

The Bar Around The Corner: Bronx County Bar Association



**Association Address/
Phone**
New York State Supreme
Court Building
851 Grand Concourse,
Room 124, Bronx, New
York, 10451
718-293-2227
Website:
www.bronxbar.com
Founded: 1902
Number of members:
1,000

Vision/purpose

The Bronx is a diverse community and the Bronx County Bar Association (BCBA) is a reflection of that diversity. The BCBA is known as the friendly bar association, as we promote congeniality among our members and the public. The BCBA facilitates communication between the bench and the bar and supports the staff and administration of the courthouses in which its members practice.

The BCBA maintains a law library for the public and its members to encourage education and understanding of the law and the legal process in the community.

Brief history

The Bronx Bar Association was founded 114 years ago to provide an opportunity for attorneys to combine their efforts to improve the quality of representation for the citizens of Bronx County. A referral service was created to provide the public with access to attorneys with various specialties at a nominal fee in the library.

How has your membership over the years helped to improve your association?

Our members have supported our Endowment, which promotes community improvement, educational scholarship programs, a Courthouse Gender Fairness Committee and a mock trial program for students in the community.

What is your association's most pressing concern regarding the legal profession?

The BCBA is greatly concerned with the erosion of the right to counsel as granted under the landmark Supreme Court case of *Gideon v. Wainwright*. In New York City, attorneys from the 18b panel had represented indigent people charged with crimes in conflict cases.



Bronx Bar officers—Bronx Bar Association officers, from left: Peter T. Ridge, secretary; Michael J. Barsky, financial secretary; Tina Wells, second vice president; Corey A. Sokoler, president; Daniel D. Cassidy, first vice president; Lester C. Rodrigues, chairperson of the Board; and Wayne A. J. Whattley, treasurer.

The city has replaced many of these attorneys who average 20 years' experience and more than 75 cases to verdict with much less experienced attorneys.

The city has now announced its intention to put out a request for proposal for representation of the indigent on homicide cases. This means that the most veteran, skilled and accomplished attorneys from the 18b panel will be replaced as counsel on new homicide cases with much less-experienced attorneys.

This is unacceptable. Impoverished people facing 25 years to life in jail deserve the best attorneys the city has to offer and not attorneys who are just now learning their profession. The BCBA will lead the fight to ensure that all people are properly represented with experienced counsel when charged with a crime.

What is your favorite social event?

Our favorite social event is the Tribute with Humor for Alan B. Friedberg and Michael A. Marinaccio, which was held on November 17 at Maestro's Catering Hall. We honored their contributions to the Legal Profession and to our Association. We also have a golf outing and a dinner cruise planned for next summer.

What is the Bronx County Bar Association's current initiative?

Currently, we are advocating for the creation of a Misdemeanor Mental Health Treatment Court in Bronx County. There is a felony Judicial Diversion/Treatment Court that evaluates individuals charged with felonies and then places them in programs for treatment and monitoring.

However, there is no specialized court for persons



Special thanks—Corey A. Sokoler, president of the Bronx County Bar Association, presents Bronx County District Attorney Darcel D. Clark with an award in recognition of her service to the bench, bar and citizens of Bronx County, during the Association's annual dinner at the Marina del Rey earlier this year.

charged with misdemeanors and one should not have to graduate to a felony charge to get the mental health treatment they so desperately need. If we can identify persons in need of mental health treatment at an early stage, we can get them the treatment they need and hopefully never see them back in court on felony charges. ♦

The Bar Around the Corner is a project of the Committee for Bar Leaders of New York State.