

Maine State Bar Association

# MAINE BAR JOURNAL

Volume 40 | Number 4 | 2025





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# MAINE BAR JOURNAL

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## Climbing Together: Building Connection and Longevity in the Legal Profession

This past summer, I had the incredible opportunity to hike the Tour du Mont Blanc, a 110-mile loop circling the Mont Blanc massif through France, Italy, and Switzerland. Over 10 days, my family and I crossed three international borders on foot, climbed mountain passes, descended into flower-filled valleys, listened to the windchime-like sounds of cowbells, and met people from around the world.

What struck me most—aside from the alpine views and sore legs—was how interconnected everything felt. The trail itself is not just a single path, but a network of routes, refuges, and relationships. It's maintained through the contributions of many and thrives because people from different countries and perspectives come together with a shared purpose.

Each day on the trail brought both challenge and clarity. Whether traversing steep passes or descending into quiet villages, I was struck by how hikers from all over the world found ways to support one another. The Tour du Mont Blanc isn't just about hiking—it's about connection, resilience, and the sense of accomplishment that comes when you journey together.

As lawyers, it's easy to get focused on our individual climb—building our practices, serving clients, meeting deadlines. But, like the Tour du Mont Blanc, our journey is richer when we travel it with others. In our profession, we must also seek connection, even when the path is difficult. We operate in a world increasingly defined by division—legal, political, cultural. We should remember that lawyers have the ability to shape the law through principled disagreement, careful argument, and mutual respect. The strength of our legal system lies not in uniformity of opinion, but in our shared dedication to resolving differences through reason and dialogue.

This past year as President, I had the opportunity to interact with lawyers outside my own practice and geographic area. With the Rule of Law as a central theme, I heard from many of you who shared your perspectives at conferences,

in the Bar Journal, and in public forums. I've been struck by how thoughtful and passionate our members are about topics true to their values. As an association, we sought the right balance between standing up for the Rule of Law and respecting differing opinions. We've received both support and criticism—each invaluable. Your engagement, whether in agreement or dissent, has challenged us to reflect, adapt, and stay grounded in our mission. We remain committed to fostering open dialogue, even when it's difficult, because that's how progress is made—together. I hope, even with differing opinions, we will continue to engage and advocate.

In the first edition of the Bar Journal this year, I emphasized the importance of connection—with one another and with our work as legal professionals. In the most recent edition, I outlined the many resources the MSBA offers to help you get involved and find opportunities that best match your interests and goals. Although my time as President will soon come to an end, the MSBA, supported by its dedicated and hardworking staff, will continue to offer high-level programming and meaningful opportunities for our members to engage and grow.

Next year marks a major milestone: the 135th Anniversary of the MSBA! The Winter Bar Conference will be held at the Westin Portland Harborview Hotel, January 28–30, 2026. We're also trying something new with the Summer Bar Conference, which will take place at the Samoset Resort in Rockport, June 24–26, 2026. Mark your calendars—you won't want to miss either event.

I am confident that the MSBA will continue to thrive under the leadership of President-Elect Rachel Okun, Vice President Jim Haddow, and Executive Director Angela Armstrong. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as President of the MSBA.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan A. Faunce".



As lawyers, it's easy to get focused on our individual climb—building our practices, serving clients, meeting deadlines. But, like the Tour du Mont Blanc, our journey is richer when we travel it with others.





ANGELA P. ARMSTRONG is the Maine State Bar Association's Executive Director. She can be reached at [aarmstrong@mainebar.org](mailto:aarmstrong@mainebar.org).

## A Year of Gratitude and Growth

As we wrap up another busy year at the MSBA, I've been thinking a lot about how much of what we do depends on gratitude — the kind that shows up quietly every day through our members, volunteers, and staff. From section chairs planning programs, to mentors guiding new attorneys, to staff keeping everything running behind the scenes — it's that steady effort and collaboration that keeps the MSBA strong. You've shown up in countless ways this year, and I want to thank you for it.

2025 has been a year of change and forward motion. We completed the transition to a calendar-year membership, a major project that required patience and flexibility from everyone involved. Your support helped make that change smooth and successful. We also welcomed the formation of two new sections — the Immigration Defense Section and the Cannabis & Hemp Law Section — both of which demonstrate how our members continue to identify emerging needs and create communities to address them.

This year also marked the first time in several years that the MSBA operated with a full staff. After several new hires in late 2024, our team is now complete — and their impact shows. Having every position filled has allowed us to deliver more timely support, expand member communications, and improve programs across the board. Behind the scenes, our staff has continued refining systems, strengthening communication, and finding better ways to serve you. They are a small but mighty group whose dedication makes a difference every single day — whether it's helping with CLEs, coordinating events, or making sure your questions get answered quickly.

We also upgraded the Lawyer Referral Service with enhanced referral management software, improving efficiency for participating attorneys and making it easier for the public to connect with legal help. In addition, we introduced several new member benefits designed to save you money and assist in your daily practice. These include discounts on professional services, expanded online tools, and other resources that directly support your work and your bottom line.

