

# Message from the Chair

It has been a true honor to serve this section as its Chair for the past two years, and to work with such an outstanding group of law students, attorneys and judges. The Section continues to provide top continuing legal education programs that are inspiring and interesting. The Section's Executive Committee works very hard to be sure that our discussions are thorough and our decisions are informed. Our Section has a voice, and that voice has and should continue to be heard.



I am so proud of the dedication that our Section and Association have shown in promoting and advocating for criminal justice reform. We have encouraged the adoption of legislation for the sealing of criminal convictions, addressing wrongful convictions issues, funding for indigent legal services, and raising the age of criminal responsibility. Seeing all of these areas included as criminal justice reform in the 2018 New York State budget gives us great satisfaction. They were much needed positive steps toward improving New York State's criminal justice system.

As we are all well aware, the issues surrounding criminal justice are many, so even with these positive reforms, there is no time for rest. Our Section will continue to work on issues including wrongful convictions, discovery reform, revision of the sex offender registry guidelines, bail reform, and counsel at first appearance. We will continue to review proposed legislation, further our study of the town and village justice courts, and begin work on studying, evaluating and addressing mental

health issues as they relate to criminal justice. This Section's dedicated and commitment to the betterment of our State's criminal justice system is strong.

I am particularly proud of the Section's reports. This Section brought a report to the NYSBA House of Delegates in 2012 on *Sealing of Criminal Convictions* which was adopted and made a NYSBA legislative priority. The report was authored by members of our Section, who were chaired by Jay Shapiro, our newsletter editor, and Rick Collins, who presented it to the House and has worked tirelessly to encourage the passage of sealing legislation in New York State. Therefore, it is a true victory to see that sealing legislation was adopted in the State's 2018 budget. I am also incredibly proud of our Town and Village Justice Court Task Force's report on counsel at first appearance, which will be brought to the NYSBA House of Delegates this June in Cooperstown. This task force is being co-chaired by Leah Nowotarski and Clare Degnan. The report is posted in our communities page and your feedback is encouraged.

I would also like to thank each and every one of you who have been active members of this Section, for all of you hard work and commitment. You have all inspired me, taught me and guided me. I will not be your Chair after June 1, 2017, but I will always be there by your side inspiring you and working with you. Whether or not you have realized it yet, members of this Section are bound together professionally. We respect one another and support one another. If you have not been actively involved, I ask you now to get involved. It will make you a better lawyer, a better advocate and open professional doors to you. I leave you with this thought: "[T]he great thing in the world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving."—Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Sherry Levin Wallach

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