

Message from the Chair

Dear Section Members:

Section Caucus Concerns

November 3–4 saw the fall meeting of the NYSBA Sections Caucus in Albany (held prior to the House of Delegates meeting). This is a gathering of the delegates from the 25 Sections that are part of NYSBA. The delegates expressed concern about the state of the Association's finances and what impact that could have on Section programing. Over the last few years Association membership has been dropping and this obviously affects dues revenue.



This is not unique to NYSBA; the same is happening at the ABA and many county and specialty bars. Additionally NYSBA's CLE revenue is declining as attorneys now can choose from many vendors, and some choose in-house law firm CLEs. NYSBA will run a deficit in its 2017 budget, and even has a small planned deficit in its 2018 budget. More significantly the projections for 2018 are that revenue will be down from the 2017 budget projections by \$1,190,000. The Finance Committee has reduced planned spending by enough that the projected 2018 deficit is only \$93,000. Not surprisingly many of the reductions will fall on staff, with both departures that will not be immediately filled and a small number of layoffs.

The Section Caucus expressed its concerns that CLE programing will be affected and concerns that limited staff could mean the Sections might be constrained from offering as many CLEs as they desire. Executive Director Pam McDevitt addressed this, stating that the freedom of Sections to deliver CLEs was not going to be constrained, but better advanced planning was going to be necessary.

What Is the Solution?

The simple answer is more revenue. President Elect Hank Greenberg (term beginning June 2019) delivered a passionate and eloquent address to the Caucus that started with the proposition that we must focus on our *relevance*. The decision to join a Bar is driven by whether attorneys think the association is relevant to them, and increasingly lawyers, particularly younger lawyers, are not seeing that relevance. Hank laid out his vision on how to turn that perception around, and that he believes the Sections are key. It is the Sections, with their substantive practice areas, that are the magnet to keep existing members and attract new members.

Is the Senior Lawyer Section Relevant?

With our current 3,400 members we are one of the larger Sections. But without a substantive practice area membership may not seem to be compelling. People don't plot how to get and stay on our Executive Committee in order to enhance their resumes and gain referrals. We don't do destination meetings around the world or even around New York. Our membership criteria is age related, like the Young Lawyers, but YLS seems to be having more fun. A number of our members, and those eligible who do not join, don't want to be called "senior" and might prefer "experienced." However, if you look at the CLEs we have offered, since 2010 at both our fall and Annual Meeting programs, they are eclectic and interesting, such as:

- Sale and Valuation of a Law Practice
- Life Beyond the Blue Suit
- The Anywhere Law Office
- A Second Season of Service

You Can Help Make Us Relevant

We need help. If there is a subject that intrigues you, volunteer to put together a CLE segment on it. You don't have to chair a whole program, but just one subject of maybe four that would constitute a whole CLE. Recently we had a hands-on free technology program in New York City where attendees moved between stations with their devices to get help with programs and applications. In October we held a Meet, Greet & Learn free CLE and lunch in Rochester for members and potential members that dealt with ethics issues around retirement and practice change. We are planning on repeating that theme in Albany on Friday, April 13. We had a CLE in New York City on November 17 and will do another at the Annual Meeting on Thursday morning, January 25. Also at the beginning of that meeting we will once again present the Senior Lawyers Jonathan Lippman Pro Bono Award. I hope to see you there.

C. Bruce Lawrence
cblawrence@boylancode.com

