

# Service

By HON. CECIL J. THOMAS

**F**inal presidential columns are often used as a space for reflection, accounting, and the expression of gratitude. This column will be no exception to that tradition. In reflecting back to my nomination as an officer in 2019, no one, least of all me, could have imagined the challenges we would face as a profession and as a society these last three years. In March of 2020, during my term as vice president of the Connecticut Bar Association (CBA), the global COVID-19 pandemic struck and fundamentally changed our world. A few months later, the horrific death of George Floyd brought about a renewed focus on issues of social and racial justice. These were “all hands on deck” moments for CBA leadership, and I am proud of all the responsive measures that we have implemented in recent years: the COVID-19 Task Force, the creation or expansion of several new pro bono programs and access to justice initiatives, the Constance Baker Motley Speaker Series on Racial Inequality, the CBA Policing Task Force, passage of Rule 8.4(7) of the Rules of Professional Conduct, to name just a few. Virtual meetings have become our “new normal” and we have embraced this technology to expand our organizational reach, improve efficiency, and continue high-quality and high-impact events and initiatives throughout the pandemic.

I am proud to count myself among the “pandemic bar presidents,” and want to express particular gratitude and admiration for my immediate predecessors, the **Hon. Ndidi Moses** and **Amy Lin Meyerson**. Both have been highly effective leaders in the face of unprecedented challenges to the CBA. I have learned a great deal

*Hon. Cecil J. Thomas was the 98th president of the Connecticut Bar Association. In May 2022, Hon. Cecil J. Thomas resigned from the position of president as a formal requirement due to the finalization of his confirmation as a Connecticut Superior Court judge. Daniel J. Horgan assumed the office of the president of the association.*



from both of them, and am proud to count them both as mentors and friends. While these three past years have taken the CBA into uncharted waters, I cannot help but observe that we have had an unprecedented diversity of leadership at the helm, with each of us representing notable firsts in CBA history. In my teaching and training on issues of DE&I, I often emphasize the many studies that show that diverse and inclusive teams are more effective. The CBA, which has weathered the pandemic’s storms and is now emerging from the worst of it with significant growth and renewed organizational strength, is testament to that truth.

My service as the president of the Connecticut Bar Association has been among the greatest honors of my professional career. As I have ended that service, and share a few final words with all of you, this is my opportunity to reflect one last time on the theme for this bar year, “Together for Justice, Together for Equity, Together in Service.” I will take this opportunity to recount briefly the many highlights of this past bar year, in emphasis of the “Service” element of that theme.

## Membership Growth, Membership Value, and Organizational Stability

The overall strength of the CBA, reflected in part in its membership numbers, has been a significant focus of my presidential service. While membership had been fairly constant at 9,500 members prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a decline between 2019-2021, with the most significant decline attributable to the period of March 2020 to March 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have grown the CBA membership back to over 9,100 members, close to 10 percent growth in a single year, attributable in part to the following efforts:

## Membership Campaign

To address membership decline, we implemented a successful year-long membership outreach campaign. Non-member attorneys received a series of letters and postcards throughout the bar year inviting them to join the CBA, with an accompanying CLE credit incentive. Almost 250 previously non-member attorneys have joined the CBA as a result of this campaign. Our renewal campaign, coupled

**“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.”**

–Rabindranath Tagore

with personal outreach efforts by CBA leadership, members, and staff have also been successful in ensuring continued membership growth and stability.

### **Connecticut-Area Law School Inclusion**

Group faculty and student membership participation from all of our Connecticut-area law schools is essential to early CBA engagement with law students, providing invaluable networking and professional development opportunities. With Quinnipiac University School of Law and the University of Connecticut School of Law already group members, we successfully added Yale Law School and the Western New England University School of Law to the program this year, which increased CBA membership by over 500 new faculty and law student members.

### **Membership Value and Benefit Awareness**

We launched three significant new efforts this year to enhance the CBA membership value proposition. First, we have added a host of new social, entertainment, and personal **member discount programs**, with an emphasis on local Connecticut-based venues and services. Members will now be able to enjoy new discounts at local wineries and breweries, airport parking, clothing, and family entertainment venues. In order to promote member awareness of these benefits, the CBA launched a new annual **CBA Membership Card**. Finally, we have launched a new **CBA CLE Pass**, which will allow unlimited attendance at all live CBA CLE events of two credits or less (with some exclusions) throughout the year, at an incredible annual price of \$129.

