

## Porter Wright Starts LGBTQ Business Group

By **Adrian Cruz**

*Law360 (June 2, 2021, 4:07 PM EDT)* -- Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP has launched a practice group focused on providing LGBTQ business owners with the help they need to both start and ensure the continued success of their business ventures, the firm announced.

Co-chair Ron Hicks told Law360 Pulse on Wednesday that he carried the LGBTQ business practice over from his previous firm, the boutique Meyer Unkovic & Scott LLP, where he spent more than 30 years.

He said the firm chose to launch the practice because he and others felt there was a need to provide a service tailored to the needs of LGBTQ business owners, who he said in his experience are sometimes reluctant to seek legal counsel due to a fear of being judged for being their authentic selves.

"One of the reasons I joined Porter Wright was the desire to be at a firm where there was more than one gay lawyer," Hicks said. "I wanted to launch a practice group in which gay lawyers could represent and provide counsel to gay business owners. We have a number of LGBT lawyers here at Porter Wright who want to help other clients grow and start their businesses and make them successful."

The practice group consists of 12 people, including eight attorneys who identify as LGBT, and operates in a number of Porter Wright's markets, including Pittsburgh, Chicago, Naples, Florida and three cities in Ohio. Some services the group provides are LGBT Business Enterprise certification, tax planning, employment counseling and intellectual property protection.

"Now, they'll be able to talk to our lawyers, and be able to disclose information that's pertinent to not only how they operate the business, but what their plans are," Hicks said. "LGBT business owners need to be open and honest with their attorneys in getting advice on how to best plan for their futures, and that's what we offer them."

Along with the new practice group, co-chair Ted Walters said Porter Wright has taken a number of initiatives to support its LGBT attorneys. The firm was Mansfield Rule certified, which requires that 30% of candidates considered for leadership roles be women, members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, members of the LGBTQ community or people with disabilities. The firm also participated



Ted Walters



Ron Hicks

in the Human Rights Campaign's Business Coalition for the Equality Act, which supports the implementation of federal legislation that would provide the same basic protections to LGBTQ people as are provided to other protected groups under federal law.

"It's not just lip service at Porter Wright, and it's not just a few of us who happen to be LGBT," Walters said. "There's a real action at Porter Wright where people in our group aren't just attorneys, but they're also in leadership positions. I'm the partner in charge of the Naples office, and we have other LGBT people who are in a similar position. It's important to the firm."

Internally, Hicks said that Porter Wright has an employee resource group called Equality Alliance, which currently has more than 50 participants working on reaching out to the LGBTQ community, firm policies, professional development and both recruitment and retention. According to the firm's website, some changes at the firm have included a more inclusive nondiscrimination policy, a gender-affirming bathroom policy and the option for attorneys to list their pronouns on their online profiles.

Walters also noted that the new practice group is a good recruitment tool for Porter Wright.

"This new business group, and the fact that we have it is unique in the legal market," he said. "We think it's a great attraction for attorneys looking to join our firm."

--Editing by Nicole Bleier.