2026 NCBP Midyear Meeting

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Please scan Mentimeter QR Code to participate in the survey.

Fulfilling the Promise of the Declaration of Independence

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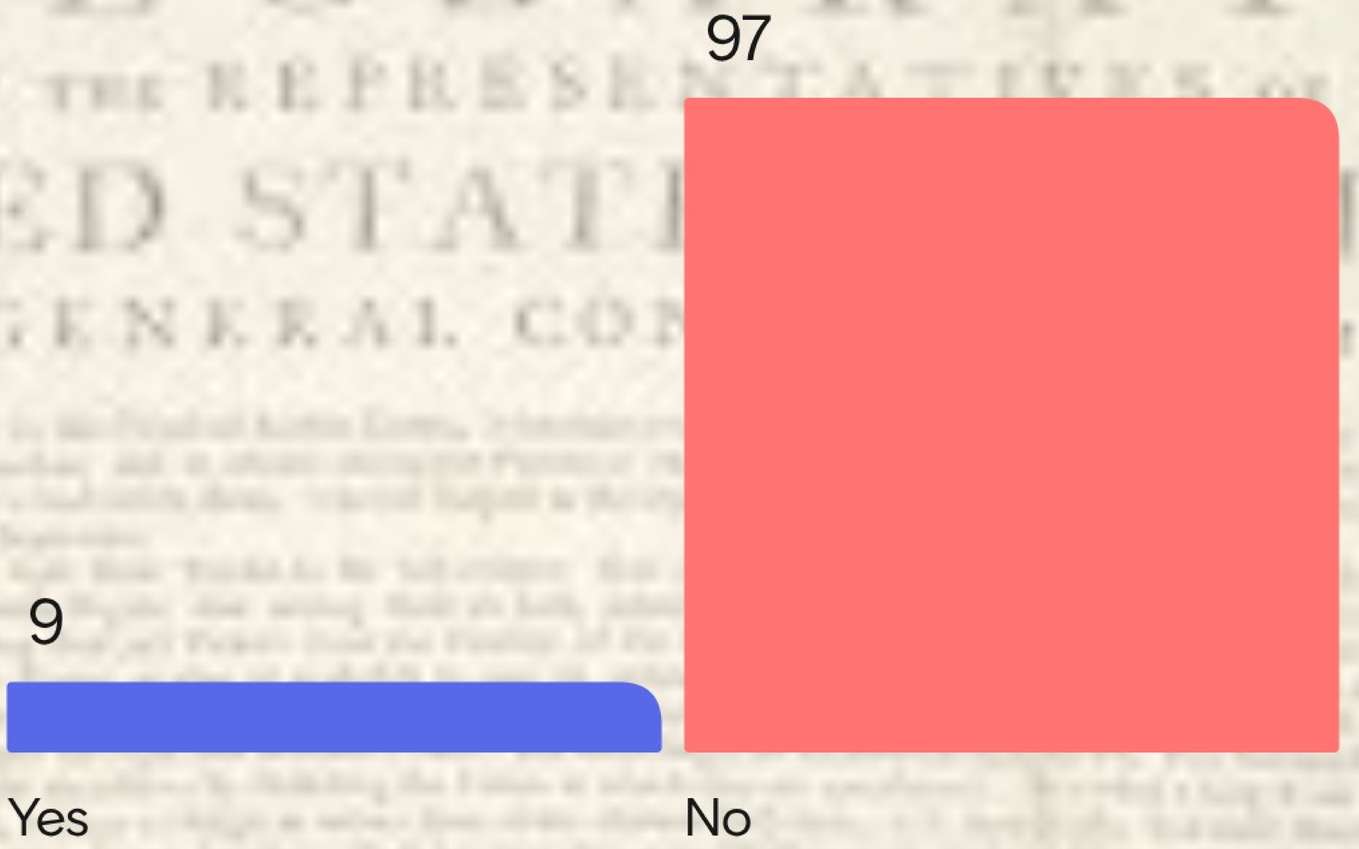
Do average citizens understand the difference between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution?



