



**Report of President T. Andrew Brown to the
House of Delegates of the New York State Bar Association
April 2, 2022**

A Vision for the Future – Forward into the Future

Dear Colleagues:

As with all previous times that I have had the honor to address the House of Delegates, it is once again my pleasure to thank you for taking time out of your busy lives to join us today. Whether you are here in person or have signed in virtually, your presence and participation is critically important to ensuring the vitality and longevity of our Association and determining its path forward. I greatly appreciate the investment you are making in the future of our organization, our industry, and your own professional development.

While we come together to conduct the business of our Association, we cannot ignore that we also come together at a time of great upheaval. I know we are all watching in horror at the war taking place in Ukraine and the significant humanitarian crisis this senseless violence has created. While it is easy to feel overwhelmed and powerless in times of international crisis, I am deeply proud of the efforts this Association is making to assist both our fellow attorneys in Ukraine and the refugees who have been displaced by the unwarranted attacks on their homeland.

Members of the International Section’s Ukrainian Task Force have worked around the clock over the last month to support our Ukrainian colleagues and have been in near-constant contact with the members of our Ukraine Chapter. I applaud the International Section’s Ukrainian Task Force and chair Edward Lenci for their dedicated efforts here – and I encourage all our members to assist in whatever way they can.

As an organization with members in over 100 countries, the New York State Bar Association has a special duty to promote, support, and protect international law and the rule of law. We stand with Ukraine, the Ukrainian Bar Association, and our Ukrainian members and will continue to identify ways for the Association and attorneys to help throughout this crisis.

Just last week, close to 750 attorneys participated in a special pro bono CLE webinar on how to help Ukrainian refugees apply for Temporary Protected Status or TPS. The designation allows those fleeing wars and natural disasters to seek protection here in the U.S.

Every lawyer has the opportunity to change someone’s life – if you have not already done so, I encourage you to reach out to our colleagues with the International Section and find a way to help in this time of extraordinary humanitarian need.

We will continue to build chapters around the globe and support our members wherever they reside – including by calling out and confronting egregious affronts to the rule of law and international peace such as the illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

We are lucky here in the U.S. to be living in a relatively peaceful society and also to have the freedom to gather in person for a House of Delegates meeting in New York City for the first time in over two years.

It was wonderful to break bread with you last night at our House reception and dinner and at the diversity reception. And I am thrilled to be here today among the leaders of the Empire State’s bench and bar – as we gather again here in Manhattan to conduct important business on behalf of our organization.

Being here is also bittersweet. It was not all that long ago that New York City was the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis and was all but shuttered in an effort to prevent the virus from spreading. Hundreds of our members, friends, and colleagues lost their lives in this pandemic. Meeting here makes this moment even more poignant. I am keeping all those who were impacted by the pandemic in my thoughts and prayers, and I ask that you do the same.

The pandemic was a pivotal moment in history that resulted in tremendous loss but also opportunities for transformation. From the outset, NYSBA led. We developed new ways to meet the needs of our members. We reimagined the delivery of member services. And in so many ways, we realized the purpose and potential of the Association “to apply its knowledge and experience in the field of the law to promote the public good.”

The NYSBA COVID-19 Pro Bono Network, which launched two years ago, has now helped over 3,200 New Yorkers with unemployment insurance matters. Our members help on many other fronts as well – supporting Afghan refugees, aiding New Yorkers displaced by Hurricane Ida, assisting our neighbors confronting the challenges of the ongoing housing crisis. We are grateful for all the service offered – indeed, only a few hours of legal help can make a difference in the lives of our fellow citizens. I must also note– as the managing partner of a small law firm myself – that so many of our most dedicated volunteers come from solo and small firm practice settings.

The ongoing work of the Task Force on the Post-Pandemic Future of the Profession reminds us that we cannot take the significant changes we have collectively experienced over the past two years for granted – including the role and use of technology, the future of legal education, and evolving workplace dynamics in the profession. I thank the Task Force members for their diligent work and look forward to supporting the report when presented to the House later this year.

All of our sections, committees, and task forces are hard at work, addressing issues critical to the state and country. That includes but is not limited to efforts undertaken by members of the Task Force on Racism, Social Equity, and the Law; Voting Rights and Democracy; and the Treatment of Transgender Youth in Sports. Support for disenfranchised communities has been a hallmark of my professional career and at the heart of my initiatives as your president. I continue to be moved and impressed by NYSBA’s willingness to confront societal challenges, address access to justice head on, and develop recommendations for changes in law and policy that will provide equal rights to all and truly help us form “a more perfect union.”

