

# Media Relations



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## **CBA Media Policy**

### ***For Issues Concerning the CBA***

It is CBA policy that the president is the official spokesperson of the association. If the President is unavailable, the president-elect shall assume the duties of the official spokesperson.

- The CBA will always use one consistent spokesperson.
- The president will ensure that prior to a media interview he/she has prepared answers including the organization's key messages.
- If the CBA has not taken a position on a matter, the spokesperson should disclose that fact. If possible, when requested by the media for a position of the CBA that has not been considered or approved by the House or Board, the president should consult with the governing bodies of the association before speaking with the reporter.

### ***For Legal Issues that Require an Expert Opinion***

When a reporter contacts the CBA regarding a specific legal issue, section and committee chairs may be called upon to speak with the media as experts in their field. If you are contacted by a reporter, please contact the CBA at [communications@ctbar.org](mailto:communications@ctbar.org) before responding.

However, any position taken by sections or committees may not be communicated as a CBA position unless it has been approved by the House of Delegates or the Board of Governors.

## **Media Contacts**

**All media contacts must be coordinated with the CBA communications staff.** Any sections, committees, or other entities of the CBA who receive inquiries from the media or who would like media coverage for a particular event are expected to contact CBA staff in advance to coordinate responses to the media and media coverage for their event. The purpose of this coordination is to secure maximum coverage and to ensure that any statements made to the media are consistent with CBA policy and actions. The CBA maintains a list of all relevant local and national media contacts.

## **Media Relations 101**

The following information will help when an officer or a member is called upon to respond to requests from the media.

### **Know The Key Messages:**

- The CBA will always accommodate requests and inquiries from the media.
- All inquiries should be channeled through the Communications staff prior to the interview in order to determine the appropriate messages.
  - If the reporter calls for an interview an appropriate response from CBA members and staff would be, “Thank you for your call. We would be happy to accommodate your request.” Tell the reporter the staff/member will get back to them with the name and number of the spokesperson.
  - If time is needed to develop the key messages, then the response to the reporter would be: “Thank you for your call. I absolutely want to answer your questions and help any way that I can. What is your deadline? May I call you back at a more convenient time?”
- Simply answering questions will allow the media to control the message. Attempt to redirect the conversation to get the key messages across.
- The spokesperson should stick as closely as possible to the messages and should not be afraid of silence.
- The spokesperson should convey the key messages clearly and directly and avoiding going off messages.
- The spokesperson should be aware of leading questions. Rehearsal can enable the spokesperson to be more comfortable with the key messages.

### **Never Talk “Off the Record”**

- The CBA should never talk off the record. There is no reason to do so as “off the record” means that the information given to the reporter cannot be used at all. An organization devoted to supporting justice and education would not share information that cannot be used by the reporter. For clarification, here are the terms that reporters use and what they mean:
  - “Anonymity” requires a contract and there can be litigation that results from it.
  - “Deep background” means that a journalist will not identify the source, but will use the information to find another means of reporting the story.
  - “Off the record” means that information cannot be used at all.

### **Know Whom You Are Talking To**

- The CBA should always get as much information on the reporter and the media outlet as possible. Ask questions like “How did you hear about ....?” or “Who else will you be interviewing?” If the reporter originally calls the Executive Director or the Communications Department, then these questions may be addressed at that

time. After being filled in by the staff member, this allows the spokesperson to focus on the interview itself.

### **Always Remain Positive**

- The CBA is a positive organization helping the community. All key messages should be positive.
- If the CBA spokesperson disagrees with the reporter it is okay to do it firmly but with professional conviction. Avoid criticism of a person, a policy, a law, etc., unless it is a board-approved position.
- Present the facts clearly.
- The CBA spokesperson should always avoid rudeness under any circumstance.
- Be detached from the reporter. The relationship with the press is not adversarial nor is it friendly. It is a business relationship and it is not personal.

### **Always Control the Interview**

- The spokesperson should always tell truth. It is always okay to say nothing.
- Repeat the key messages more than once if needed.
- It is important for the CBA spokesperson to remain cool, calm, and polite during the interview.
- It is acceptable for the spokesperson to answer, “I don’t know but I will find out.”
- The spokesperson NEVER says “No Comment.”
- The spokesperson may offer help in finding the answer or refer the question to someone else.

### **I think I have a story or news angle. What do I do with it?**

If you have a story angle that you feel might be of interest to the local media, contact the CBA Communications staff to discuss it. It’s harder than it looks to catch the media’s attention. Traditionally, newsworthiness has been identified by an angle’s timeliness (if the event happened a week ago, maybe even three days ago, it’s no longer newsworthy), significance (how many people does it affect), proximity (what happens near us has more impact), and prominence (are there any well-known, even if locally, people involved). Human interest stories (those with an emotional side) also often make the cut. The CBA staff can help you flesh these out and advise you on how likely a reporter is to have interest in your proposed story. They can also direct you to the right media outlets—as newspapers and radio serve a much different function than television.

Should you wish to write a letter to the editor in response to a story about the CBA, an area of law, or the profession in general, it is expected that you alert the Communications staff. The CBA Communications staff should review the letter to ensure it stands in line with the CBA’s position, if applicable.

### **Is the media the enemy?**

No. There is a common misconception that members of the media are “out to get you.” Journalists and reporters are trying to do their job, just like you are. They have an obligation to tell a story to select interest groups. The story may not be to the advantage of you, your client, or your organization, but the reporter is doing his/her job through presenting *all* the facts in a truthful, unbiased manner. Therefore, it is *always* prudent to tell the truth. It’s not about what you say, but *how* you say it—the message.

### **How does the CBA promote the image of the profession?**

The CBA strives to promote the image of the profession by showcasing its members and the good work they do to support the community. Whether it is through attorneys volunteering their time to teach civics education in schools across the state or through pro bono efforts, the CBA seeks to tell the story of its members through their efforts to provide legal services to the community.

### **Public Relations vs. Crisis Communication**

Public relations (PR) manages the flow of information between an organization and its publics. PR helps to build a positive image of your organization in the minds of those publics. PR consists of anything from placing a story, securing a TV interview, speaking as an expert at a special event, participating in a speakers’ bureau, or engaging in social media.

Crisis communication is the act of responding to an incident that threatens your organization’s reputation, the reputation of a particular professional field, or an individual associated with your organization.

PR and crisis communications are approached very differently by the media. In the event of a crisis (*e.g.*, an attorney opens fire and kills 15 lawyers at his firm; the CBA president is indicted for embezzlement; a CBA employee is arrested for selling marijuana), the CBA Communications staff will immediately meet with the executive director and the officers to craft an appropriate response/statement or, if necessary, organize a press conference. (See Appendix A for the process of coordinating a press conference.) Response in a crisis should be swift, as opposed to general PR, where practitioners slowly build relationships with members of the media to deliver a particular message.