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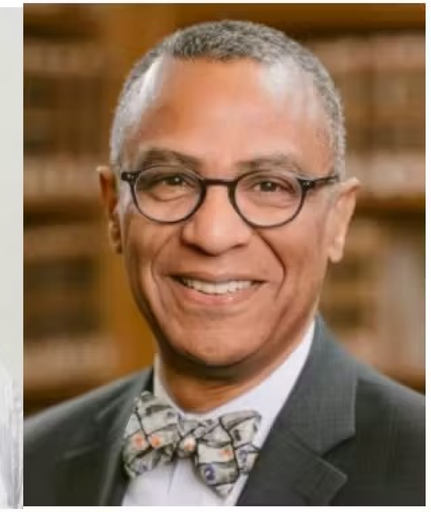
Fulfilling the Promise of the Declaration of Independence



Patrick Palace | Dan Cotter | Michael Ariens | Carl Smallwood

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The Then and Now: The Declaration of Independence as America's First Indictment of Executive Power

Why Start Before the Declaration? Rule of Law Before Revolution

-Before independence, there was law
-Before resistance, there was restraint
-Before grievance, there was legitimacy

John Adams and the Rule of Law

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John Adams and the Boston Massacre (1770)

- Adams defended British soldiers accused of killing colonists
- Deeply unpopular decision
- Risked reputation and livelihood
- Won acquittals for most defendants
- Signer of Declaration

"Facts are stubborn things… and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."

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Why Adams Matters Here

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The Revolutionary Ethic

- -Law precedes politics
- -Due process precedes outcomes
- -Justice is not loyalty-based
- -Independence without law is tyranny by another name

The Declaration: Not Poetry, a Pleading

- A structured legal indictment
- A bill of particulars against executive abuse
- Edited and debated like a brief
- Addressed to the “opinions of mankind”

The Grievances as a Warning System

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What Unchecked Executive Power Looks Like

- -Obstruction of legislatures
- -Manipulation of courts
- -Politicized justice
- -Standing armies over civil authority
- -Governance by decree
- -Erosion of accountability

Grievance #1
"He has refused his Assent to Laws…"

Then (1776):

-Royal obstruction of colonial legislation

Now (modern translation):

-Selective enforcement of statutes

-Executive refusal to implement duly enacted laws

-Governance by delay or defiance

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Grievance #2
"He has obstructed the Administration of Justice…"

Then:

-Interference with colonial courts

Now:

-Attacks on judges

-Delegitimizing court rulings

-Political pressure on prosecutors

-Weaponized pardons

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Grievance #3
"He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone..."

Then:

-Judges beholden to the Crown

Now:

-Personal attacks on judges

-Calls for impeachment based on rulings

-Delegitimizing judicial independence

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Grievance #4
"He has erected a multitude of New Offices…"

Then:

-Crown officers imposed without consent

Now:

-Acting officials
-Circumventing Senate confirmation
-Expansion of executive bureaucracy without accountability
-Firing – Cook, Slaughter

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Grievance #5
"He has affected to render the Military independent of the Civil Power…"

Then:

-Standing armies among civilians

Now:

