

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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Prol Reflects on a Successful Year of Advocacy and the Pursuit of Justice for All



Since this is my final *New Jersey Lawyer* President's Perspective column, I want to look back briefly on my tenure as president, and offer you my vision for our common destiny as lawyers and officers of the court going forward.

I began my term as state bar president engaging a type of conversation not normally heard from a state bar president. It was focused on the dignity and equality of every person under the Rule of Law, an issue that is deeply personal to me as the first openly gay officer of the NJSBA. I have spent much of the last decade as a practicing attorney in the struggle for equality for all people—in public, through the Legislature, and before the courts. I am honored to have been allowed to advance these issues and engage this conversation as your president. If there is one legacy I hope to leave behind, it is that you continue this important discussion in a meaningful and impactful way with anyone who will listen in the days, months and years to come.

I also opened my term sounding the alarm that there is an effort to turn the practice of law into “just another business making widgets” by companies and efforts that seek to disrupt the economics of the legal marketplace without taking into consideration that the practice of law is a noble calling that transcends simple market supply and demand analyses. As officers of the courts and practitioners, people turn to us to protect and defend fundamental rights vis-à-vis the government and other members of society. Indeed, we now find ourselves in an environment where multi-national companies have spent the last decade building a billion dollar business model that seeks to assert control over our sacrosanct role and either employ us or cut us out altogether. They offer disingen-

uous statements about how they are doing this to help the poor and needy, but the simple truth is that all they are doing is looking to help themselves.

This effort is led by companies that have made inroads in New Jersey, as well as through limited licensed legal technicians' schemes that use apprentices to take on legal work and advice even though they haven't been through the crucible of law school, are not subject to the 'burden' of ethics rules or the necessity of answering to judicial authorities. Additionally, we must be vigilant about measures that seek to impose uniformity on defendants and, possibly next, civil litigants, by automating justice through algorithms that supplant the uniqueness of individuals with data-informed predictive technology. While we have understood that justice is blind and should not take unnecessary factors and implicit biases into account in meting out judgment, the hallmark of our government is the right of the individual to be left alone and to be just that—an individual.

I call upon each of you to advance the deeper conscience of the bar, for each of you to be the guardians of democracy and the defenders of the Judiciary as your life's work. At no time in our history has this been more important. Judicial independence isn't just a theoretical concept to me. The importance of protecting the courts, of having the state bar embrace its role as the law firm for the Judiciary and the defender of the practice, is a lesson I have learned in a most personal way.

Engaging a vision of a better world and the Rule of Law is the essence of fulfilling the constitutional mandate to seek out the “more perfect union.”

We have a great new state bar president, Robert Hille, being installed in May, and I am certain he will lead our association admirably. He will also have many issues to address, and I am committed to continuing my support and helping him. As I deliver this last message, let me leave you with my gratitude for the trust you placed in me and simply say, thank you. ☪