

# What's Up with the Well-Being Committee

By JOAN REED WILSON

**G**reetings from the Well-Being Committee! We are thrilled to share the initiatives and upcoming events of our committee, which are open to all members of the bar. The Well-Being Committee is at the forefront of a critical movement to improve the overall well-being of legal professionals within the state. This movement is part of a broader national initiative, guided by the American Bar Association's report, *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*, which can be found on our page of the CBA website at [ctbar.org/Well-Being](http://ctbar.org/Well-Being). The report highlights the significant need to address the mental health and substance use challenges that many in the legal profession face and calls for systemic change to foster a healthier, more supportive legal environment.

The findings of the ABA's 2017 report were a wake-up call for the legal profession. High rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide among lawyers are not just individual issues—they are systemic problems that affect the entire profession. The Connecticut Well-Being Committee has responded by creating initiatives that address these issues directly, working to foster a culture of health, sustainability, and support.

## The Mission of the Well-Being Committee

The Well-Being Committee's mission is deeply rooted in the objectives set forth by the ABA, aiming to:

**1. Promote Well-Being as a Core Professional Value:** The committee strives to integrate well-being into the

fabric of the legal profession. It recognizes that a lawyer's duty of competence is closely tied to their mental and physical health, advocating for a work culture where well-being is considered essential to professional performance.

**2. Reduce Stigma:** One of the most significant barriers to lawyer well-being is the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health or substance use issues. The committee is committed to changing this narrative by creating a culture of openness and support, where legal professionals can seek help without fear of judgment or career repercussions.

**3. Educate and Empower:** Education is a key component of the committee's work. Through various programs, the committee provides legal professionals with the knowledge and tools they need to maintain their well-being. This includes strat-

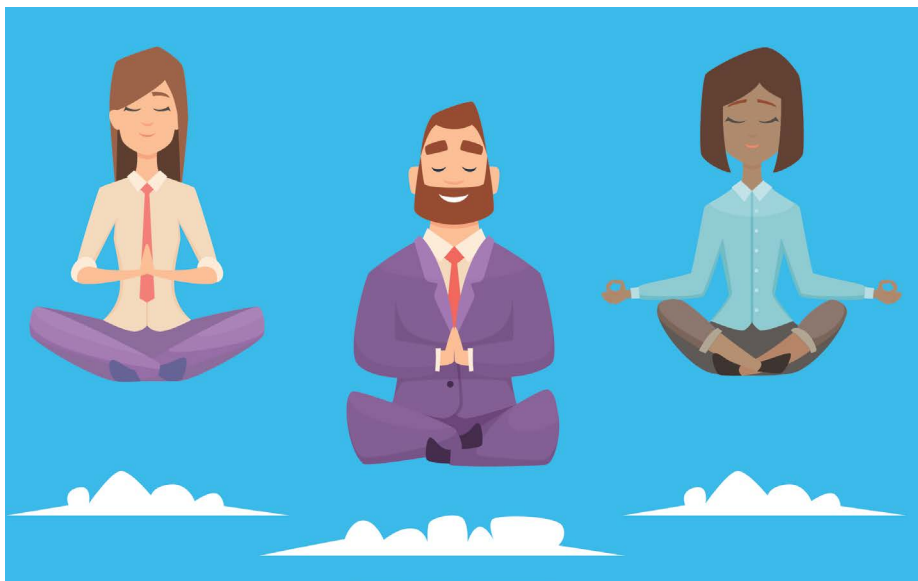
egies for managing stress, balancing work and life, and addressing mental health challenges head-on.

**4. Build a Supportive Infrastructure:** The committee works tirelessly to ensure that Connecticut's legal professionals have access to the resources they need. This includes lawyer assistance programs, confidential support services, and wellness initiatives that are designed to meet the unique needs of those in the legal profession.

**5. Foster Collaboration:** The committee recognizes that improving lawyer well-being is a collective effort. By collaborating with law firms, bar associations, regulatory bodies, and law schools, the committee aims to create a unified approach to well-being that supports lawyers at every stage of their careers.

