



**T. Andrew Brown**  
President-Elect  
Brown Hutchinson LLP  
925 Crossroads Building  
Two State Street  
Rochester New York 14614  
(585) 454-5050  
[abrown@brownhutchinson.com](mailto:abrown@brownhutchinson.com)

**President's Report  
to the House of Delegates  
June 12, 2021**

My fellow delegates, friends, and colleagues, it is my pleasure and humble privilege to begin my term of service as the one-hundredth and twenty-fourth President of the New York State Bar Association.

To returning delegates, greetings. Although separated virtually, I know that we stand together in our continued service on behalf of the Association and our profession. To new delegates, welcome. I trust that you will enjoy your terms of service with the House of Delegates – the governing body of the Association – and thank you for your willingness to help lead the Bar into the future.

I wish to also acknowledge the many new committee and section chairs who are beginning their terms of service, and to congratulate my fellow officers – President-Elect Sherry Levin Wallach, Secretary Taa Grays and Treasurer Domenick Napoletano. I look forward to working with you all. I especially thank my predecessor, Immediate Past President Scott M. Karson, for his leadership and stewardship of our Association during a year of change and crisis perhaps unparalleled in our long and storied history. And I recognize you, our members and delegates, for your perseverance over the last year.

Let us turn now and look back on the last fifteen months – fifteen months in which the practice of law, and indeed our daily lives, have changed perhaps more so than in the last fifteen years. The past year has taxed us – our nation, our state, our profession, and our society – in ways no one could have predicted or desired. We've more closely examined our personal lives and relationships, searching for meaning and what really matters. Coming out of the pandemic, we now face a time of further reflection, a time of reckoning, a time for renewal and a time to re-imagine our highest ideals.

Physically, socially, emotionally, and, for many, financially, we have been stretched thin and we are tired. We witnessed levels of unemployment, isolation, and indeed forced societal change perhaps unseen before in our lifetimes – perhaps even in recent human history. We witnessed our democracy stretched to a near breaking point. We witnessed social upheaval, discrimination, and injustice, ugly reminders of a stain that still blights America and blocks many from the true promise of the American Dream. That is the backdrop that will shape my presidency.

As eager as we may be to put this trying time behind us, it is imperative that we do not close our eyes to the revelations and lessons it brought – no matter how difficult they may be. We find ourselves on the cusp of a great opportunity to take what we have learned and change things for the better. Let’s not fail to take advantage. The twin crises of the coronavirus pandemic and social justice as it relates to law enforcement combined to expose long-standing inequities and it is far past time to address them. I will dedicate the time of my presidency to careful attention and action on these issues.

These changes will not come easily. In many cases, entire systems – policing, healthcare, education, and even our courts – require significant reimagining and retooling. But we must rise to the challenge. As lawyers, we are uniquely positioned to assist in this endeavor.

The restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the already considerable difficulties faced by some of the most vulnerable members of our society – including access to justice, the very foundation of our democracy. Shuttered courts and virtual proceedings presented additional barriers to those who do not have easy access to the internet, cannot afford legal representation or for whom English is not their first language.

But there are also advantages to expanding virtual proceedings for court employees and attorneys alike. Now that there is light at the end of the pandemic tunnel and we see the reopening of our courts and offices, it is time for us to take stock of the changes that occurred over the past year and determine what worked, and what did not; what we keep and what we go back to.

Both the Association and the profession must reflect and reimagine how to safeguard and strengthen our futures. And where necessary, we cannot fear reinvention. We must embrace the opportunity for change.

One of my top priorities during my year as president will be to establish a task force on the post-pandemic future of the legal profession, whose members will be charged with determining how we collectively should move forward to maximize the opportunities and overcome the hurdles presented by our new way of life. This task force will have a broad mandate, and its mission shall include study of various existential issues such as the remote practice of law, the increased use of technology by clients and practitioners, the efficacy of virtual courts and tribunals, changes in client interaction and expectations, law practice management, access to justice, the delivery of legal services, and the education, training, and mentorship of newer attorneys. I am pleased that my colleague John H. Gross has agreed to chair this task force, the work of which is of utmost importance to the strength and future of our Association and to support our members.

