

Awatef Assad, Esq., Deputy Director for Risk Management, Cuyahoga County, is a fighter for fairness and social justice. As the first woman to become an attorney from Beit Hanina, a Palestinian town in East Jerusalem, Awatef has fought to create a level playing field for everyone. Awatef found inspiration from her mother, Fahmia—who herself attended the first Beit Hanina school for girls in the 1930’s—and whose unrelenting determination was responsible for bringing her family to the United States in 1969. Awatef’s love for her community and learning comes from her father, Ismail Ahmad—a community icon who devoted his life to the betterment of his community.

With twenty-six years of experience as a government litigation attorney, Awatef led the County’s effort in enacting the historic Anti-Discrimination Ordinance and the establishment of the Human Rights Commission. She co-authored the first amicus brief filed in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court marriage equality case in support of the rights of all citizens to marry and raise children.

As an Assistant Law Director with the Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland, Awatef represented government officials in complex civil rights litigation, class-actions, and wage and hour claims. The successful outcomes she achieved in the many high-profile matters have had a significant and positive impact on the community and the perception of its residents regarding their government officials—especially those in law enforcement.

Currently, Awatef directs Risk Management for Cuyahoga County—a county with approximately 1.2 million residents, 4,500 employees and over \$3 billion dollars in real estate. She oversees the administration of property and liability insurance, claims management, and loss prevention programs – and established the first-ever Enterprise Risk Management Program.

Awatef received her *Juris Doctor Degree* from Cleveland State University College of Law in 1995, and a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration from CSU in 1988. As a first-generation law student, CSU Law School gave her the opportunity to learn and grow while acquiring the skills to advance her community and offer inspiration to those who will follow. She is life member of the Alumni Association. In 2022, Awatef was inducted into the CSU Law School Hall of Fame in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the success and prestige of the Law School and for her work in legal community. She continues to look for ways to collaborate and elevate CSU Law School students and faculty.

A resident of Cleveland for over forty-years – she has made a lifelong commitment to lifting and mentoring others. She served as mentor for the Ohio Supreme Court and mentors area law students. Awatef also established the Law School Student Advisory Groups for the CMBA’s Mental Health and Wellness Committee and Women in the Law Section – strengthening partnerships with area law schools.

She has developed numerous programs that have advanced diversity, inclusion, and equity in the legal community and improved the lives of women and diverse attorneys. These programs address the need to overcome barriers to equitable access to opportunity – and promoting the advancement of women and diverse attorneys in the legal profession. In her role as the CMBA’s VP of Inclusion and Diversity, she established the Council of Conscious Inclusion. As a member

of the Executive Committee of the National Youth Roundtable for the National Conference for Community and Justice (now the “Diversity Center”), she helped develop programs designed to fight racial bigotry and bias in Northeast Ohio and currently heads the Cuyahoga County Law Department’s inclusion and equity efforts. Awatef has also organized programs and initiatives to promote attorney wellness by focusing on mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques to reduce burn-out and achieve optimal well-being.

Her community service includes serving as the immediate past present of the CMBA’s Vice-President of Inclusion and Diversity, a Commissioner to the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Commission on Certification of Attorneys as Specialists, a member of Ohio State Bar Association’s Council of Delegates, Advisory Council on Diversity Initiatives and Attorney Wellness Advisory Board, the National Arab America Foundation Leadership Council, the Arab American Bar Association of Ohio, and the Leadership Cleveland Class of 2020.

Awatef has led many community engagements and discussions fostering understanding and addressing Arab American relations. She organized youth leadership conferences to inspire Arab-American girls to become more engaged in their community. As a former board member of ACCESS-Ohio, she spearheaded the first Needs Assessment of the Arab American Community in Cuyahoga County and established the Arab American Youth Working Towards Achievement Conference (AYWA)—an initiative to inspire Arab-American youth to become more involved in their community and to plant the seeds of leadership.

Awatef is nationally recognized for her community work on behalf of the Arab American community and legal profession. Awatef is the recipient of the following awards: F.B.I. Director’s Community Leadership, Arab American Institute (AAI) Excellence in Public Service, Ohio Civil Rights Commission “Keeping the Dream Alive,” the Cleveland American Middle East Organization (CAMEO) Leadership, and the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (CMBA) Justice for All Volunteer of the Year. Recently, Awatef received the William K. Thomas American Inn of Court’s President’s Award (2023) and the CMBA’s 150th Living Legacy Award (2023) for extraordinary leadership, innovation, and professional excellence.