



DIVERSITY, EQUITY + INCLUSION



Learn more from Stan and Brandi about some of the firm's key initiatives from 2023.

[Watch the video](#)

On behalf of Balch & Bingham, we are pleased to share with you our 2023 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Report.

Throughout the pages of the Report, we illustrate the ways in which we have expanded upon our long-standing commitment to our people, our clients, and our communities. Building on our foundation, the firm will continue to hyperfocus on our culture – ensuring that each member possesses a sense of belonging and fair opportunity to thrive.

We are thankful to Firm Leadership, the DEI Council, the Hiring Committee, the Associates Committee, and countless attorneys and professionals who work to strengthen the firm's DEI priorities.

Thank you for taking the time to review our Report and learn about how we are working to improve our firm and the legal community. We hope you will join us on this journey. **It takes all of us.**



Stan Blanton
Managing Partner



Brandi A. Russell
Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer
and Director of Talent Management

**Our Commitment to
a Better Future for
All of Us**

At Balch, we embrace Diversity, Equity & Inclusion as core values of the firm. Our dedication to providing excellent client service is rooted in our commitment to cultivating an environment where people of all backgrounds, characteristics, and perspectives are valued for their contributions, skills, and talents. We actively recruit, hire, mentor, develop, advance, and retain a diverse team and foster an inclusive environment that encourages respect, camaraderie, and community for all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key Priorities

Highlights

Foster a Connected and Supportive Culture

Demonstrate Active Leadership Commitment

Strengthen Diverse Talent Pipeline and Representation

Focus Development Opportunities Toward Retention

Partner with Communities

KEY PRIORITIES

Foster a Connected and Supportive Culture

We foster an inclusive environment by building and expanding opportunities for personal accountability and growth. In support of this effort, we host a learning series designed to provide actionable steps in fostering a workplace where everyone is empowered to reach their full potential. We also promote educational experiences that celebrate our unique diversity and collective success.

Partner with Our Communities

We work to extend our commitment to DEI beyond our workplace by supporting diverse and minority bar associations, organizations, and community-led initiatives, and identifying opportunities to collaborate with clients on our efforts to increase, advance and support DEI initiatives within our respective organizations and the legal profession.

Demonstrate Active Leadership Commitment

We strive to demonstrate active leadership commitment by encouraging personal accountability, sharing success for progress, and incorporating DEI goals into work practices and policies. Our leadership also extends to annual assessments and succession planning, business development, as well as professional and leadership development.

Strengthen Diverse Talent Pipeline & Representation

We work to strengthen a diverse legal talent pipeline by leading diversity pipeline programs, recruiting at diversity-focused events and fairs, hosting mentoring and networking events for underrepresented law students, and training our teams to identify and remove barriers to recruiting with a diverse lens.

Focus Development Opportunities Toward Retention

We focus our development programming to meet the needs of all members of the firm, with an enhanced focus on opportunities tailored by members and allies of affinity groups such as Balch BLOCC and Women's Initiative. We also review qualitative feedback through our mid-year and year-end review processes to further enhance our programming.



HIGHLIGHTS

Compass Award: Second Consecutive Year

We are proud to announce that the firm has once again been named a 2023 Compass Award recipient by the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD). This recognition marks the second consecutive year that the firm has been acknowledged for its unwavering commitment to fostering diversity and inclusivity within the legal profession.



Christina Pantazis Momentum Upward Program

Christina Pantazis, attorney in the firm's Birmingham office and member of the Labor & Employment Practice, was selected as a participant in the Momentum's Upward Program. Momentum Upward is a program designed to foster further development of career driven women during their early to mid-career years. The program guides each cohort of women through a process of self-discovery, vision casting, action planning, and provides access to a vast network of women leaders.

Christina Nuñez Atlas Award

Christina Nuñez, attorney in the Jackson office and member of the Corporate & Commercial Practice, was awarded the inaugural Pathfinder Atlas Award at the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) Pathfinder Fall Meeting. New this year, the Atlas Award is designed to recognize Pathfinders who have the highest levels of engagement throughout the program.



