work at a company that recognizes the value and importance of making sure every employee has a voice.

“The Brighthouse Financial board of directors congratulates Christine DeBiase on this honor,” said Irene Chang Britt, chair of the board’s nominating and cor-

porate governance committee. “As chief administrative officer and general counsel, Chris actively leads the company through highly complex legal matters while seamlessly managing a broad range of functions and serving as one of the company’s greatest champions for diversity and inclusion. The board is particularly proud of Chris’s advocacy for women and underrepresented groups, and applauds the important pro-bono work her organization does in the community.”

Calaway and DeBiase join other notable Aiming High general counsel honorees including Lucy Fato, executive vice-

president and GC of AIG; Esta E. Stecher, nonexecutive chair of Goldman Sachs Bank USA; Bridget M. Healy, former executive vice president and chief legal officer at ING US; Sabine Chalmers, former GC at Anheuser-Busch InBev and now chief legal officer at British telecom BT Group; Deborah P. Majoras, chief legal officer and corporate secretary at Procter & Gamble Co.; Lynn R. Charytan, GC at Comcast Cable; Sara E. Moss, former GC at Pitney Bowes and now vice chair of Estée Lauder Cos.; and Stasia D. Kelly, comanaging partner of DLA Piper and former GC of Sears Roebuck & Co.

Citi Recognized as Champion



Citigroup has a history of elevating women leaders in its various divisions.

Citigroup will be presented with the first Corporate Champion Award at the 20th Legal Momentum Aiming High Awards. Legal Momentum has honored more than 100 business leaders who have supported its mission of economic and physical security for women and girls. Senior women executives at Citi have been honored on more occasions than leaders from any other organization. These include Stephanie B. Mudick (2003), then-executive vice president and chief administrative officer of Citi’s Global Consumer Group; Sallie L. Krawcheck (2004), then-CEO of Citigroup’s Smith Barney unit, and the cofounder and CEO of Ellevest; Bonnie Howard (2008), then Citi’s chief auditor and now a director on the Anne E. Casey Foundation board; Deborah D. McWhinney (2010), then-president of Citi Personal Banking and Wealth Management and now a director for BorgWarner, Fluor Corp., Focus Financial Partners, and IHS Markit; Jane N. Fraser (2012), then-CEO of Citi Private Bank and current president of Citi and CEO of Global Consumer Banking; Suni P. Harford (2013), then Citi’s regional head of markets, North America, and now chair of UBS Asset Management; and Barbara J. Desoer (2016), who retired last year as CEO of Citibank and continues to serve on the Citigroup board. Many other Aiming High honorees were affiliated with Citi before or after they were honored, including Terri Dial, Heidi Miller, Barbara A. Yastine, Joan Guggenheimer, and Jane C. Sherburne. Legal Momentum president and CEO Carol Baldwin Moody, herself an executive at Citi earlier in her career, told *NACD Directorship*, “Legal Momentum is privileged to recognize Citi with its Corporate Champion Award. In the 20 years of the Aiming High Awards, Citi stands out for incubating great diverse senior female talent that is committed to supporting women’s rights.”