

Task Force Working Toward Positive Change for Lawyers



When I was installed as president of the New Jersey State Bar Association I announced the creation of the Putting Lawyers First Task Force. Today, I am here to report that it is already hard at work.

The task force is made up of over 30 attorneys from a wide arrange of practice areas, including criminal, civil, family, as well as attorneys who practice at large, mid-size and solo firms around the state. This summer they rolled up their sleeves to start looking for real, concrete, and meaningful ways to make the practice better for all of us.

The task force will spend the next several months examining issues that are impacting our colleagues, leading to stress, anxiety, and depression. It won't simply collect a list of complaints, rather it aims to propose steps that will lead to positive change.

The task force will examine several topics, including:

- How to improve lawyers' ability to attend to mental health and physical health issues.
- Studying how the ethics system works, such as fee arbitrations, character review process and disbarment issues, with an eye toward offering constructive suggestions.
- Looking closely at how malpractice cases play out, specifically examining whether there are recommendations to be made related to affidavits of merit coming from practicing attorneys in the same area as the person who is charged with committing malpractice, similar to the requirements

for medical malpractice actions.

- An examination of how attorneys can ethically protect their online reputation, as it has become more and more common for clients to leave reviews on websites.
- A detailed review of the law surrounding how attorneys can appropriately be relieved as counsel and similarly how they can be assured of fair compensation for their work on a matter.
- Provide recommendations to help solo and small-firm attorneys and new attorneys address the financial aspects of running a firm ethically, as well as how to balance and juggle family responsibilities.
- Study the practice of using initials in certain family law case rather than names to determine if there are alternative best practices to employ.
- How the legal community can work together to ensure the Court's mediation and arbitration programs are utilized effectively and have the resources needed to yield the best results when cases are sent along that path.

To tackle this work, the task force will dig into data, reports, gather information via surveys and collect input from meetings with key officials around the legal community. The goal is to create a comprehensive report that will be submitted to the NJSBA Board of Trustees to consider and implement.

Now, I ask for your help and feedback.

We all know there are many great aspects of practicing law and that there are challenges, too. Tell us about what you love and what issues we can drill in on. Share your experiences in the profession, what works well, what you think needs to be addressed and how we can work together to effectuate change.

Send me an email with your insights at askthenjsba@njsba.com. ■