Christina Nuñez, Attorney, Jackson Office.



It was such an enriching and rewarding experience to be part of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity Pathfinder Program. I thank Balch for the opportunity and for recognizing the importance of DEI. I am inspired by every lawyer I had the privilege of connecting with and grateful to have been on the recipients of the inaugural Atlas Award."

Birmingham Business Journal NextGen BHM: Law Honoree

Katie Kimbrell, partner in the firm's Birmingham office, member of the Corporate & Commercial Practice, was named to the *Birmingham Business Journal* as a 2023 honoree on its "NextGen Law" list. This award honors lawyers under 40 years of age who have been recognized as the future of the legal profession in Birmingham.



Katie Kimbrell, Partner, Birmingham Office.



Pictured L to R: Raine Cook, Megan Stephens, Katie Kimbrell, Jennifer Cox.

Champions of Justice Hall of Fame Kick-off Reception

The Jackson office hosted a kickoff reception for the 2023 Champions of Justice honorees, including local leaders in the Mississippi Civil Rights movement.

This signature event was spearheaded by the Mississippi Center for Justice. The Center for Justice opened its doors in 2003 to advance racial and economic justice through an approach that combines legal services with policy advocacy, community education and media outreach. Balch's Walter Boone serves as Chair of the Board of Directors.



Pictured L to R: Demarcus McGee, Walter Boone, Matt Warren, Christina Nuñez, Laura Sheffield.

FOSTER A CONNECTED AND SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

At Balch & Bingham, we are committed to advancing a dynamic and welcoming culture where all members of the firm can thrive.

Continued our DEI Learning Series to infuse inclusion into our daily practices.

As our society continues to evolve, we are engaging in dedicated learning experiences to promote a more inclusive culture. Through our learning modules, members of the firm are able to gain a better understanding of daily practices to strengthen our inclusive environment and to incorporate more inclusive language into our vocabulary. In 2024, we will integrate practices of allyship and mentorship into our DEI Learning Series.

Each year, the firm recognizes several commemorative Heritage Months and Special Days, including Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Black History Month, Women's History Month (including International Women's Day), Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, LGBTQ Pride Month, Juneteenth, National Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month, and Native American Heritage Month.



Members of the Gulfport office celebrating their win for "Top Office" as part of the firm's DEI Quiz Series. Pictured L to R: Mark Bond, Melanie Mitchell, Mary-Katherine Barnes, Mark Alexander, Heather Reeves, Leo Manuel, Allison Geter, Tracy Bouma, Margi Davis, Stephen Broadus, Cody Austin, Beth Marshall.

Continued our partnership with Leadership Council on Legal Diversity to further advance a more diverse, equitable and inclusive legal industry.

The firm continued active involvement with the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), for the 2023 year. The organization's action programs are designed to attract, inspire, and nurture talent in society and within law firms across the country, thereby helping a new and more diverse generation of attorneys ascend to positions of leadership. **David Duhé** and **Christina Nuñez** served as our 2023 Fellow and Pathfinder for their respective programs.

“

The DEI Quiz Series served as a valuable reminder of the significance of diversity in both our workplace and everyday lives. I learned several interesting facts and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.”

– Courtney Colley, *Practice Systems Analyst*

Participated in Southeastern Women Litigators Conference to amplify the importance of mentorship and how to develop a fruitful mentoring relationship.

Litigators from the firm’s Atlanta, Birmingham, and Jackson offices attended the 2nd Annual Southeastern Women Litigators Conference. The purpose of the conference is to provide support, education, and advancement for women in litigation across the southeast. Topics included enhancing business development skills, coping with imposter syndrome and burnout, refining trial and presentation skills, mentoring, and becoming a successful lawyer.

During this meeting, **Sloane Phillips**, attorney in the firm’s Birmingham office and member of the Litigation Practice, served on a panel entitled “Getting Your Sea Legs: What Do Mentees Really Want From Their Mentors.” The panel focuses on strategies that can help you get your “sea legs” by discussing the best ways to foster fruitful mentor/mentee relationships within respective organizations.



