



The Young Lawyer Voice during the 2016-2017 Bar Year

By Dana M. Hrelc

Dana M. Hrelc is the Chair of the Connecticut Bar Association Young Lawyers Section for the 2016-2017 bar year. She is also the chair-elect of the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division for the 2016-2017 bar year. She is a partner at Horton Shields & Knox PC in Hartford, where she focuses her practice on Connecticut state and federal appeals. She graduated with distinction from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy and Political Science and from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 2008 with a Juris Doctor degree.

When I graduated from law school in 2008, as the legal market dropped before me, the recession kicked in like an angry punch to the gut, and I found myself suddenly looking for a new job, I am not sure I knew I had a voice in our legal community yet. If I did, I certainly did not recognize it. All I was concerned with was finding new employment at the close of my clerkship and making sure I mailed my student loan payments on time (and hopefully in full) every month. I knew that other new admittees to the bar were having similar experiences, but I focused less on how we were handling it and more on how *I* was handling it.

When I joined the Connecticut Bar Association the next year, admittedly at the prompting of my new colleagues at the

small Hartford appellate boutique law firm of Horton Shields & Knox PC, I started paying attention to how my experience compared to others' and how we could work together to help each other out. I tried to keep my ear to the ground for those who were looking for employment; I made sure I stayed connected to my law school alumni association so I could be a local resource for new graduates; I paid attention to the questions I had as I entered the practice of law and thought of ways I could help others find the same answers I sought—through, for example, CLE, non-CLE seminars, and publications.

As a member of the CBA Young Lawyers Section—which I automatically was by virtue of my age and level of experience—I found myself as part of a team. The young lawyers with whom I networked and did business were living, learning, struggling, and aspiring in much the same way I was. The difference between my life as a new lawyer and my life as a new lawyer involved in the YLS, however, was that in the YLS, we shared a platform that would allow us to help others just like ourselves. Individually, we were learning how to be lawyers on our own, but together, we shared a voice and could do something about it.

And that we did. We started by organizing and implementing CLE programs geared

toward teaching new lawyers the basics of Connecticut lawyering: short calendar 101, real estate closings 101, and family law 101, to name a few. We put together a recurring (and immensely popular) programming series about starting, surviving, and succeeding at your own solo or small firm. We opened doors to bench-bar relationships, offering young lawyers various opportunities to hear and meet both state and federal trial and appellate judges. We regularly met with new bar admittees after their bar admission ceremonies and continue to this day to hold a reception where we not only warmly welcome them to the bar but also introduce them to numerous pro bono service and legal opportunities throughout the state. We bridged the gap between law students and our young lawyer communities, routinely visiting our Connecticut law schools to sit on panels and host brown bag lunches to discuss career options and employment tips.

These are just a few of the things we did—and have continued to do—as a way of exercising our collective voice in the bar and in the state. And they are just a few of the things that inspired me to chair this tremendous group of talented and diverse young lawyers.

As my year as chair of the YLS begins, I am reminded of these tireless efforts and the impact they have had on our colleagues,

our peers, and our profession. They are the reasons why I got involved with the YLS in the first place and why I have stuck around for so long. I am also, however, encouraged to continue to help others find their voices in the way the YLS helped me find mine.

While we have worked hard to get where we are, no doubt due to the invaluable leadership of my predecessors and the immeasurable energy of our fellow young lawyers, there is much work left to do. This year, we have an incredible team of young lawyer leaders heading the charge on a number of new and improved initiatives that I hope will go far to not only encourage young lawyers to become more engaged with the bar association but also amplify the impact of the young lawyer voice across the state.

First, our legislative voice will be stronger than ever. With a newly-formed legislative affairs team, our legislative affairs director will be reviewing and bringing to the section's attention bills that concern or should concern young lawyers. They will take the lead on making recommendations for our section about when to take a position and will be ready to assist with drafting legislative testimony or letters that reflect any such position. They will also work hard to make sure that young lawyers are represented at every level of the law-making process; this includes ensuring our input and feedback to advisory groups such as the newly-created Civil Gideon Task Force as well as others. Our team has already begun working with Bill Chapman, the CBA government and community relations manager, to begin this process.

Our voice will not be limited to statewide issues. Our American Bar Association Young Lawyer delegate in the House of Delegates brought several of the resolutions that were on the HOD's agenda at the ABA Annual Meeting in August 2016 to our attention at our Leadership Retreat in June. After thoroughly presenting on those resolutions, Executive Committee members engaged in a lively debate on each one and collectively took a position that our representative will carry back with him to the annual meeting. Both he and our ABA Young Lawyers Division dis-

trict representative plan to make sure that the Connecticut Young Lawyers Section stays active in the American Bar Association during the coming year. As the chair-elect of the ABA Young Lawyers Division, I plan to assist them in that respect, but I continue to be impressed with their level of representation and engagement on behalf of Connecticut young lawyers.

We also plan to have a much richer and more consistent presence at Connecticut's three law schools throughout the coming year. Our law school outreach director has already begun planning various programs that will allow us to work with current law students on drafting and improving their resumes, fine-tuning their interview skills, and making the most of different types of networking opportunities. We also plan to continue inviting and actively engaging with law students at many of our regularly scheduled section events throughout the year.

Our young lawyer voice this year will extend to our communities as well. In addition to continuing some of the great work that was started years ago with our "Lawyers in the Classroom, Kids in the Courtroom" program, which introduces elementary-aged children in a friendly and fun way to various aspects of the law through stories, interactive Q&A sessions, and courtroom visits, we hope to again put on our Youth Law Academy. In 2014, we kicked off the inaugural Youth Law Academy at Quinnipiac Law School and invited nearly a hundred middle and high school students to explore a day of pre-law discussion and engagement. Students enjoyed an interactive and diverse panel of Connecticut judges and justices, they participated in a mock law school class led by Judge Angela Robinson, and they attended numerous sessions where they had a chance to meet and talk with lawyers practicing law in many different ways, including at law firms, as in-house counsel, and as government attorneys. It was a tremendous success and allowed young lawyers to engage with a younger yet equally as inquisitive generation. Moreover, it was fun and we cannot wait to do it again!

Last but certainly not least, we plan to contribute greatly to the tremendously important discussions and programming that will be happening throughout the

entire year about ensuring and expanding the reach of diversity and inclusion in our profession. We will put on our second installment of the Diversity Town Hall, which was first organized by Immediate Past Chair Matthew Necci and which invited young lawyers to interact with a panel of lawyers, journalists, university educators, and university students about recent events surrounding diversity and inclusion in American colleges. While the topic may change, the open and engaging spirit of the Town Hall will not. Moreover, we plan to help in whatever way we can with the CBA's inaugural Diversity Summit, to be held this fall on October 26, and to hold our traditional Diversity Award Dinner immediately following that summit. Finally, throughout the year, we plan to present our section and the greater association with plenty of opportunities to visit with, hear from, and learn from a wide range of distinguished speakers in order to provide our members with diversity of perspective and thought as they engage in the practice of law.

While this year is sure to be a busy one, I cannot help but be excited for all that is to come. I invite Connecticut's young lawyers to join me this year as we build, engage and celebrate our collective young lawyer voice through these and many other programs we have coming down the pike. See you there! **CL**

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