

**Agendum
Oakland University
Board of Trustees Formal Session
February 2, 2024**

**APPROVAL OF HONORARY DEGREE FOR BRUCE MILLER
A Recommendation**

- 1. Division and Department:** Academic Affairs, Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.
- 2. Introduction:** In accordance with Article IX of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, honorary degrees may be awarded by the Board of Trustees in recognition of distinguished accomplishment and service within the scope of the arts and letters, sciences, professions, and public service as recognized and supported by the University. The awarding of honorary degrees reaffirms Oakland University's scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and ties the University to the community at large.

Bruce Miller, founding partner of Miller, Cohen PLC, has defended the rights of workers in Michigan since 1954. With a career grounded in the protection of organized labor, he has fought racial discrimination and defended the rights of workers and the poor. Miller has served numerous unions in Michigan and is currently the General Counsel for the Metro AFL-CIO.

Miller has been a tireless advocate for civil rights and racial understanding. As a high school student in the 1940s, he formed the Interracial Youth Committee—an organization designed to quell racial tensions and end riots in New York City high schools. As a law student at Wayne State University, he led demonstrations against local businesses that refused to serve African Americans. As a labor lawyer, he represented those who challenged discriminatory hiring practices and helped to win equal access to jobs for Detroit's African American community. Despite having a career grounded in protecting labor unions, Miller successfully litigated an affirmative action case against the Laborers Union of Michigan so that African Americans had access to these important construction jobs.

While serving as an attorney for the Detroit Branch of the NAACP, Miller worked to protect black citizens from police brutality. Defending a woman who was accused of crimes and beaten by police while being taken into custody, he helped shine a light on illegal police practices and find allies in law enforcement who were no longer willing to turn a blind eye to police intimidation. This effort to end arbitrary and brutal police behavior resulted in the first discipline of a Detroit police officer for racial brutality.

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In an effort to break the “lily white” hiring practices of Detroit’s downtown banks, the Detroit NAACP organized pickets at the First Federal of Michigan to demand non-discriminatory hiring. When protesters were arrested, Bruce Miller represented them. During the trial he successfully challenged the judge for making racially disparaging remarks and eventually resolved the case with a compromise that included a commitment from First Federal to establish goals and timetables for hiring blacks. Miller was critical in other efforts during the 1960s to create equal opportunities for black Detroiters. He led the effort to end the Poindexter Homeowners Ordinance; this was part of housing regulation in Detroit that permitted segregationists to use housing covenants to block African Americans from most residential neighborhoods. By successfully challenging the Poindexter Housing Ordinance, Miller was able to help turn the tide against legally based housing discrimination in the city.

Miller’s career in litigation was not always successful, but he demonstrated that he was ahead of his time in conceptualizing rights. In 1973 he represented a woman who had to quit her job to care for her husband after he became paralyzed in a workplace injury. Arguing the woman was entitled to workingmen's compensation, Miller was unsuccessful in convincing the judges of the Michigan Court of Appeals that a wife’s work in the household was worth money. In the 1990s, Miller fought the liquidation of government mental institutions. He argued that the transition to privately managed group homes was not accompanied by appropriate licensing or oversight legislation. He feared that, without proper medical oversight and medication management, some of Michigan’s most vulnerable would become homeless. Although he did not prevail in these cases, he helped to illuminate critical problems facing vulnerable Michiganders.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Miller increasingly shifted his energy away from litigation and toward changing public perceptions of the rights of workers and the obligations of employers. He staunchly defended unionization, against the main currents of American culture. He wrote opinion pieces complaining that the National Labor Relations Board did little to prevent employers from firing those workers who supported unionization. He defended Hudson’s Department Store workers who had been fired for union activity, and represented workers who claimed that the department store management had leaked confidential information from their personnel files in an effort to publicly embarrass them.

Through his representation of the AFL-CIO, Miller tirelessly advocated for workers’ rights across the nation. Miller continuously advocated for a National Labor Relations Board that was more vigilant in stopping employer retaliation against union activists. He promoted stronger, better enforced workplace safety laws (particularly condemning the deaths of 25 workers in a North Carolina meat packing plant who could not escape a fire because all of the emergency exits had been padlocked by the management to prevent the theft of chickens). He called for more systematic federal support of job

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training to help those who worked in manufacturing and wanted to shift to other industries. Because he understood the labor implications of a growing global economy, Miller also participated in AFL-CIO International's efforts to prevent workers' exploitation outside of the United States. He was an ardent supporter of the Polish labor movement, Solidarity and their efforts to democratize Eastern Europe and ease their transition away from the Soviet bloc.

Bruce Miller still practices law, aggressively defending the rights of workers. With a career that has spanned eight decades, he has been involved in some of the most critical issues that have confronted modern American society. He has been a consistent advocate for democratic ideals and the citizens' rights that accompany a truly democratic society. He has tenaciously fought to protect others who cannot protect themselves.

Once when asked by a reporter why he works so tirelessly for others, Bruce Miller responded that he learned his values from his mother, who taught him, "Everything you are is because of other people. Nobody makes it on their own."

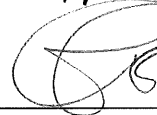
It is our suggestion, with your approval, that Bruce Miller is awarded a Doctor of Laws, honoris causa from the College of Arts and Science at the 9:00 PM ceremony on Saturday, April 27, 2024. Should you determine that a more appropriate (different) degree be awarded or at a different ceremony, the Honorary Degree Committee supports your recommendation (without further review).

3. **Previous Board Action:** The Board of Trustees periodically awards honorary degrees at its Formal Sessions.
4. **Budget Implications:** None.
5. **Educational Implications:** The awarding of honorary degrees is an established tradition in academe, by which the University reaffirms its scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and its ties to the wider community.
6. **Personnel Implications:** None.
7. **University Reviews/Approvals:** The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost has recommended approval of the recipient to receive an Honorary Degree.
8. **Recommendation:**
RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees awards the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws *Honoris Causa* to Bruce Miller.

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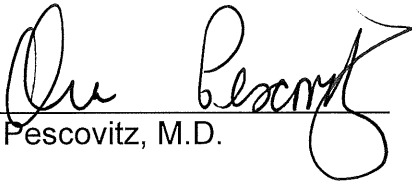
9. Attachments: None.

Submitted to the President
on 1/29, 2024 by



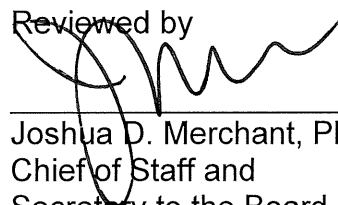
Britt Rios-Ellis, M.S., Ph.D.
Executive Vice President for
Academic Affairs and Provost

Recommended on 1/29, 2024
to the Board for Approval by



Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.
President

Reviewed by



Joshua D. Merchant, Ph.D.
Chief of Staff and
Secretary to the Board of Trustees