In addition, I will convene a task force on racism, social equity and the law, with an eye toward building on the work the association has undertaken to address some of the most intransigent regulations, laws, and structures that are collectively holding us back as a society from achieving true equality. We will strive to see every issue we tackle this year through the lens of equity, as we know all too well that racism and injustice pervades almost every aspect of our lives.

And that effort will extend beyond race.

More than 100 years since the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, we know there is still much to be done to advance gender equity. I will look for opportunities to address the continuing challenges faced by women in the profession. Around the world, the abuse of women arising out of gender discrimination is still rampant. This cannot stand.

We must also address those who suffer stigma and abuse as a result of their sexual or gender orientation. Across the nation, we are seeing an alarming rise in efforts to curb the rights of individuals simply because of the way they choose to express themselves. 2021 was a record-breaking year for anti-transgender legislation, with 33 states introducing a variety of bills targeting the freedom of this vulnerable population. This cannot stand. With its reputation as a progressive leader, New York can and should speak out against these prejudicial efforts and set the standard for true equitable treatment of all individuals under the law.

State level initiatives like those that target transgender Americans are born at the ballot box. The free and unfettered ability to vote is a fundamental right, and it too, is under attack. The past year has brought an alarming rise in efforts to undermine this inalienable right – starting with a pre-presidential push to discredit the outcome of the 2020 election, followed by the unprecedented Jan. 6 attack on our nation’s Capitol by those bent on overturning the very bedrock of our democracy and our nation.

Now we see states across the nation engaged in a wholesale push to restrict voting access. This assault on democracy has been largely targeted against Black and Brown persons – persons who have long fought for the franchise and access to the ballot box. Again, this cannot stand. New York, thankfully, has worked in recent years to improve and broaden access to the ballot box. We should be a beacon of hope and a shining example of how to encourage participation in democracy, not limit it. The association has a role to play here as well, putting the considerable expertise and experience of our members at the disposal of lawmakers who seek to protect and preserve this important tenet of our society. That is why I will establish a task force focused on voting rights and charged with developing recommendations to safeguard this most important tenet of our democracy.

I will also build on the initiatives of my predecessors and continue our important work to recognize the importance of wellbeing for all attorneys and address the mental health issues that haunt our profession. Our profession has long failed to address the plight of mental health and wellbeing and how it affects the livelihood of our profession. Now, as we come out of the pandemic, I sadly believe the need to confront this issue is of more significance now than ever before. I am pleased that the Task Force on Attorney Wellbeing continues its efforts here, and I, like many of you, look forward to receiving their final report at the October meeting of the House of Delegates. I know that their recommendations will impact our profession for the better.

I am aware the agenda I have outlined above is both far-reaching and ambitious. And there will undoubtedly be additional issues that arise over the coming year that we will be compelled to address. But I firmly believe now is the time for us to tackle difficult and intractable issues or risk remaining relevant and responsive to members and prospective members, and to the profession.

Rather than empanel many task forces and special work groups, I will reach out to and engage our sections and committees to do most of the good work needed to move us forward.

Over the course of today, you will hear presentations from several task forces and committees, some of whom have labored long – years, in some cases – in the preparation of their reports. From the future of the New York State bar examination to the future of local journalism, from the sudden tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic for residents of nursing homes and long-term care, to the ongoing tragedy of racial injustice and police misconduct, these reports are important, and demonstrate some of the best work that our Association can do to shape the development of law and educate and inform the public on the cutting-edge legal and policy issues of the day. I thank the leaders and members of these groups for their efforts and their service to the Association and the profession.

The events of the past year upended and unsettled us, but also accelerated and mandated changes that arguably would have taken much longer to accomplish. Now that we are here, we must take advantage and reinvent ourselves as a profession and certainly as an association. There is no turning back. We must have the courage and willingness to make change and do things differently than they have been done in the past. Those bar associations that have failed to recognize this will only suffer. Our proud bar association must remain at the forefront of recognizing this need for reinvention.

I look forward to working with you all. Indeed, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to abate, I trust that the opportunity will come soon that we can meet in person, as colleagues, friends, and members of the Bar. In the meantime, do not hesitate to reach out to me – there is much work to be done over the coming year. Let us begin.