



Staff Memorandum

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE Agenda Item #7

REQUESTED ACTION: Approval of request for creation of a Judges Assistance Committee.

Attached is a memorandum from Patricia Spataro, Director of the Association's Lawyer Assistance Program, setting forth a proposal for a Judges Assistance Committee. As noted in the memo, judges have unique challenges and a Judges Assistance Committee would provide peer support to judges in need of assistance with addiction and mental health issues. The memo notes that Hon. Michael Coccoma has undertaken efforts to secure judges willing to participate in such a program; however, for confidentiality reasons it is advisable to house this program outside the court system.

The request will be presented by Hon. Sarah L. Krauss, past chair of the Lawyer Assistance Committee.



Patricia Spataro, Director • Lawyer Assistance Program • 800.255.0569 • 518.487.5685

MEMO

To: Executive Committee
From: Patricia Spataro
Re: Establishing a Judge Assistance Committee
Date: June 6, 2011

Our Lawyer Assistance Program is dedicated to assisting lawyers, judges, and law students in distress. LAP's successes are evidenced by the number of attorneys that seek or accept help, the numerous statutory and regulatory changes achieved to protect professionals willing to address their problems, and the growing recognition that these addictions and mental health diseases are treatable.

LAP has worked hard to reach out to judges, with some success. However, the unique challenges of a judge's position pose different obstacles to accessing help when needed. As a result, affected judges in New York State may avoid addressing their untreated alcoholism, addictions, or mental health problems both to their detriment and potentially to the detriment of the public that they serve.

In an effort to enhance LAP's outreach to judges and increase their confidence in accessing assistance, I respectfully request that a Judges Assistance Committee be established. Since the Lawyer Assistance Committee is vital to the success of LAP it seems the missing piece to the same success with judges is a committee of judges who can work to get the word out and, more importantly, provide the invaluable service of peer support.

Judge Michael Coccoma, DCAJ Courts outside New York City, has spearheaded efforts to establish a program for judges. He has gotten commitments from more than sixty judges who are interested in volunteering to assist their colleagues. Judge Coccoma's efforts are impressive and worthy of the State Bar's support. In order for Judge Coccoma's plan to come to fruition it is of the utmost importance for this group of judge to find a home someplace outside of the Office of Court Administration for the obvious concerns of confidentiality. For this group, the State Bar is the most appropriate "someplace" outside of OCA.

For over 20 years the State Bar's Lawyer Assistance Program has effectively assisted many lawyers. In that time we have garnered much experience in what works and what doesn't work. Sharing our experience and strength with judges would be an honor and a privilege.

As it is with all State Bar committees we will communicate to those interested in serving on the committee that being a member of the State Bar is required.

Thank you.