Pictured L to R: Anne Kaufold-Wiggins, Christy Crockett White, Martha Thompson, Meghan Pieler, Jenna Lombard, Sloane Phillips.

DEMONSTRATE ACTIVE LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

The firm's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council, comprised of attorneys and senior business professionals, leads the firm's strategic priorities to further advance a culture where all members possess a sense of belonging and an opportunity to thrive.

INCLUSION

Involves the day-to-day experience of all members. It is an action that involves cultivating environments where all people enjoy the opportunity to be welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate.

Highlights of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council

- 1 Last year, the firm's Executive Committee approved a policy providing attorneys with 50 hours of billable credit annually for significant leadership or participation in diversity, equity, and inclusion-related activities and events. Over the course of the year, members of the firm have devoted over **1,000 hours** to DEI-related activities and events.
- 2 Last year, the firm implemented new hiring practices to advance its goals of becoming a more diverse organization. The firm's hiring practices focus on proactively identifying needs, expanding the reach when sourcing candidates and maintaining consistent hiring procedures. The firm also utilizes an applicant tracking software to regularly measure and assess data against industry benchmarks.

- 3 In 2023, the firm served as a sponsor and attendee for the annual Scholarship Banquet with the Magic City Bar Association (MCBA), an organization (based in Birmingham, Alabama) that promotes and facilitates the professional advancement of minority attorneys and provides a forum for discussing and addressing a wide variety of community issues and concerns.



Pictured L to R: Raine Cook, Ian Burt, Nick Brown, Lauryn Smith (2L Summer Associate), Camdyn Neal (1L Summer Associate), Kelsi Long, John Banks.

Worked alongside key policy makers to secure a \$2 million federal appropriation for pro bono client, The Lovelady Center.

Members of Balch's Public Policy & Government Relations Practice **Steve Still**, **Brian Rell** and **Michael Davis** worked alongside Congresswoman Terri Sewell to secure a \$2 million federal appropriation for Balch's pro bono client, The Lovelady Center. As part of this effort, Steve, Brian, and Michael, along with The Lovelady Center's leadership, worked to develop a strategic plan identifying new resources to support the center's continued growth. Their work included an educational campaign highlighting the center's current and anticipated needs, leading advocacy efforts, and educating key policy makers about the current success of The Lovelady Center.

The Lovelady Center, based in Birmingham, Alabama, helps women rebuild their lives after overcoming adverse challenges, including addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, and incarceration. The Lovelady Center also offers services to reinforce life skills, work force training, and spiritual guidance.



Rep. Sewell presented a \$2M check to Balch's pro bono client, The Lovelady Center, to help fund critical capital needs at the Birmingham, Alabama facility which provides long-term housing and essential services to women and children after life-altering challenges.

Top 40 Under 40

Brandi Russell, Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer and Director of Talent Management, was selected as one of Birmingham's 2023 Top 40 Under 40 by the *Birmingham Business Journal*. The award honors the best and brightest of Birmingham's business scene who have distinguished themselves in their fields before the age of 40. This award is among the BBJ's most prestigious designations, with hundreds of nominations considered.

John Banks, attorney in the Birmingham office and member of the firm's Litigation Practice, has been named one of Alabama's Top 40 Under 40 Black Lawyers by The National Black Lawyers. This honor is awarded to the top 40 under 40 African American lawyers in each state or region with reputations for providing excellent legal representation in their respective practice areas.

Alabama Leadership Initiative

In April, **Kelsi Long**, attorney in the firm's Birmingham office and member of the Energy and Corporate Practices, graduated as a member of Class V of the Alabama Leadership Initiative (ALI). The Alabama Leadership Initiative is a unique program offering young professionals the opportunity to develop leadership skills and to establish ongoing relationships with other young leaders across the state. ALI focuses on three key areas: education, connections, and personal development.

Birmingham Business Journal Leader in Diversity

Irving Jones, partner in the firm's Birmingham office and member of the firm's Litigation Practice, was recognized in the *Birmingham Business Journal's* annual "Who's Who in Diversity and Inclusion" list, published in December. This list highlights individuals who have made significant contributions to advancing diversity and inclusion efforts in the state of Alabama.

