

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

JOHN E. KEEFE JR.

Doing Good Together, for the NJSBA and Profession



We are in the midst of sobering times. The drumbeat of news, whether it is about the turmoil of our nation or of our world, is relentless. The pressures we face in our daily business of trying to ethically and zealously represent our clients, while also running an office,

have become more intense thanks to the blessing and curse that is technology. And the level of discourse between our professional brothers and sisters, as well as in our communities, is too often strained to the limits of civility.

and South Asian Bar Association of New Jersey to object to the administration's policies and offer assistance.

The association continues to create initiatives to ensure it truly embraces the rich diversity of New Jersey and engages in active inclusion of all. The association has taken steps to work toward that goal, from the inside out.

The NJSBA's board is comprised of 50 thoughtful and accomplished attorneys. It has been my privilege to work with and learn from them. I am proud to report that roughly half of those trustees are women and people from diverse backgrounds. That was not the case just a few years ago. It has been a consistent effort of the association to make diversity and inclusion a natural part of how we run the organization

Understanding the life experiences and perspectives of the people who make up the rich tapestry of New Jersey, and are our colleagues and clients, is central to the mission of the New Jersey State Bar Association.

That means there is no more important time for us to work together, to learn from each other and to listen to one another. Understanding the life experiences and perspectives of the people who make up the rich tapestry of New Jersey, and are our colleagues and clients, is central to the mission of the New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA).

I am here to listen, to learn, to be a student of the collective knowledge to be shared, and to promise you that the NJSBA is committed to not just talking the talk, but to walking the walk to make our profession more welcoming and more reflective of our towns and communities.

Indeed, that's just what the NJSBA did when it spoke out against the border policies that are separating families and leaving children unaccompanied. The NJSBA wrote to Trump administration officials together with the Asian Pacific Lawyers Association of New Jersey; Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey; Garden State Bar Association; Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey; New Jersey Muslim Lawyers Association;

to serve as an example for NJSBA's sections and committees and for the whole profession. Because of our diversity, our discussions and debates, as well as our decisions, evolve from the unique perspective each trustee brings to the conversation in the board room.

The association has also reinforced its commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion within the legal profession through our diversity initiatives, while simultaneously acknowledging that we can and must do more.

- We have spotlighted issues such as implicit bias and discrimination issues through programming.
- We have spoken out not just about policies like the treatment of families and children at our southern borders, but about the need to ensure that the judges who preside in all courthouses in the state reflect the communities they serve.

Continued on page 8

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Continued from page 6

- We launched a Leadership Academy, which makes it a priority to help diverse attorneys find opportunities for advancement.
- We are requiring all NJSBA leaders to complete a diversity and inclusion action plan checklist.

In addition, progress is being made in our courthouses. Today, 75 judges are women and people of color, according to Administrative Office of the Courts statistics. That number has

steadily grown in recent years, and is something to be proud of because it means the people who appear before our judges will see themselves in our bench, which reinforces the validity of the legal system as a place to resolve disputes.

Yet, simply because we have made steps forward does not mean we should be satisfied. We all know a great deal more work needs to be done in our profession to level the playing field.

I plan to spend much of the year ahead listening and engaging in discussions about what we can all do to dismantle barriers and keep them down; to think about diversity in an

expansive way; to combat bias, intolerance and discrimination and ensure people of diverse backgrounds are treated with respect and have access to opportunities in our communities and profession; and to encourage everyone to put their talents to use for the common good.

To be civil and empathetic we must talk to and listen to one another. With this knowledge, we will be able to walk forward, together.

I will close this column, as I will all of my speaking engagements during my year as state bar president, with this thought: Do good and do well; and be good to each other. ☺

SPECIAL EDITORS

Continued from page 6

concentrates on intellectual property, privacy and cyber issues and commercial litigation.

*She is a former chair and current trustee of the NJSBA LGBT Rights Section and co-chair of the NJSBA Intellectual Property Special Committee. **Maria P. Vallejo** is a partner at Chasan Lamparello Mallon & Cappuzzo, PC, where she focuses her*

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