

YOUNG LAWYERS

Angela Brunicardi-Doss

Chairperson
Young Lawyer Section
The West Virginia State Bar



COMING TOGETHER AFTER A HARD YEAR

First, as the new Chairperson of the Young Lawyer Board, I want to briefly introduce myself. I am a native of West Virginia and was born and raised in Parkersburg in Wood County. For seven years I lived in Morgantown, where I obtained my bachelor's degree in 2007 from West Virginia University and eventually my law degree in 2010 from the West Virginia University College of Law. After law school I came back to Parkersburg, where I have continued to practice law. I previously worked for two local law firms, focusing on social security disability, family law, criminal defense and abuse and neglect cases. Currently, I am an assistant prosecutor in Wood County. I have a husband and two little girls who are 6 and 2 years old, and a baby boy due in July 2021. I became the District 3 Young Lawyer Board representative in 2016, and I have served the

Young Lawyers Section of our State Bar in various capacities since that time. I have come to know many young and not-so-young attorneys during my tenure on this Board, and I am very much looking forward to meeting and working with my fellow West Virginia attorneys in the coming years.

As we navigate the remainder of 2021, coming off the heels of 2020, it certainly feels like we all survived something together. Of course some of us were more affected by COVID-19 than others, but I dare say none of us went unscathed. Many of us have lost loved ones, and others have lost businesses. We have all dealt with tumultuous changes in our professional and personal lives, with routines and procedures being turned upside down. As we continue to navigate this pandemic, and hopefully begin to see some light at the end of a dark tunnel,

my hope is that we all continue to work together with empathy and understanding for our fellow attorneys, even as we begin to overcome these unprecedented times. Because the truth is, we all deal with unexpected life experiences of our own every day. Sometimes these times are joyful, like welcoming a new baby or reaching a personal goal like running a marathon. At other times, they are more difficult, like dealing with loss or suffering from mental or physical illness. None of us is immune to these outside influences — but wouldn't it be nice to always be able to count on your boss, your coworkers, your judges and even opposing counsel to be understanding and supportive during those times?

As I begin this new chapter in my life as the Chairperson of the Young Lawyer Board, I would like to focus some attention on

encouraging others to continue the trend of being extra kind, empathetic and supportive of your fellow attorneys, especially the young ones. Throughout the pandemic, when some had obstacles to overcome that were more difficult than others, we all stepped in and took care of each other. We did not object to continuances when opposing counsel had been in quarantine and unable to meet with clients before trial. We covered hearings for each other when our colleagues were ill. Our judges allowed us to appear remotely when we did not feel safe appearing in person. Our bosses understood when we needed time off to care for our kids whose daycares were shut down due to COVID exposures. As I mentioned earlier, we are certainly not out of the woods when it comes to this pandemic and the effect it will continue to have on many of us. But as we hopefully continue to see a decline in cases and more people getting vaccinated, let us proceed with a continued sense of togetherness, because we truly are all in this together.

Although I am more of a not-so-young attorney these days, I continue to see young attorneys in our state struggling with work-life balance and making career decisions that will accommodate a future where they can see themselves thriving, both personally and professionally. And this is where our fellow attorneys, both the young and the more seasoned, can use the skills they utilized during the pandemic to be more understanding, supportive and empathetic.

Young lawyers face obstacles that more experienced attorneys may no longer have to deal with, as they are often more settled into their lives outside the office. And as I stated before, these obstacles are not necessarily a result of misfortune, but may very well just be a part of life. Many young lawyers feel distracted by the pressures outside of their professional lives, but feel as

though they cannot let those pressures have any effect on their job. That is a difficult, if not impossible, task. As we all know, our personal and professional lives are constantly intertwined. We take home to work with us, and we bring work home with us. And this is true for every single attorney, not just the young.

Young lawyers are often new to an area, having relocated after law school. The pressures of developing new friendships in order to acclimate to a new city or state can be difficult. Life events such as engagements or weddings can be a distraction. Struggles with fertility and family planning. Becoming a new parent or dealing with maternity or paternity leave and postpartum complications. Absence of child care. New relationships. Financial hardship. These are distractions we cannot help but bring to work with us. And while these distractions are certainly not exclusive to young lawyers, they are life events that often happen for attorneys in their first 10 to 15 years of practice. I expect that I will be depending on my fellow attorneys, including my boss and coworkers, to be understanding and supportive when I need to take extra time to fulfill my duties as the new Young Lawyer Board Chairperson. I will need that same support and understanding when I welcome our family's newest addition this summer. And I intend to offer that same support to my fellow attorneys as they navigate this challenging profession while also trying to have life outside of work.

And so I challenge all of us, both young and not so young, to try and understand. Support your colleagues and offer words of wisdom, not criticism, as we all deal with life's many distractions. Just because it may not be a global pandemic does not mean we are all not constantly dealing with something. And wouldn't it be nice if we all worked together to make life just a little easier for our fellow attorneys? **WVL**