



**Toni Beninato, MD,
MS, FACS**

DEI Director

I am writing this statement to self-nominate for the position of DEI Director for the Association of Women Surgeons. I believe my contributions to and experience with AWS make me well-suited for the position, and it would be an honor to continue my service to the organization.

I joined AWS in 2016 when I started my first faculty position and started attending the annual meeting at that time. I was impressed by the diversity of women at the meeting, from Chairs of Surgery to medical students and surgical residents, all united behind the common goal of advancing women in surgery. In 2018, I joined the Outreach committee when it was in its infancy, advancing to Vice-Chair in 2020 and most recently Chair since 2022. While the Outreach Committee's scope continues to grow and develop, the most consistent mission we have fulfilled over the past six years is to foster our relationships with our Liaison societies: SAAS, SBAS, LSS, AOSA, and AAS. Four of the five societies partner with us in elevating those who are underrepresented in medicine and I continue to be motivated to advance our missions side by side.

Over the past six years, I have worked on various projects through the Outreach Committee under the leadership of the DEI Director. Early on in my involvement, I helped to develop and revise the DEI statement for AWS, and as a committee member and Vice-Chair judged many joint scholarships and visiting professorships sponsored by AWS and our Liaison societies. The COVID-19 pandemic put many of these relationships on hold, and when I became chair of Outreach Committee, one of our primary missions was to re-establish and strengthen prior relationships with our Liaison societies and work to develop new ones. Over the past two years we re-established our Visiting Professorships with SBAS and SAAS as well as our

IDEI travel awards to the annual meeting with four of the five Liaison societies. We have co-sponsored a new travel award to the SAAS meeting and are discussing a new initiative of producing joint webinars with women leaders in surgery and its various subspecialties. We established and awarded for the first time this year a visiting professorship with LSS and will choose a host site shortly. We now give 10 awards per year to women in various career stages in partnership with our liaison societies and hope to continue to grow that in the future. We also recently reviewed and revised the demographic information collected from our membership to make it more inclusive.

Though we have accomplished a lot in the last few years, I think there are great opportunities to do even more. I am proud to have re-established our visiting professorships and travel awards, and I would like to continue to work with AOSA to establish a visiting professorship. I want to re-establish a closer relationship with our AAS liaison and develop some joint programming with them, potentially some scholarships to the great courses they offer several times per year. Though not directly under the DEI umbrella, I also aim to continue to establish relationships with sub-specialty societies so we can continue to empower women throughout the surgical world. I have so enjoyed my work with this organization and would embrace the opportunity to continue the work we have been doing. I would love the opportunity to provide the continuity of leadership to Outreach Committee and our Liaisons by advancing to DEI Director.

Thank you for your consideration.