

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

NORBERTO A. GARCIA

A Focus on Community, Connection and Lawyer Well-Being

Editor's note: Norberto A. Garcia was installed as the 128th president of the New Jersey State Bar Association at the Annual Meeting and Convention on May 14 in Atlantic City. This is an excerpt from his installation speech. It has been edited for brevity and clarity.



I cannot fully express what this opportunity means to me, my family and my colleagues. Though I'm at the top of the bill, this night is not about me—it is about our extraordinary legal community in New Jersey and the great institution that represents it—the New Jersey State Bar Association.

As your 128th president, I am proud to be the first who was born outside the United States. I'm an immigrant. I came here as a young child with my family. Whenever I think I'm having a bad day or facing a setback, I think about what my parents must have felt when they left Cuba—the only country they had ever known—to bring their young children to a place where they didn't know the language or the culture, and had to start life completely anew, leaving behind everything. The courage, the fear, the anxiety that must have taken hold. I am grateful every day for their sacrifice to give me and my sister a better life.

I'm thankful that of all the places in the world we could have landed, we ended up—after a shortcut in Madrid and Jackson Heights, Queens—in the wonderful state of New Jersey. I was blessed to grow up in Hudson County, where I still work, a wonderfully diverse place that no doubt shaped the path that brought me here.

As for my theme or project for the upcoming year, here's what I bring to the table. I have practiced at a big firm with deep resources—where you can push a button to issue a check

or retain an expert. I was also a solo practitioner for five years, knowing that every decision, every expense, every paycheck rested squarely on my shoulders. That contrast matters. It grounds how I view the challenges facing our members. Too often there's an assumption that lawyers have unlimited time, money and support. We all know that's not the case. I want everyone to know that as we consider rule changes, legislation and court decisions, I will keep a clear focus on their real-world impact and on the day-to-day practice and well-being of lawyers.

I love being a lawyer because I love dealing with people. Before COVID, the practice was different. Depositions, arbitrations, motions, conferences and seminars were mostly in person. That is the space where I learned to be a lawyer.

We all read the *New Jersey Law Journal* on Mondays—Suits and Deals, On the Move, the ethics decisions.

That world may not fully return, and that shared space may be diminished, but the need for connection and community in this profession remains as important as ever.

I want the New Jersey State Bar Association to occupy that space—to present lawyers with the opportunity to get together, communicate and mentor one another. We should expand opportunities for seasoned attorneys to engage and for newer lawyers to find guidance and support. And we should continue to leverage our listservs, CommunityNet and daily alerts to keep our members informed and connected to what's happening across the profession.

We will continue our strong partnership with the many county and affinity bar associations in the state, serving as a connecting entity and the center of gravity that binds the legal community in New Jersey together.

I look forward to working with all of you in the year ahead to strengthen that role and to build on everything we have already accomplished together.

Thank you for this opportunity and thank you for your trust. I won't take it for granted. ■