Looking back, I'm proud of how much we've accomplished together — and even more excited about what lies ahead. In 2026, the MSBA will celebrate its 135th anniversary, a remarkable milestone that we'll honor throughout the year. One of the highlights will be a special anniversary gala in May — an opportunity to come together as a community and reflect on the Association's history, growth, and the thousands of members who have shaped it through their leadership, service, and commitment to the legal profession in Maine.

On behalf of our staff and Board of Governors, thank you for your continued trust and engagement. I wish you and your families a happy, healthy holiday season and a successful start to the new year. And, as always, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [aarmstrong@mainebar.org](mailto:aarmstrong@mainebar.org) with your thoughts, questions, or ideas for the MSBA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Angela P. Armstrong", written in a cursive style.

# Sustaining Members of the Maine State Bar Association

The MSBA offers grateful thanks to these members, whose additional support makes possible some of the work of the Association on behalf of the lawyers and residents of our state.

## 2025 Sustaining Members as of 10/22/2025:

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*Sustaining memberships permit MSBA members to make additional commitments to the Maine State Bar Association. As established by the MSBA's Board of Governors, an individual Sustaining Membership is \$100 in addition to a member's regular membership dues.*



RACHEL OKUN, ESQ. is the founder of Okun Law PLLC, a personal injury law firm representing injured clients throughout Maine. Rachel can be reached at [rachel@okunlawoffice.com](mailto:rachel@okunlawoffice.com).

## Looking Back, Moving Forward: Strengthening Our Legal Community

As we approach the MSBA's 135th anniversary, I find myself imagining what it must have been like to practice law in 1891, a time before cars were seen on Maine roads, when telephones were rare, and typewriters had only just become the norm. Maine hasn't always been at the forefront of technology, so I'm picturing lawyers handwriting briefs, mailing letters back and forth to negotiate contracts and settlements, and waiting weeks for responses. It's been a long time since the MSBA was founded in 1891, and much has changed, but as I reflect on the past and look toward the future, it strikes me that in today's world, the MSBA is just as important, if not more so, than it was when it was created.

The MSBA was founded by 281 Maine lawyers who came together to promote the interests of the legal profession and to institute legal reforms. While the world has changed in myriad of ways over the past 135 years, lawyers still benefit from the most basic human connection that comes from supporting the shared goals of our profession. With the rise of technology, it's easy to lose the personal connections that make our profession meaningful. Taking time to engage with one another beyond casework helps foster relationships. Those moments of genuine connection strengthen collegiality, and in turn, improve the work we do for our clients.

While the rise of Zoom for depositions, mediations, and court hearings has made scheduling easier, it has also reduced many of the opportunities that lawyers had for conversations with each other outside of formal proceedings and therefore reduced the opportunities for connecting with each other. I often hear stories from older attorneys about "motion days" in court, where the attorneys and judges would have time to talk. Now, these opportunities don't seem to exist, or if they do, they don't exist in the same way, and our profession loses something because of it. It's difficult to build relationships with opposing counsel if your only conversations are adversarial, and it's hard to have non-adversarial conversations if your only conversations take place in impersonal Zoom proceedings or via sterile emails.

In just 11 years of practice, I've witnessed tremendous changes, from Zoom and remote work, to seismic shifts in the law, including the Supreme Court overturning long-standing precedent and the emergence of rapidly evolving ethical questions surrounding the use of AI in legal practice. It can feel overwhelming at times, but the MSBA has always been a steady source of support, and a quick conversation with a colleague invariably helps me regain perspective and feel grounded.

In a profession with incredibly high rates of burnout, mental health challenges, and substance abuse, taking time for basic connection with other people who understand our unique challenges as lawyers can help reduce stress, and remind us that we are not alone. As part of that effort to strengthen connection, we're launching a storytelling project to mark the MSBA's 135th anniversary—an opportunity for lawyers statewide to share the moments, mentors, and memories that have shaped their paths. See how you can participate on the next page. We'll showcase your stories, photos, and reflections in the spring edition of the Maine Bar Journal, prior to our gala celebration May 15 at Grace in Portland. (Please save the date!)

As President in 2026, my goal is to connect attorneys statewide, building a community of colleagues and friends. Maintaining active membership in this remarkable organization is essential to ensure that the MSBA can continue to support and strengthen our profession. If you're a partner or senior attorney, please encourage your associates and newer attorneys to join the MSBA, and if your firm covers membership dues, please make sure they know that. If you're a newer lawyer and aren't sure whether your firm pays for membership, don't hesitate to ask. Most firms are happy to do so, even if they haven't mentioned it! If you're a solo practitioner or employed at a smaller firm, please consider the benefits of being connected to lawyers across the state. Most of all, I hope you'll join us at one of our in-person events next year as we celebrate our history, community, and shared commitment to the profession.

