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Career & Workplace

## Business of Pride: Saul Ewing's Nicole Seawright says DEI shift can't diminish its importance



Image: Philadelphia Business Journal

Nicole Seawright is a professional development manager at Saul Ewing.

ACBJ PHOTO ILLUSTRATION; JAMIE STOW PHOTOGRAPHY

By Rebecca Logan, Business Journal contributor



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*This story is part of the Philadelphia Business Journal's 2025 Business of Pride series, profiling individuals and companies advancing and supporting the region's LGBTQ+ community.*

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Nicole Seawright said if you've ever attended one of her trainings, you've probably heard her say that she doesn't own any "capital T" truth.

It's a theme that Seawright, professional development manager at Philadelphia law firm Saul Ewing, has embraced throughout her career.

"The most important thing is that you show up and listen," she said. "You've got to start with the listening."

The longtime advocate for advancing diversity and LGBTQ+ equality in the legal profession is keen on seeing people move from what she calls cultural competency to cultural humility.

"We can't ever be competent in each other's experiences. I will never know what it is to fully walk in someone else's shoes," she said. "But I can approach someone else with humility to try and understand and meet them where they are."

Before starting at Saul in October, Seawright was associate director of career advising at Columbia Law School. Her connection to law goes back to her days at Fordham University, where as a sophomore she'd yet to declare a major. She decided to seek advice from some favorite professors, including one who asked about her goals.

“I talked about wanting to serve the communities I came from [as a queer, Black woman] and to be impactful in that way,” she said. “He had a law degree and said, ‘Have you ever considered the law and what you could do with advocacy organizations?’ ”

She hadn’t. There were no lawyers in her family. What she knew about law she knew from TV. But law school it was. After receiving her J.D. from Quinnipiac University, she spent three years as a staff attorney for the Connecticut Legal Rights Project, providing legal services to low-income individuals with mental health conditions. She represented individuals on matters related to their treatment, recovery and civil rights, and litigated employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and denial or termination of services cases.

“When I was doing that, I quickly saw that there was a need for LGBTQ+ affirming health care,” said Seawright, who worked on initiatives like making sure state forms were updated to include options for chosen name, pronouns and a range of identity options.

“I had my docket of clients that I was working for,” she said. “But I found, more and more, that queer clients were seeking me out for issues that they were having in terms of access to care.”

So, five years into practicing law, she decided to transition full-time into DEI and professional development. She’s been director of diversity and inclusion at the Cardozo School of Law; director of professional development, diversity and inclusion for the City of Philadelphia Law Department; and diversity and inclusion manager for Proskauer Rose LLP.

“I recognize that we still have a lot of work to do,” said Seawright, noting that National Association for Law Placement data shows Black lawyers make up 5% of all attorneys in the U.S. and LGBTQ+ lawyers represent 4.2%.

Seawright serves on the board of The Attic Youth Center, which works to create opportunities for LGBTQ+ youth, and was appointed in October to the Mayor's Commission on LGBTQ+ Affairs.

She said she's fortunate to be at Saul at a time when people are taking note of how leaders move through a shifting landscape.

"Our leadership, our pro bono team, our DEI manager [are] all moving in the same direction to make sure that our commitment to inclusion is intact," she said.

But Seawright knows that others at some firms and businesses don't have that same assurance. She shares with them that there are ways to continue DEI work amid shifting language. Key among them is focusing on core principles like belonging rather than specific terminology, she said.

"While we see a shift in how DEI is perceived, that doesn't diminish its importance," she said. "This moment presents an opportunity to strengthen our approaches to create truly inclusive workplaces. The work continues, no matter the language."

One concrete step that can be taken is to mentor queer youth like law students, she said, adding that Outlaw chapters at various law schools might serve as a connection point.

"Mentorship is a powerful tool for inclusion. It affirms identity, builds confidence and expands access," she said. So does sponsorship. Say someone's name in a room if you have the chance, Seawright said.

"I've benefited so much from this and feel a real responsibility to lift as I climb," she said.

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