-Militarization of civilian enforcement

-Threats to deploy military domestically

-Blurring military and civil authority

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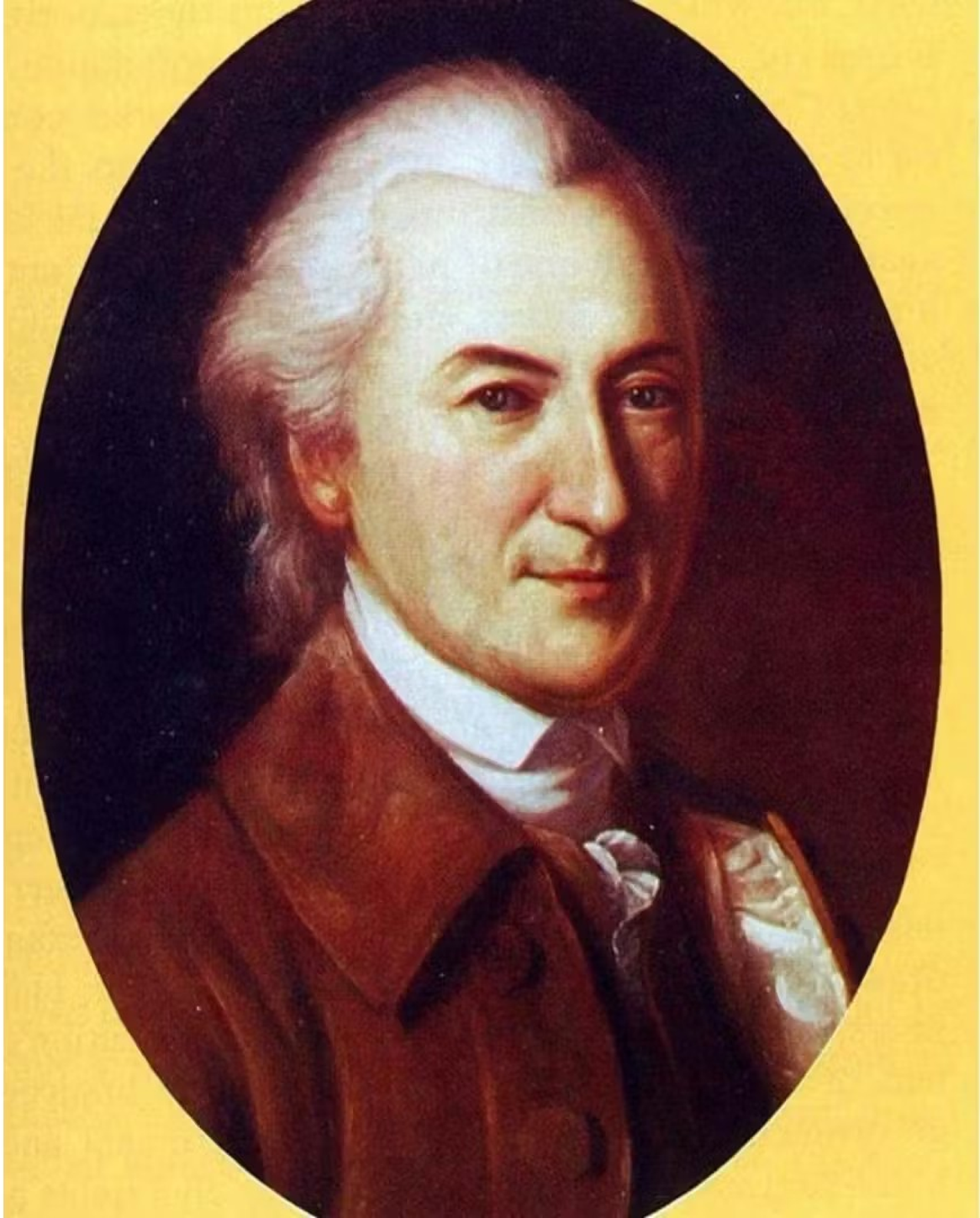

John Dickinson

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The Juxtaposition Then vs. Now

Then:

- -No vote
- -No appellate courts
- -No constitutional remedies

Now:

- -Independent judiciary
- -Elections
- -Separation of powers
- -An organized bar

Patrick Palace will discuss the Pledge and a call to action

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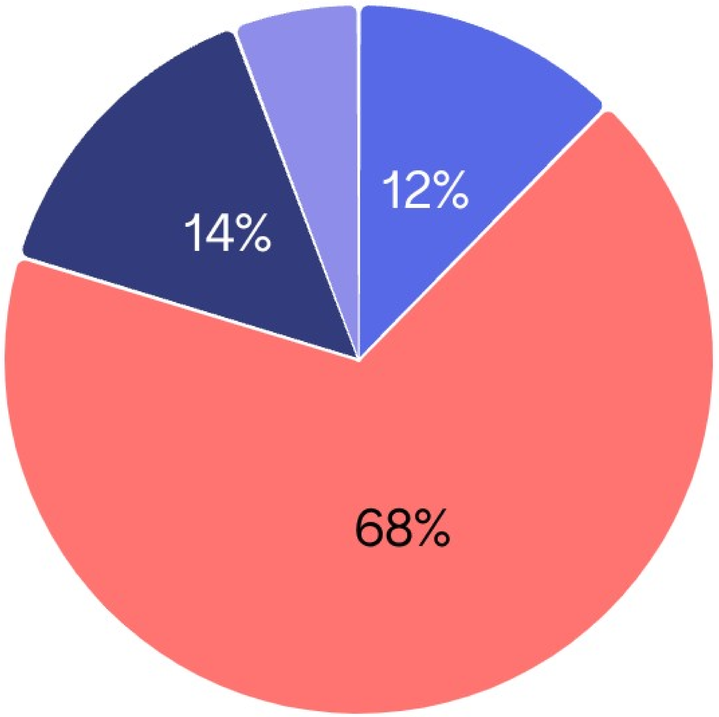
How many democracy-related programs (CLEs, committee meetings, listening sessions) did your bar have in 2025?