I am particularly proud to have chaired the Task Force on Racial Injustice and Police Reform which presented a report to the House that was adopted in June of 2021. And the work of making the sensible recommendations in that report a reality is ongoing.

Tackling racial justice advocacy must be more than just platitudes – it must be concentrated action to help “reclaim our brothers and sisters back into society.” With that in mind, I am thrilled to announce that last week the Executive Committee approved support of the Clean Slate Act, which, if enacted into law, would provide for the automatic sealing of certain conviction records. This is one simple step we can take to help confront the pervasive problem of racial injustice in the criminal justice system.

Other Association entities – including the Criminal Justice Section, the Task Force on the Parole System, and the Committee on Mandated Representation – continue to review the criminal justice system through the lens of both access to justice and racial justice.

And later today, the House of Delegates will vote on a resolution offered by the Committee on Families and the Law addressing systemic racism in New York State’s child welfare system. I commend the Committee for their thoughtful report and can tell you that I will be supporting this resolution. I also note that the Task Force on Racism, Social Equity, and the Law will give an informational update to the House this morning – I thank the members of this Task Force as they continue to draft the report and recommendations and look forward to the final report that will be presented before the House in Cooperstown this June.

In both Albany and Washington, the Association is lobbying vigorously for our legislative priorities including the long overdue increase to 18b rates, repeal of Judiciary Law 470, development of sensible gun control legislation, enactment of a right to counsel in immigration proceedings, and the implementation of the Chief Judge’s court simplification plan.

I have already said much, both today and in other addresses over the course of my term as president, on the importance of relevance. There is an old truism that “words without action are meaningless” – and indeed, continued relevance can only be ensured by deliberate and concerted action. I am announcing today that I have formed a new Strategic Planning Committee that is charged with developing actionable goals that will enable NYSBA to grow, retain, and better serve our members.

Taa R. Grays, NYSBA secretary and co-chair of the Task Force on Racism, Social Equity, and the Law, and Christopher R. Riano, Executive Committee member and chair of the LGBTQ Section, will chair the committee. The members have been strategically selected from across NYSBA – including members who have “been in the trenches” the last few years – bold leaders who are committed to driving our Association forward.

It has been over a decade since our Association last developed a comprehensive Strategic Plan to guide our operations, and truly, much has changed both within the practice of law and NYSBA itself over this period. We have had many organizational successes in recent years – such projects as the launch of the Virtual Bar Center, the successful pivot to webinars and hybrid programming during the COVID-19 crisis, a revamped multi-prong communications strategy, and focused

advocacy on innovative public policy initiatives – but there is much left to be done to guide our organization forward. We must ensure the full participation of our members in the activities, benefits, interests, and successes of the Association – this is the key to our future.

Simply put, it is my charge that the Strategic Planning Committee will secure NYSBA’s continued preeminent position in influencing and driving change in the law and the legal profession. As we approach our 150th anniversary in 2026, we must ensure that our Association remains relevant, nimble, adaptive, and strong, not just for the next decade, but for years beyond.

To help move forward, we have recommitted to the importance of diversity at all levels and activities within the Association – indeed, diversity is a foundational element to the continued success and livelihood of NYSBA, and I thank the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for their outstanding and constant work helping us improve. Equally, we have been reminded of the importance of focusing on generational changes in the practice of law, the legal profession, and certainly the role of the bar association.

We have also realized that there are new and exciting ways to engage with our members – including through remote events, virtual public forums, CLE webinars, and hybrid meetings like today’s meeting of the House of Delegates. As we gradually return to in-person events, we cannot forget the ease by which technology allows us to connect with so many more attorneys than before – and we have an obligation to our members and the public to ensure that our Association remains as accessible as possible.

Colleagues, it has been the privilege and pleasure of my professional career to serve as the one-hundred and twenty-fourth president of the New York State Bar Association. I wish to thank my fellow officers and friends President-Elect Sherry Levin Wallach, Immediate Past President Scott M. Karson, Treasurer Domenick Napoletano, Secretary Taa R. Grays, and President-Elect-Designee Richard C. Lewis, for their strong support over the course of my presidency. I also wish to thank the members of the Executive Committee, our section and committee chairs, and you, the members of the House of Delegates, for your exemplary leadership and service to our Association. And I would especially like to thank our staff for their diligent efforts to ensure that NYSBA is – and will continue to be – the greatest and most impactful bar association in the country.

We must not overlook the importance of this moment. We will not wait to seize this opportunity. I challenge you, the leaders of our Association and the profession, to commit to building a better NYSBA for the good of our Association, for the good of our members, and for the good of our state as a whole.