

It is not possible to start off my first President's Message without reflecting on the year we have just been through. We've lost friends, colleagues, and family. We've completely changed how we do business. Our day-to-day lives don't look anything like they did in the early part of 2020. And yet, through all of that trauma and change, the Washtenaw County Bar Association continued to function as the glue that held all of us together through this remarkable year.

We, the members, continued to receive as many of the Bar Association services as possible. The Bench-Bar Conference, which updated us on all the pandemic changes, was held on Zoom. The Probate Court training, which is mandatory, was also held on Zoom, allowing the probate practitioners to meet the requirements needed to receive court-appointments. Some of us learned yoga techniques to relieve the emotional stress of COVID and the physical stress of sitting all day. The WCBA continued to serve the community, which needed more help than ever, by raising funds for The Shelter Association of Washtenaw County at the Delonis Center in December and spring planting for Avalon Housing. Of special note is how valuable the Lawyer Referral and Information Service was to the community during this past year. With attorney offices closed, or delays in getting messages, the WCBA received a record number of calls for attorney referrals. The service provided legal services to a community that had a lot of need and, at times, was desperate. It was also a boon for those attorneys whose practices were adversely affected by the pandemic, but could handle the referrals. Thank you, Kyeena, for keeping that service operative for the last year.

Paul Fessler (our Immediate Past President), Kyeena Slater (our Executive Director), the WCBA Board of Directors, and the Section and Committee Chairs displayed great leadership and creativity adapting to the changes. Many, many thanks to our WCBA leadership in 2020 and to each of you for continuing to support the WCBA.

This June, the new officers and board members had the chance to meet and start planning for this year. One thing we all agreed on: we miss seeing everyone in person. We're looking forward to face-to-face interactions as the State opens up. We have several events planned:

- Our first face-to-face event is the July 8<sup>th</sup> joint picnic with the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan. By the time you read this, the event will have happened. I hope you had a chance to attend.
- The Annual Golf Outing will return in the fall. It is being planned now, and as soon as we have a date, we will start publicizing it.

- We are hosting the annual Bias Awareness Week Dinner in October, with the Vanzetti Hamilton Bar Association. Bias Awareness reached a new depth this past year and approaches to addressing its many tentacles were explored nationwide. We have a lot to talk about and a lot of education to do, and we hope you will join us in this important endeavor.

Although aspects of life are returning to normal now, it appears that some form of video hearings are here to stay and many offices will likely continue to operate (at least partially) remotely. We will keep you updated as the courts and other public offices that affect our practices start to re-open, and what the limitations of the re-opening will be.

The WCBA Board of Directors are committed to evolving as an organization to support you as we, fingers crossed, near the end of the pandemic and begin this new normal. To do that, we are looking to you for your time and talent. Let us know what challenges you are facing. Let us know what newly acquired skills you have that can help your brother and sister counsel. Are you proficient at livestreaming? Have you mastered video recording? Will you devote some time to give a “TED talk” to your colleagues on those topics? Or other topics that have become staples of this new normal? Do you have ideas for how the WCBA can meet community needs in this millennium?

Attorneys are community leaders. We have the ability to shape public discourse and to propose solutions to social issues. The pandemic has altered the way of life for us and our communities. We have the opportunity to re-shape our communities in new and better ways. Please engage with the WCBA in this opportunity to provide responsible leadership to our communities. You won't regret it. The WCBA is where you belong.