### **Organizational Stability**

The CBA has enjoyed significant financial stability in recent years, and in or-

der to continue this stability, the CBA Board of Governors approved a **modest structured dues increase** at my request in March. This dues increase, the first in over ten years, will add \$10 to most paid membership categories this coming bar year, and another \$10 in two years. Additionally, we have grown the **1875 Society**, consisting of those leaders of the Connecticut legal profession who voluntarily contribute \$100, to over 90 members this year. In another effort to ensure long-term organizational stability, I convened a new **Building Committee**, which is chaired by incoming Vice President **James T. Shearin**. The committee will assess the long-term physical needs of the CBA, and make recommendations for appropriate and necessary future infrastructural changes, investments, or repairs to the CBA's headquarters.

### **Access to Justice**

The CBA Constitution includes a charge to “facilitate the delivery of competent legal services to the public and particularly those in greatest need.” I am proud to say that the scope and scale of the CBA's pro bono and access to justice efforts has increased greatly in recent years. This year, we created a new director of access to justice initiatives position, which, along with the efforts of our Pro Bono Committee, led this year by **President Dan Horgan**, has allowed us to significantly expand all of our pro bono programs. Our **Virtual Free Legal Clinics** have expanded to a quarterly model, allowing dozens of lawyer, paralegal, and law student volunteers to provide free legal advice to hundreds of low-income individuals. The CBA has significantly expanded the footprint of the **Lawyers in Libraries** program, now held in ten locations across the state. Our volunteer engagement with **CT Free Legal Answers** has also been tremendous, with volunteer attorneys consistently complet-

ing all outstanding queries from the public each month. **CBA Pro Bono Connect**, with its companion **Pro Bono Pledge**, has also grown, with new attorneys signing up, taking the virtual on-demand pro bono trainings, and receiving case referrals throughout the year. The CBA was a leader and key supporter of both the **Eviction Right to Counsel Program** and **Domestic Violence Temporary Restraining Order Pilot Program** last year, and I am thrilled to see these programs being implemented throughout the state. This year, the CBA created a new **Legal Aid and Public Defense Committee**, which will be led by **Ben Daigle** of the Office of the Public Defender, and **Nilda Havrilla** of Connecticut Legal Services, to serve as a forum for legal aid and public defender attorneys in their service to the economically-disadvantaged, and will be a vital aspect of the CBA's ongoing efforts to address the access to justice gap in Connecticut.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

I have previously recounted the significant growth of the CBA's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the March/April 22 issue so will not recount that journey again here. The organization continues to lead a successful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Summit annually in the fall and expand its Pledge & Plan.

### **Task Forces and New Initiatives**

Two significant task forces, launched during the Hon. Ndidi Moses' term as CBA president, have concluded their work this year, producing comprehensive and impactful reports. The **Policing Task Force**, led by **Deirdre Daly**, **Rev. Keith King**, and **Alexis Smith**, compiled its final report at the start of this bar year, which has had significant impact on Connecticut's policing and community

*Continued on page 40 →*

## President's Message

*Continued from page 5*

relations efforts. The **State of the Legal Profession Task Force**, led by the **Hon. Elizabeth Bozzuto**, **Patrick Clendenen**, **Kyle LaBuff**, and **Hon. Ndid Moses**, has also completed its final report, which has provided much food for thought and present and future action. I encourage you to review their article summarizing their excellent, thoughtful, and future-looking report, found in this issue. The CBA has taken steps to implement many of their recommendations this year, including successfully advocating for rule clarifications on remote practice before the Rules Committee, organizing a successful webinar on **Limited Scope Representation (LSR)** in May, and forming a new **LSR Committee** led by **Tara Dugo**. I encourage you review her article on LSR, also found in this issue.

Finally, the CBA also launched the **Pandemic Recovery and Future of Court Technology Task Force**, led by **Amy MacNamara** and **Andrew Nevas**. The task force will consider and make recommendations on: the use of virtual technology in Connecticut courts as we emerge from the pandemic, as well as technological changes that may be employed in Connecticut courts in the near and long-term future, such as greater use of hybrid proceedings, digital and text message court notices, or virtual assistance for the completion of basic court forms by self-represented parties.

