

Fair Employment Advocate – Paul Steven Miller

By Jessica Summers

Paul Steven Miller graduated near the top of his Harvard Law School class in 1986 – yet upon his graduation, he was rejected by forty-five law firms before finally landing a job at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips in Los Angeles. You see, this was four years before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Miller was born with achondroplasia, a form of dwarfism. Miller later recalled that one of the early firms he interviewed with told Miller that his credentials were impressive, but that the firm would not hire him lest their clients "think we're running some sort of circus freak show."

Despite the blatant discrimination that he faced early in his career, Miller quickly rose through the professional ranks and became known for his work to end the type employment discrimination that he had experienced firsthand.

Just four years out of law school – Miller was named director of litigation for Loyola Law School's disability rights law center. His advocacy in this position garnered him national recognition and in 1994, at the age of just thirty-three, Miller was appointed by President Clinton to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). During his decade of service as an EEOC Commissioner, Miller played a central role in the implementation and enforcement of the ADA.

After departing the EEOC, Miller became a professor at the University of Washington Law School. Having observed critical gaps in the ADA, Miller was a key architect and champion of the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act (GINA), which was signed into law in 2008 and which prohibits employment discrimination based on genetic characteristics. Miller was once again called to public service in 2009 when newly elected President Obama engaged him to assist in selecting and recruiting diverse candidates for key positions within the federal agencies.

Tragically, Miller died of cancer in 2010 at the age 49. He was survived by his wife and two daughters as well as a legacy of molding and improving the nation's anti-employment discrimination laws. As President Obama wrote in remembrance of Miller, "[i]n a world where persons with disabilities are still too often told 'you can't,' Paul spent his life proving the opposite."