This recognition follows Irving being named a 2023 Leader in Diversity by the BBJ earlier in the year, recognizing his leadership in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives both within the firm and the community.



Pictured: L to R: Brandi Russell, Kelsi Long, Allen Estes, Irving Jones, Leslie Allen, Stan Blanton.

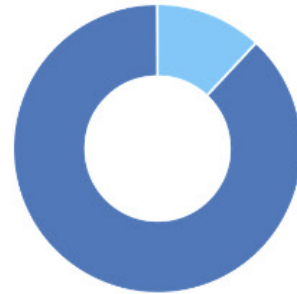
STRENGTHEN DIVERSE TALENT PIPELINE AND REPRESENTATION

Through our pipeline and early recruiting efforts, Balch continues to advance its commitment to providing excellent client service by building and developing a diverse group of teams.

DIVERSITY

Includes all the ways in which people differ. That includes, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disability.

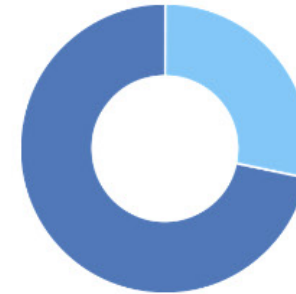
2023 FIRST-YEAR ASSOCIATE CLASS



88%

Women or BIPOC

2023 SUMMER ASSOCIATE CLASS



71.8%

Women or BIPOC

“

Last year, the Hiring Committee implemented new practices to further advance our goals of becoming a more diverse organization. Our new framework focuses on proactively identifying hiring needs, expanding our sourcing pool to reach a more diverse group of potential candidates, and maintaining consistent hiring procedures across all offices and practices.”

– **Adam Israel**, *Chair of Hiring Committee*

“

In September, we were proud to welcome one of our most diverse first-year associate cohorts in firm history. The cohort is comprised of some of the best and brightest with a unique set of backgrounds, traits, skills, and experiences to better serve our clients.”

– **Brooke Gram**, *Vice Chair of Hiring Committee*

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL ON LEGAL DIVERSITY (LCLD) 1L SCHOLARS

As part of our partnership with the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, we are proud to participate in the LCLD 1L Scholars Program. Through this initiative, law students have the opportunity to work side-by-side with attorneys from LCLD Member organizations. The 1L Scholars also have the opportunity to participate in robust client networking events and career development sessions throughout the year.

Camdyn Neal – Buena Vista, GA
The University of Alabama School of Law



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Through the 1L LCLD Scholar program, I have gained new mentors and perspectives in the practice of law. As a first-generation law student, there are many aspects about the legal profession that, without this program, I may not otherwise have had an opportunity to learn this early in my career.”

Cameron Evans – Jacksonville, FL
Howard University School of Law



“

My experience as one of the LCLD scholars for Balch this summer will have a long-lasting impact on my career in the legal profession. The program provided me access to a network of diverse peers, professionals, and mentors, all of whom offered guidance and support on successfully navigating the legal profession.”

ON CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

At Balch, our efforts are not limited to one month. We take pride in our responsibility to reach back and pour into the next generation. As such, throughout the year we find ways to mentor students who will make up the next generation of lawyers across the firm's footprint.

1 Alabama Law BLSA Banquet

The firm was proud to continue in its years-long support as sponsor for the 21st Annual Scholarship Awards Banquet for the Black Law Students Association at the University of Alabama School of Law. This year's theme was "*Legacy: Planting Seeds of Excellence*," with the keynote address applying the importance of maintaining your integrity, resilience, and servant leadership.



Pictured L to R: Nick Brown, Kelsi Long, John Banks, Brandi Russell, Camdyn Neal (1L Summer Associate), Katie Kimbrell, Malcolm Lowe (1L Summer Associate), Irving Jones, Raine Cook.