The start of this bar year brought the unexpected and tragic news of the passing of past president Ralph J. Monaco. Among the many new projects and initiatives we launched this past year, our efforts to honor the memory and legacy have been the most meaningful to me. The **Ralph J. Monaco Memorial Civics Education Fund and Award** have been established as a lasting tribute to Attorney Monaco's life, work, and deep commitment to civics education and the rule of law. The response to this new fund has been nothing short of amazing, and the **Monaco Memorial Fund Committee** was honored to choose three truly-inspiring high school seniors to be the inaugural recipients of the award this year, presented during our Annual Law Day Celebrations in May. As with so

many other members of our profession, I looked up to Attorney Monaco, and I am happy to know that his life will continue to inspire and support future generations.

### Gratitude

These have been truly unprecedented times, and I am deeply grateful for the open lines of communication we have maintained with the Connecticut Judicial Branch throughout this past year. **Chief Justice Richard Robinson**, **Chief Court Administrator Patrick Carroll III**, and **Deputy Chief Court Administrator Elizabeth Bozzuto** have met with me and other CBA leaders throughout the year, and have always been receptive to our feedback and concerns.

I have had the privilege of working with one of the most diverse executive committees in the history of the CBA. I am grateful to my fellow 2021-22 officers, **Amy Lin Meyerson**, **Dan Horgan**, **Maggie Castinado**, **Sharad Samy**, **David Moore**, and **Cindy Cieslak** for their leadership, friendship, and support this year. I am also deeply grateful to **CBA Executive Director Keith Soressi** and his team for their tireless work on behalf of the CBA. I have worked three days a week out of the CBA offices throughout this year, so have witnessed first-hand their incredible dedication and commitment.

I am also grateful to several past presidents who have been a source of advice and counsel throughout these last few years: **Karen DeMeola** and **Monte Frank** have been constant in their friendship and support at every step. **Livia Bardollar**, **Fran Brady**, **Bill Clendenen**, **Lou Pepe**, **Jonathan Shapiro**, and **Mark Dubois** have also generously offered their time and counsel throughout the years. **The Hon. Neeta Vatti** and **Kean Zimmerman** have been tireless in their commitment as my fellow co-chairs of the CBA DE&I Committee, along with so many other attorneys and judges, too many to name here, who have been so helpful in leading our various sections, committees, subcommittees, task forces, and working groups.

I have greatly enjoyed getting to know and work with my successor, President Dan Horgan. I wish him all the best in his service in this vital role, and have the utmost

confidence in him and his leadership. I am grateful to Dan for his friendship, support, and in particular for his good cheer and cooperation in stepping into this role a little earlier than expected. Judicial ethics prevented me from continuing to serve as an officer of the CBA upon my confirmation as a judge of the Connecticut Superior Court on April 29, 2022. Dan did not miss a beat in this sudden transition, and has handled his early ascension to the presidency with his typical aplomb and good cheer. I know the CBA is in excellent hands, and look forward to seeing all that the organization will accomplish under his leadership.

I have not answered the call to service as an officer of the CBA alone. I am deeply grateful to my wife, Sindhu, for her constant love and support throughout this journey. These past three years as an officer, past seven years as co-chair of our DE&I Committee, together with my other bar association activities and the demands of my day job as a legal aid lawyer over the last 16 years, have called for long hours and many missed family dinners and events. Sindhu has been patient and supportive through all of it, selfless in her understanding of my own sense of duty to the callings that have come my way. Our three sons, Isaiah, Elijah, and Joshua have also been understanding and supportive in ways that are beyond their years. I hope, in their own long view of this time, they will understand my own sense of responsibility to the legacy that I have received and sought to preserve for them: a set of deeply-held values that have sustained our family for generations.

I could not have led this organization without gaining a deep love for its history, its traditions, its many contributions to our profession and to society, and its potential for future good. As with all presidents, my dream for my service was to leave the organization stronger than it was when I commenced my term. In such service, I have always found a deep and sustaining joy. A new calling to service now beckons. As I answer that call, I bid you all a fond farewell, full of gratitude for the trust and confidence that you have placed in me these past years, and an immense sense of hope for the bright future of the Connecticut Bar Association. ■