

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

JERALYN L. LAWRENCE

6 Months in, Progress on Putting Lawyers First, Judicial Vacancies



WOW!

It is hard to believe, but six months have passed since my installation in May. Time has flown by. There is so much work underway and yet to be done, and it has been a pleasure and privilege to serve as your president. As we rocket ever forward to a new year and new adventures,

please allow me to share a brief update of what I, and the Association, have been up to in our efforts to improve the profession.

The Putting Lawyers First Task Force has spent the summer and fall digging into issues that are major drivers of stress in the profession. It has been gathering information via surveys on issues including wellness and experiences with the ethics and fee arbitration systems. It has also been holding informational sessions with officials and lawyers from around the country, all with the goal of creating a comprehensive report that will be submitted to the NJSBA Board of Trustees this winter to consider. In a related development, the Association has added its voice to the Judiciary's committee examining the duration of disbarment, advocating strongly that we believe there should be a path for reinstatement following disbarment. We are working to ensure there is a potential pathway for attorneys to continue their livelihood following disbarment and rehabilitation.

The Association has been tireless in its efforts to urge all parties involved to address the judicial vacancy problem that is causing catastrophic issues for lawyers and their clients who want to resolve cases. We have had a two-pronged approach: We have been outspoken advocates in asking the governor and Legislature to fill these empty positions, and our Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee has been diligent in reviewing every candidate who has been sent our way. While some progress has been made—specifically we are pleased that Justice Rachel Wainer Apter and Justice Douglas Fasciale were confirmed to the state Supreme Court—

there remains a staggering number of vacancies that need to be addressed to ensure the justice system is working to its fullest potential.

On the advocacy front, the NJSBA has been—and will continue to be—a national leader in the fight against the proliferation of non-lawyer legal service providers and non-lawyer-owned law firms. Unfortunately, some states have loosened restrictions on law firm ownership as an access to justice measure, potentially allowing for-profit businesses to compete to provide legal services in the U.S. We vow to be a voice opposing this, while also seeking ways to help clients who need representation and lawyers who want to help. Another national issue has been connecting with bar leaders around the country asking them to join us in supporting the federal version of Daniel's Law to protect our federal judges.

And in New Jersey, we are working closely with our colleagues in every county around the state to ask that lifesaving automated external defibrillators be accessible on each floor of every courthouse to protect everyone who visits these facilities. We continue to promote diversity and inclusion as well as monitor and educate our members on the latest regarding jury reform. We also are addressing mandatory pro bono assignments and are advocating for the abolishment of the *Madden* system as it is unfair to clients and to lawyers. While the goal of *Madden* is noble, it has led to disastrous consequences for clients when attorneys are compelled to represent them in practice areas for which they have no training, knowledge or expertise.

As we launch into the busy season of winter, holidays, the end of the mandatory continuing legal education reporting period, I am here to tell you that in the past six months I have seen the very best the legal community has to offer. Our members who selflessly volunteer their time and insights to do this important work and the sponsors that support our organization fill me with faith that we will accomplish so many great things together in the next six months!

Wishing you the happiest of holidays and an abundance of happiness today and throughout the year. ■