2 Ole Miss Law BLSA Banquet

The firm was proud to serve as the title sponsor of the Annual Scholarship and Award Banquet for the Constance Slaughter-Harvey Chapter of the Black Law Students Association at the University of Mississippi School of Law. This year's theme was "*Back to Black: The Time is Now*," with the keynote address focusing on the importance of using a capital B in Black when referring to a racial, ethnic, or cultural group and honoring the legacy of those who came before us by leading with a bold presence.



Pictured L to R: David Duhé, Kye Handy, Christina Nuñez, Arreyah Whitlock (2L Summer Associate), Walter Boone, Joe Curry.

3 Alabama Law BLSA Cover Letter Session

In November, attorneys from the firm's Birmingham office visited the Black Law Students Association at the University of Alabama School of Law to host a workshop on cover letters and resume drafting, and networking tips.



Balch attorneys Irving Jones, Ian Burt, and Kelsi Long with members of the University of Alabama School of Law Black Law Students Association.

4 Ole Miss Law Annual HBCU Law Preview Day

Balch was proud to serve as a sponsor and attendee of the 3rd Annual HBCU Law Preview Day at the University of Mississippi School of Law. This annual event included tours of the law center, a mock class, a crash course on the LSAT, a discussion with admissions staff, and a panel where Ole Miss Law grads discussed their experiences.



Balch's Kye Handy, who completed her tenure as Chair of the University of Mississippi Diversity Council in 2023, sharing remarks with the attendees.

Magnolia Bar Association

Balch was proud to serve as a sponsor for the 2023 Magnolia Bar Association Boys & Girls Camp. **Allison Payne**, attorney in the firm's Austin office and member of the Energy Practice, served as a panelist for the event. The Magnolia Bar Association Law Camp is a four-day residential camp with a mission to provide a free program for teens in Mississippi. During the camp, the campers have an opportunity to interact with lawyers, learn about the study and practice of law, and engage in activities that advance the development of values and life skills.

Ole Miss Career Services Session

Members from the firm's Birmingham, Gulfport, and Jackson offices visited the 1L cohort at the University of Mississippi School of Law to share insights on applying for a 1L summer clerkship. During the discussion, attorneys presented on best practices to cover letter and resume drafting, and networking tips. Following the workshop, the firm hosted a reception to facilitate meaningful relationships with the class.

FOCUS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES TOWARD RETENTION

At Balch & Bingham, we work to build and expand opportunities for growth through active affinity networks for our lawyers of color (Balch BLOCC) and women lawyers (Women's Initiative).

EQUITY

Relates to routine patterns, practices, and processes. It recognizes that not everyone starts in the same place, and, as a result, not everyone enjoys access to the same opportunities.

Women's Initiative

Balch's Women's Initiative serves as an internal community for women attorneys across the firm's footprint. Through this initiative, the members work together, and with firm leadership, to address the challenges facing women in the workforce.

Mary Samuels, partner in the firm's Birmingham office and member of the Environmental & Natural Resources Practice, led the firm's Women's Initiative for three years. Over the past year, Mary has welcomed **Katie Kimbrell**, partner in the firm's Birmingham office and member of the firm's Corporate & Commercial Practice, to the role of chair of the firm's Women's Initiative.

Katie has a diverse practice with a focus on corporate, securities, and financial services. She regularly advises clients in a wide variety of complex transactions and all aspects of mergers and acquisitions for public and private companies. In 2023, Katie was selected to participate in the Momentum Executive Leadership Program, an extensive nine-month program designed to further develop leadership skills, confidence, and connections among Alabama's most promising women.

As the firm looks ahead, with Katie's leadership, the Women's Initiative plans to increase allyship awareness and the ways in which its supporters can contribute to the success of the group. The Women's Initiative will also continue its focus on **professional development** covering a variety of topics such as public speaking, business development, and career advancement; **mentorship**; and **client engagement**.



Join Mary and Katie as they discuss the driving force that is Balch's Women's Initiative, the impact it has had on their careers, and what is on the horizon.

[Watch the video >](#)

Nutrition Session with Sophie Dolan

Sophie Dolan, a registered dietician nutritionist and Balch Business Boost client, led a lunch and learn for the firm's Women's Initiative. During the program, Sophie shared wellness tips on how to incorporate healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better health outcomes.