12%	Zero (Maybe in 2026)
68%	1-5 (Great start!)
14%	6-10 (You rock!)
6%	11 or more (Champions!)

One Year Later: America Meets the World—The Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship

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Morocco recognized U.S. independence in 1777

- First country to do so
- Formal treaty followed in 1786
- Oldest unbroken treaty relationship in U.S. history

Why Morocco Matters International Validation of Rule of Law

-Recognition followed lawful declaration, not rebellion alone
-Sovereignty grounded in legitimacy
-America was seen as a constitutional experiment — not a mob revolt

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Describe your bar's association's Law Day 2026 program?

Breakfast event

Student essay contest

Town Hall

Constitution Day with high school students

Human rights seminar

Bring your child to work day

None. From a red state. Viewed as too political. So my law firm organizes.

We issue a law day statement and meet with other bar association.

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Describe your bar's association's Law Day 2026 program?

Student art contest

Special sitting of Appeals Court

Reaffirmation of attorney oath

Educational outreach to high schools.

Law Day Luncheon (per usual)

Appellate practice CLE

Color of Justice Distribute pocket constitutions for Jury appreciation Elementary school readings

Lawyers and judges convene at federal courthouse to publicly reaffirm our oath

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Describe your bar's association's Law Day 2026 program?

Retake the lawyer civility oath as a group. Federal judges leading the oath.

Event focusing on 250th anniversary hopefully featuring our Lt. Governor

Rule of law day with high schoolers

CLE - Rule of Law + Independence of the Judiciary

Inn of Court theme on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence- technology used to enhance celebrations.

Retaking of attorney oath

Following the SBOT Theme: Texas Constitution and the Rule of Law

Lunchtime program with a rule of law statement and joint bench/bar presence

Describe your bar's association's Law Day 2026 program?

The West Virginia State Bar 2026 Annual Meeting theme is Constitutional Conversations!

Lunch event with keynote speaker & have our Supreme Court justice re-administer our oath. Aldo planning CLE throughout the year.

Event with judiciary

Rule of law seminar panel presentation. Indiana state bar.

Giving students voice to share their "American Dream"

We have high school students engage in a speaking activity at our appellate court every year. The entire court attends, there are also a few speakers and an annual award. — CT Bar Assn

Lawyer's oath reaffirmations ceremonies again — 2025 reaffirmation ceremonies were successful and members asked that we do them annually

Local discussions about threats to the judiciary

Describe your bar's association's Law Day 2026 program?

Open inquiries at all levels for input from our population. Education about civics.

Insight from members on what the Dec. of Ind. means to them in magazine and on website.

Focus on 250th anniversary with particular outreach to school-age children

Civic Ed in a box for lawyer to speak to adult & student groups

Lawyer and judge teams present programs on the LD topic to 7-12 grade classrooms across the state. Anticipating 100-plus presentations. Sometimes court sheriffs and law clerk also participate.

Student essay/speech/poster contest about the 150 anniversary of the State Constitution

We hold an event at our Judicial Building with speakers as well as events at several county courthouses.

Indiana Bar is hosting a symposium on legal and judicial independence, including a session on clarifying laws related to DEI, vs. what some elected leaders are calling “illegal DEI” practices

Describe your bar's association's Law Day 2026 program?

Substantial increase in our educator/attorney/judiciary team participation in classroom visits to explain rule of law, constitutional rights, and civility of behavior.

We are holding programs at local schools in coordination with a Texas Supreme Court Justice teaching civics and the rule of law. We also hold an annual poster and essay contest.

Mound City Bar Association(MCBA) hosts an annual Legislative Summit that engages lawmakers with lawyers and the community. MCBA is hosting a series of civic education events and publishing articles.

Rule of Law presentations to local schools

2 ROL days held at our Supreme Court lead by our Chief Justice. 1 day for Middle school students; 1 day for high school students. Judges, lawyers, law students, police officers etc participate/discuss

3-day intense education program for HS history/govt 40 teachers across the state —make resources available online for greater reach

The Bar's Role Then and Now From Adams to Today

- Lawyers defended the unpopular
- Lawyers drafted the grievances
- Lawyers built the constitutional system
- Lawyers must defend institutional legitimacy

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Closing Reflection
The Declaration as Warning Label

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"The Declaration is not just our birth certificate — it is our warning label."