## Key Initiatives and Programs

The Well-Being Committee's efforts are



more than just a response to a crisis—they are a proactive attempt to reshape the legal profession in Connecticut into one where well-being is prioritized. This cultural shift is vital for improving the quality of legal services, enhancing the professionalism of the bar, and ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

To that end, the committee has launched several initiatives that align with the ABA's recommendations and cater specifically to the needs of Connecticut's legal professionals. These initiatives are designed to be both impactful and accessible, ensuring that all members of the legal community can participate:

**1. Well-Being Week:** This annual event is a cornerstone of the committee's efforts. It falls during the first week of May each year and features workshops, seminars, and wellness activities that promote both mental and physical health. These events are designed not only to educate but also to provide practical tools that lawyers can use to maintain their well-being in the face of the profession's demands.

**2. Continuing Legal Education Programs:** This year, the Committee plans to offer three virtual CLE programs focused on topics such as stress management, work-life balance, and mental health awareness. These programs are an excellent opportunity for lawyers to learn new skills and strategies that can help them thrive both personally and professionally.

**3. Law School Partnerships:** Recognizing the importance of starting early, the committee works closely with Connecticut law schools to integrate wellness into the curriculum. By educating law students about the importance of mental health and providing them with resources, the committee is helping to set the foundation for a healthier future generation of lawyers.

**4. Online Resources:** The Connecticut Bar Association's website hosts a



(L to R) Co-chairs Sara Bonaiuto and Joan Reed Wilson

comprehensive section dedicated to lawyer well-being. This section includes articles, toolkits, and links to resources that can help lawyers address their well-being needs. These resources are designed to be easily accessible, ensuring that help is available whenever it is needed.

### How You Can Get Involved

The success of the Well-Being Committee's initiatives depends heavily on the active participation of Connecticut's legal professionals. Participation in events like Well-Being Week and CLE programs is not just an opportunity to learn—it is a commitment to oneself and the profession. These events provide a unique space for legal professionals to connect with peers, share experiences, and build a supportive community. The Well-Being Committee encourages all Connecticut lawyers to take part in these events, not only to benefit from the resources provided but also to contribute to the ongoing effort to create a healthier legal environment.

By joining these initiatives, lawyers are making a statement that well-being matters. They are helping to break down the stigma surrounding mental health and substance use, and they are taking an active role in fostering a culture that values health and sustainability.

Finally, if you have an interest in joining our Well-Being Committee, we welcome you. Please contact Ashleigh Morelli at [amorelli@ctbar.org](mailto:amorelli@ctbar.org) to inquire about joining.

### Upcoming Event

Our first virtual event will be on Octo-

ber 23 and will feature former federal judge, Hon. Mary Beth O'Connor, who will share her experience and knowledge of the risks of substance use disorder (SUD) in the legal profession. Participants will gain insight into the subtle and insidious progression SUD may have upon users of any substance as well as the interaction between SUD and various rules of ethics governing Connecticut attorneys. Guidance, resources, and suggestions to those interested in the recovery process will also be provided. This event has been approved for one hour of CLE in ethics and professionalism and is not to be missed! Please mark your calendars and be on the lookout for registration information.

### Meet Our Co-Chairs

**Sara Bonaiuto** is an associate at Shipman & Goodwin LLP, where she is a member of the firm's Commercial Finance and Business and Corporate practice groups and the Cannabis Industry Team. Her practice is focused on assisting businesses and individuals with equity and debt financings, term and revolving credit facilities, entity formations, mergers and acquisitions, construction financing, real estate joint ventures and general contract matters. As part of her cannabis practice, Attorney Bonaiuto assists established and emerging cannabis companies, as well as social equity applicants, with application counseling, entity and partnership formation, financing, contract negotiations and interpretation of state and federal cannabis laws. She can be reached at [sbonaiuto@goodwin.com](mailto:sbonaiuto@goodwin.com).

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