

YOUNG LAWYERS

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IN TIMES OF CRISIS, LAWYERS LEAD

As I write this article (my first as the Chair of the Young Lawyer Board) from my home office, I am contemplating all of the societal changes that are about to occur and our new “normal” once we are given the all-clear by our government leaders, doctors and scientists from the COVID-19 pandemic. What will our world look and feel like? How will we interact with each other? Will we continue to hold large-scale events; and, if so, what will they look like? Will we be able to cheer on our Mountaineers or Thundering Herd on the gridiron this fall? No one knows the answers to these questions or the many others, and we may not for some time. One thing is for sure, though: the role of lawyer in our society will not change and will continue to be existentially vital.

Throughout our relatively short history, the United States has faced

monumental crises — the Civil War, two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Great Recession and other epidemics and pandemics. Each time, we have bounced back, greater than we were before. I have no reason to doubt that this time will be any different. Whether that turns out to be true, however, is dependent upon lawyers rising to the occasion, as much as any other profession or group in our society.

Following each of the aforementioned trials and tribulations, and the many others that our society and the world have faced, lawyers stepped up in a most significant way to lead and chart the path forward. Lawyers write, enact, enforce and interpret the many laws, rules and regulations that come out of each crisis. We protect those who have been affected most by helping to secure their financial future, administering the estates of those who

have been lost or making claims for benefits or damages on behalf of our clients where appropriate. We petition government actors and seek redress in the courts to ensure that civil, voting and other rights afforded by the United States Constitution and those of the various states are not infringed upon while the focus of the Nation may be elsewhere. In short, we uphold our Oath by representing our clients to the best of our abilities in whatever capacity we have as an attorney-at-law.

The COVID-19 pandemic is no different. So far, we have seen lawyers step up to advise clients, both individuals and businesses, and the general public regarding the various government stimulus and unemployment benefits for which they may be eligible. The criminal defense bar and prosecutors have been working to secure

the release of nonviolent incarcerated individuals, many of whom are at high risk for a bad outcome if infected with the COVID-19 virus. As this is an election year, lawyers around the country have been assisting in securing voting alternatives or complete postponement of primary elections. These are just a few examples of how lawyers have been working and using their skill during this pandemic. Certainly, there is more need and effort to come as we navigate the pandemic and our post-COVID-19 future.

The Young Lawyer Board stands ready to lead and assist our members in any way possible during the crisis. Our mission is to implement and contribute to programs that promote education, leadership and public service, and we are eager to continue to fulfill that mission. For instance, several of our members have engaged in community service projects to help protect and feed the essential workers who have continued to report for duty during the pandemic, including those in health care and other essential services. In the months leading up to the pandemic, we spearheaded a collection drive for personal hygiene products and are currently exploring options to distribute those to the needy in our communities. The Board also requested that the CLE Commission seek a one-year extension of time for those admitted to The Bar between July 1, 2018, and April 30, 2019, to complete the Bridge the Gap program; the Supreme Court of Appeals approved that extension by Order on April 16, 2020.

Our profession is, at its core, one of service. I am proud to be a lawyer, and I am proud of the work we do, day in and day out, in the pursuit of justice for our clients and for the greater good. Of course, this is a trying time for us all; but if we continue to be true to our Oath, we will come out stronger than before.

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As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, this is my first as Chair of the Young Lawyer Board (previously known as the Young Lawyer Section Executive Committee). Please allow me to introduce myself — I am a first-generation college graduate who hails from Wetzel County. I am a graduate of West Virginia University and the West Virginia University College of

Law. I have lived and practiced law in Morgantown for the last eight years. Prior to that, I spent three years in Charleston. My practice focuses mostly on personal injury plaintiff litigation, but I have practiced in a number of other areas.

I am genuinely humbled and excited by the opportunity to serve The State Bar and the young lawyers in West Virginia. I am also proud to serve alongside Monica Nassif Haddad, also of Morgantown, as the new President of The West Virginia State Bar. I look forward to my year at the helm of the Board, in which I intend to refocus on the many programs the Board currently has in place. In addition to our community service projects mentioned previously, here are a few of the things we do:

Bridge the Gap: Twice each year, the Young Lawyer Board produces a live, in-person Bridge the Gap program for new lawyers. The upcoming programs are November 13, 2020, at the Bridgeport Conference Center and April 5, 2021, at The Greenbrier. New lawyers have two years from the date they were admitted to practice to complete the program (except those admitted July 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019, who have three years).

Practice Handbook: The Young Lawyer Board has compiled a Practice Handbook with 40 chapters dedicated to different practice areas. The Handbook can be found on our website at <https://wvyounglawyers.com/practice-handbook>. This a great resource for young lawyers, or even more experienced lawyers who might be venturing into a new practice area. Some of the chapters need updating, however.

Mentorship Program: This program is designed to pair young lawyers with more experienced lawyers in their particular practice area who can act as a mentor.

The Board also produces a lecture series at the WVU College of Law and provides boxed lunches for bar exam takers in February and July. If you are interested in learning more or contributing to any of these projects, please contact me or another member of the Board. We welcome new ideas and participants.

Like the leadership and work of lawyers during a crisis, I am proud of the leadership and the work of the Young Lawyer Board. I look forward to my year as Chair and making the Board and our projects stronger than ever before. **WVL**