- It tells us how republics fail
- It names the behaviors, not the actors
- It demands vigilance, not nostalgia

Final Question for the Panel
What Is the Modern Grievance?

-When executive power strains the system
-When courts are attacked
-When law is subordinated to loyalty
Jefferson wrote a brief for the future.
The question is whether we still know how to read it.

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Takeaway(s) from discussion about Declaration of Independence?

Read the Declaration of Independence!

Annual review of the Declaration and annotate it!

Keep it alive by keep discussing and educating and pledging to it

We need to find the lane to strongly stand up without alienating half our membership. That is the challenge of 2026.

Inspiration, hope. It is our time!

Need to translate Declaration for today's audience.

The issues we are facing are not new - learn from the past and improve!

Interesting to learn about John Dickenson and how he supported it by stepping back but that his lack of public support hurt his reputation.

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Takeaway(s) from discussion about Declaration of Independence?

We really need to schedule a few 250th anniversary events

Useful reminder that lawyers have been present at the creation of our country and at crucial moments since then.

Lawyers are critical to process

We must stand up for the Constitution despite any personal risks.

History truly repeats itself. What we do on our second go round remains to be seen and is ours to craft

Familiarize myself with the Declaration. Bar orgs must be a voice for the profession

Community education remains critical for shaping progress.

Incredible parallels to today in celebration of the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence! It must be now.

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Takeaway(s) from discussion about Declaration of Independence?

The rule of law is not partisan. Stop hiding behind that fear.

Similarities to events in 1776 and importance to educate public on same

Read the Declaration, strength of forefathers

A lot of group think ... Some people like the current status quo.

We need to hang together. Bar lawyers need courage. We need more tools from NCBP to fight for the Rule of Law.

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The NCBP Pledge

Patrick Palace
President, National Conference of Bar Presidents
Founder of Palace Law Group

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NCBP Pledge to Preserve the Independence of the Legal Profession and the Judicial System

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The Purpose and Spirit of the Pledge

The NCBP Pledge is rooted in our shared oath as lawyers — to uphold the Constitution, the rule of law, and the fair and equitable administration of justice. It is both a reaffirmation and a call to action: a commitment by bar leaders and members of the legal profession to stand together in support of our oath and commitment to the independence of our profession.

This initiative seeks to build a **national coalition of bars and bar leaders** united by a shared set oF principles that reaffirm the core values and foundational principles of our profession.

This movement is not political; it is based solely upon our Oath as lawyers and the Preamble to the Rules of Professional Conduct. It reflects the spirit of the lawyer's oath we each take to support and defend our constitutions and uphold justice with integrity and courage.

As our NCBP President Patrick Palace shared recently with our NCBP members, *"Our duty is not to comfort the profession, but to awaken it— and it is our job to amplify ... to remind every bar leader that this is not about politics; it is about preservation — of our profession, our ethics, and our independence."*

A Call for Unity

At this stage, we are seeking signatures of Bars across the nation. It would be a great honor for you and your bar to partner with the National Conference of Bar Presidents as a representative leader among bars who stand to defend and protect the core values of our profession — values that have guided our lawyers and the nations lawyers for generations.

Next Steps

We would welcome your endorsing signature. If you or your Board would like more information about the NCBP Pledge, please reach out to NCBP President Patrick Palace.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership joining this movement.

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Pledge to Preserve the Independence of the Legal Profession and the Judicial System

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1. Upholding the Rule of Law and the Constitution
2. Preserving the Independence of the Profession and the Judiciary
3. Upholding the Legal Process and Respect for the Courts
4. Promoting Public Trust and Confidence
5. Ensuring Access to Justice for All
6. Advancing Professional Excellence

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The NCBP Pledge to Preserve the Independence of the Legal Profession and the Judicial System

Patrick Palace

President, National Conference of Bar Presidents

Founder of Palace Law Group

Pledge to Preserve the Independence of the Legal Profession and the Judicial System

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Scan with your phone to
Sign the Pledge Now

Visit the NCBP website, https://ncbp.org/page/NCBPPledge to find out more

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