



A North Star to Guide Us

The rule of law is an unwavering beacon, one that lawyers and bar associations should always rely on for direction and guidance.

In August, State Bar of Wisconsin President Dean Dietrich, President-elect Jane Bucher, and I attended the National Conference of Bar Presidents' annual meeting in Denver. Programming included a focus on the erosion of public trust in our democratic processes and institutions and what bar associations and individual lawyers can do to restore trust in our democracy and the rule of law.

One of the most compelling presentations was by leaders from the World Justice Project® (WJP).

The WJP defines the "rule of law" as a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers four universal principles: accountability, just law, open government, and accessible and impartial justice.

They further define these principles in the following manner:

- Government as well as private actors are accountable under the law.
- Just law is clear, publicized, and stable and is applied evenly, and it ensures human rights as well as property, contract, and procedural rights.
- There is open government, in which the processes by which the law is adopted, administered, adjudicated, and enforced are accountable, fair, and efficient.
- Accessible and impartial justice is delivered timely by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutral parties who are accessible, have adequate resources, and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.

So, what are our responsibilities, as a state bar association, in preserving this cornerstone that ensures the stability of our democracy?

The State Bar of Wisconsin's vision states: *Our members are the respected guardians of the dignity and integrity of the rule of law within a fair and accessible justice system.*

Carrying out this vision is woven into the very fabric of our daily work:

In our advocacy, for criminal justice reform and proper funding of our justice system, including the dire need for increased civil legal aid, where Wisconsin ranks at the bottom in our nation in committing resources to making our courts accessible to all;

In continuing-legal-education programming that promotes better understanding of and support for the integrity of our voting system and that educates our members to be highly skilled and competent practitioners to best serve their clients and as officers of the court;

In our charitable work, through the Wisconsin Law Foundation, where we advance public understanding of the law and invest in programs that improve the administration of justice and educate younger generations through our high school mock trial program; and

In our support of your pro bono efforts in working toward equal justice under the law, by providing pro bono services accessible to all attorneys.

Your State Bar remains committed to being an advocate and voice for the fundamental building blocks that ensure our democratic way of life.

As we traverse the rough seas that have become society's political discourse, let the rule of law continue to be our guide and our North Star. **wl**

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

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THE WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT

The World Justice Project is an independent, multidisciplinary organization working to create knowledge, build awareness, and stimulate action to advance the rule of law worldwide. Learn more about the World Justice Project at worldjusticeproject.org.

Donations to the Wisconsin Law Foundation's Mock Trial Fund can be made online at wisbar.org/wlfdonate.