Members of the firm's Birmingham office pictured with guest host of lunch and learn Sophie Dolan. Pictured L to R: Claire Johnson, Mary Samuels, Christina Pantazis, Sophie Dolan, Grace Hembree, Sloane Phillips, Emily McKee, Katie Monti.

“

I am so glad the Women's Initiative organized a lunch and learn with Sophie Dolan. Balancing healthy habits during busy seasons of life is challenging. Sophie shared realistic advice on consistently maintaining a healthy and nourishing diet, and I continue to implement many of her suggestions into my daily routine.”

— Grace Hembree

Self Defense Class

The firm's Birmingham office hosted a self-defense class for women attorneys and clerks during the summer associate program. Attendees of the class engaged in self-defense techniques that sharpened their situational awareness and safety strategy skills.



Members of Women's Initiative show off their self-defense skills. The session was led by Danny Williams, 9th degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do and instructor, from Tiger Rock Martial Arts and Balch attorney, John Banks, 4th degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do.

Balch BIPOC Lawyers Opportunities Culture & Connection (BLOCC)

Balch BLOCC actively supports Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) lawyers through monthly meetings that aim to foster **professional development** and **cross-office mentorship**. BLOCC also highlights the unique challenges facing racially and ethnically diverse communities and promotes increasing and retaining the number of racially and ethnically diverse groups within the firm and throughout the legal profession.

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I am so proud of this group for taking this initiative and the firm supports and encourages the effort. We recognize that recruitment is only one step in creating a diverse and inclusive law firm. Balch BLOCC is a critical tool in our lawyers' professional development and job satisfaction. More importantly, it will help them become better lawyers and better serve our clients.”

— Stan Blanton, *Managing Partner*

“

The summit was a fantastic opportunity to provide a meaningful sense of connection between the attendees despite the physical distance between our offices. I feel that it is also important, particularly for the junior lawyers, to know that Balch is a place where they have real opportunities to grow and succeed in the profession and the event was a strong showing that Balch is truly committed to providing an environment that will foster that path.”

— David Duhé, *Partner*

In April, Balch was proud to host its Inaugural Professional & Business Development Summit for BIPOC attorneys. The Summit included communication and relationship building activities designed to build trust, open lines of communication, and increase collaboration. Attendees also engaged in a roundtable with three dynamic in-house lawyers, designed to strengthen and build client relationships. Partners from the firm also led robust roundtable discussions about the path to partnership and the importance of mentorship.



Members of Balch BLOCC attend the firm's Inaugural Professional & Business Development Summit for BIPOC attorneys.



Members of Balch BLOCC attend the firm's Inaugural Professional & Business Development Summit for BIPOC attorneys.

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITIES

Our commitment to becoming more diverse, equitable and inclusive, extends beyond the bounds of our offices into our communities.

ALLY(IES)

Someone who acknowledges the oppression of groups other than their own (in terms of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.) and is active and purposeful in efforts supporting, promoting, and advancing real change through a focus on inclusion, equity, and diversity.

ALLYSHIP

The state or condition of being an ally; supportive associate with members of a marginalized group.

Birmingham Promise

The firm was proud to serve as presenting sponsor for the Birmingham Promise second annual “Night of Promise” event on November 9, 2023. Birmingham Promise aims to ensure that every graduate of Birmingham City Schools has a clear pathway to college and career success, offering scholarships to cover tuition gaps, providing students with success coaches and providing paid internships for high school seniors in high-demand industries and post-graduation apprenticeships.



Pictured L to R: David Miceli, Ian Burt, Greg Butrus, Katie Kimbrell, Doug Kauffman.



“

Our Atlanta office truly cherishes our community partnership with PAWkids. Embracing this nonprofit isn't just about giving; it's about amplifying our impact by enriching the lives of these young children.”

— **Cimi Douglass**, Marketing and Recruiting Coordinator



DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION COUNCIL

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[Balch.com/DEI](https://www.balch.com/DEI)

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