

COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Porter Wright launches LGBTQ-focused business practice group

BY HAYLEIGH COLOMBO
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Karim Ali still remembers the uncomfortable experience of being one of just a few LGBTQ attorneys at Columbus law firm Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP when he started nearly two decades ago.

"I was very concerned about being an out attorney at a large Columbus law firm," said Ali, who is now Porter Wright's chief diversity officer.

In the years since, he said, "a lot has changed."

For instance, Ali wouldn't have imagined back then that Porter Wright would one day launch an LGBTQ business practice group, a cross-disciplinary group of about 10 attorneys who will work to provide legal services to the LGBTQ business community across all of Porter Wright's offices.

"That to me shows a lot about the progress that we've been able to make over the years," Ali said. "There's always room for improvement, but this is another opportunity to say to our clients that we're serious about our commitment to diversity and inclusion."

Porter Wright is Central Ohio's second-largest law firm, according to Columbus Business First research, with 125 attorneys in the region. The firm has 218 attorneys and eight offices across its total footprint.

Ali said the LGBTQ practice group is a recognition of the fact that Porter Wright had a growing number of LGBTQ attorneys and clients who need services.

"This is just another way for us to distinguish ourselves with our current clients and perhaps find new clients who are looking for counsel that is sensitive to the needs of the LGBTQ community," Ali said. "It enables us to authentically meet the needs of our clients where they are."

Porter Wright was also inspired by Columbus-based Loud Capital's LGBTQ-focused venture capital group, which raised \$10 million.

"That was one of our first data points that this is a big market, and we should be thinking about what we can



Karim Ali, chief diversity officer and partner in charge of professional personnel at Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP, is a 2021 Diversity in Business honoree.

be doing to help support this market," Ali said.

Ali said that the LGBTQ practice group is a tangible way for Power Wright to do something meaningful to support the LGBTQ community.

"A lot of us in the corporate space, we sometimes tend to take what I would consider the easy way out, going to pride parades and wearing the nice T-shirts about pride," Ali said.

There's nothing wrong with those things individually, he said, but the law firm wanted to "take a further step."

In addition, the firm has also rolled out transgender healthcare benefits, and formalized

an effort to recognize its attorneys' preferred pronouns.

The practice group will help clients with business entity formation, LGBTQ business enterprise certification counseling, commercial and residential real estate advice, labor and employment counseling and litigation, business competition, growth and operation, and more.

"LGBTQ+ business owners often face unique challenges when doing business," Ted Walters, co-chair of the group, said in a news release. "The attorneys in our group are members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community and bring the experience, understanding, and authenticity to partner with our clients to help them achieve their goals."