

YOUNG LAWYERS

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BRIDGING THE GAP

As required by the West Virginia State Bar Administrative Rules, all newly admitted members to the West Virginia State Bar are required to complete a mandatory “Bridge the Gap” Program. Newly admitted members must complete the Bridge the Gap Program within 24 months after admission to the West Virginia State Bar. The Bridge the Gap Program is provided by the State Bar twice a year and is held in different locations throughout the state of West Virginia. Attendees obtain CLE credit for their attendance, and the program is free of charge to newly admitted members. The Young Lawyer Section Board has been tasked with planning Bridge the Gap courses since the program transitioned to an in-person course several years ago.

The Young Lawyer Section Board is always evolving the

program. Historically, the Bridge the Gap Program’s goal was to bridge the gap between law students and the practice of law; but now, with the growth of the Uniform Bar Examination (UBE), attendees of the program span from new attorneys just admitted to practice to more seasoned attorneys from other jurisdictions newly admitted to the West Virginia State Bar.

Any transition in life can be complicated and full of challenges; that is one reason it is vital to help bridge the gap between law students and the practice of law and the transition of attorneys admitted in other jurisdictions to the practice of law in West Virginia. The goal of the Bridge the Gap Program is to help provide resources and information regarding real-world legal work. Additionally, Bridge the Gap provides attendees an overview of the resources provided

to West Virginia State Bar members, including the West Virginia Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program (JLAP) and the Office of Lawyer Disciplinary Counsel (ODC). The program also offers an opportunity for participants to network with speakers, including judges, experienced attorneys, State Bar staff, Young Lawyer Section Board members and other newly admitted attorneys.

The latest Bridge the Gap Program was held Oct. 4 at Hotel Morgan in Morgantown, West Virginia. The Young Lawyer Section Board is extremely grateful to all presenters at the latest Bridge the Gap Program, some of whom present at every single Bridge the Gap.

During each Bridge the Gap Program, members of the Young Lawyer Section Board moderate a panel discussion around the plights



At the October Bridge the Gap program, Mitch Moore, YLS District 14 Representative, presented on West Virginia's e-filing system; Andrea Hinerman, Senior Lawyer Disciplinary Counsel, discussed the lawyer disciplinary system; and the Hon. Omar Aboulhosn, Magistrate Judge, spoke on the differences between federal and state practice from the judicial perspective. PHOTOS BY MARY JANE PICKENS.

of young lawyers. The panel discusses a cornucopia of topics from work-life balance to the importance of mentorship to general advice for newly admitted attorneys. I had the privilege of moderating the last panel in Morgantown. Young Lawyer Section Board District Representatives Les Mallow Jr. (District 12), Victoria Bittorf Camardi (District 16), Jake Trombley (District 15), Hannah West (District 7) and Isaiah Robinson (African American Representative) were on the panel. They each shared their experience of transitioning to the practice of law from several perspectives, including differences in types of practice and various life stages such as juggling the practice of law with young children.

At the October Bridge the Gap, Andrea Hinerman, Senior Lawyer Disciplinary Counsel, represented the ODC. She discussed the lawyer disciplinary system in West Virginia, how to avoid the Office of Disciplinary Counsel and how to navigate the process if an attorney receives an ethics complaint. Hon. Omar Aboulhosn, Magistrate Judge for the United States District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, presented on the differences between federal and state practice from the judicial perspective. Mitch Moore, Young Lawyer Section Board District 14 Representative, gave a timely presentation on West Virginia's e-filing system, which is finally live in all 55 counties. Mary Jane Pickens, Executive Director of the West Virginia State Bar, provided a welcome to the State Bar presentation which covers the State Bar organization and the resources provided by the Bar to members.

JLAP Clinical Director Stephanie Thornton spoke about JLAP offerings such as peer support; intervention; referrals to medical and clinical resources; monitoring; and advocacy for lawyers, judges, Bar applicants, law students and their families who are struggling with any physical, mental, emotional and/or behavioral health issues.¹ Molly Russell from Legal Aid of West Virginia spoke regarding pro bono opportunities and the benefits of pro bono work. A new addition at the most recent Bridge the Gap was Hon. Brittany Ranson Stonestreet, Kanawha County Family Court Judge, who provided a presentation on the importance of family court GALs, the rules and responsibilities and practical tips for those who do GAL work.

The Young Lawyer Section Board is extremely proud of the Bridge the Gap Program and appreciative to all those who make it possible. This includes the West Virginia State Bar staff, especially Kenadee Murphy, Communications and Events Coordinator.

As a Board, we want to ensure that the program is ever-evolving and expanding to focus on new areas of law and topics most helpful to newly admitted attorneys. If you have a topic idea or have a proposed presentation you think would be fitting for newly admitted attorneys, please reach out. The next Bridge the Gap CLE will be held on April 4, 2025, at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs. **WVL**

Endnote

1. <https://wvjlap.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024-JLAP-Brochure.pdf>.