*Rachel O*



## SHARE YOUR STORIES

To mark the 135th anniversary, I invite all Maine lawyers and law firms to join in a statewide storytelling project. We want to collect your photos, memories, and reflections about life in the law – the meaningful cases, the mentors who guided you, the courtroom victories (and the humbling defeats), and the traditions that define your firm or county bar.

Our goal is to celebrate the depth and connection of Maine's legal community. Whether you've practiced for 50 years or five, your stories matter. We will be featuring select stories and photographs in the Spring 2026 issue of the Maine Bar Journal.

### How You Can Participate

You can take part in a variety of ways:

**Share a story:** Write a short reflection (approximately 100-300 words) about a memorable experience in your legal career, a case, a mentor, or a moment that shaped you as a lawyer.

**Submit a photo:** Send in photographs from your firm's early days, community events, or courtroom milestones. Be sure to include the date of the photo and the names of the people in the photos if possible.

**Nominate a legend.** Is there a colleague whose contribution to Maine's legal profession deserves recognition? Let us know!

**Reflect on Change:** How has the practice of law evolved since you began? What advice would you give to the next generation of Maine lawyers? (100-300 words)

Please feel free to share your stories, photos, nominations, or reflections with me by email at [rachel@okunlawoffice.com](mailto:rachel@okunlawoffice.com) or by mail at Okun Law PLLC, 155 Gray Road, Suite 1, Falmouth, ME 04105.

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STEVE ROWE is a graduate of the University of Maine School of Law. He served in the Maine Legislature before serving as Maine Attorney General. Steve also practiced law at Unum, Verrill Dana, and served as president of the Maine Community Foundation. Now mostly retired, Steve provides pro bono legal services for the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project.



LAURA M. O'HANLON is a graduate of the University of Maine School of Law, whose career took her from an internship with the US Attorney's Office, into private practice, then back to Maine Law as the director of career services. She served the Maine Judicial Branch for many years before assuming her current role as deputy general counsel at Bath Iron Works Corporation. She is committed to access to justice for all.

## Campaigning for Justice: A Call to Action

Our sincere thanks to those of you who have contributed to the 2025 Campaign for Justice.<sup>1</sup> Together our gifts are helping to increase access to justice and making Maine's justice system work more efficiently, BUT we are not done yet.

We urge every member of the Maine bar to stand up for civil legal aid and increased access to justice. If you have not yet made a gift to the 2025 Campaign for Justice, please give generously now at [www.campaignforjustice.org](http://www.campaignforjustice.org). We would like to add your name to those supporting justice in Maine.

In this year of unprecedented instability, fear, and anxiety, vulnerable populations across Maine, are struggling. These include elders, immigrants, and people with low incomes. Civil legal aid providers have reported rapidly increasing requests for services. Demands on providers have outstripped their capacity. Campaign funds allow providers to increase their capacity to serve at-risk clients, thereby helping to disrupt drivers of poverty. That's why the Campaign for Justice is so important.

Many members of the Maine bar have heard our plea and responded promptly and generously. Reactions to our calls, emails, letters, and personal visits have been warm and encouraging. Lawyers have welcomed us into their workplaces, live and virtually. The Board of Overseers of the Bar has included information from us in annual registration reminders, and the Maine State Bar Association Board of Governors and staff have provided tremendous support of the Campaign for Justice in many ways.

Throughout this year, the Campaign for Justice has been carried out by a dedicated and enthusiastic volunteer leadership cabinet composed of: Eben Albert, Jeff Ashby,

Bill Black, Travis Brennan, César Britos, Jim Costello, Kristy Hapworth, Bill Harwood, Roger Katz, Tom Kelly, Jana Kenney, Jamie Kilbreth, Alysia Melnick, Sally Mills, Laura O'Hanlon, Alexia Pappas, Steve Rowe, Michael Saxl, Paula Silsby, Alexandra Stanley, Stacy Stitham, Daniel Walker, and David Warren as well as a talented and hardworking campaign director, Elizabeth Martin.

We are proud to be members of a legal community that is united for justice; and we are so very grateful to the providers and those listed above (and those we may have inadvertently omitted) who have worked tirelessly to fulfill the promise of access to justice for all.

We hope that the rest of you will join the Campaign for Justice today by giving as much as you are able. Together, we can make access to justice a reality in Maine.

Please give now at [www.campaignforjustice.org](http://www.campaignforjustice.org). Thank you.

### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> As a reminder, the Campaign for Justice is a collective commitment from Maine's legal community to assure fairness for all in the justice system. Funds raised through the Campaign support the important work of Maine's six civil legal aid providers: Pine Tree Legal Assistance, the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, Legal Services for Maine Elders, Maine Equal Justice, the Clinics at Maine Law, and the Volunteer Lawyers Project. In addition to providing critical services to Mainers in need, the providers have also worked hard to make this year's Campaign successful.





JIM COHEN and SAM HAMILTON are attorneys with Verrill Dana, LLP and serve as outside legislative counsel to the Maine State Bar Association.

## Maine Legislature Wraps Up Busy 2025 Session

In late June, the 132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature wrapped up its work for the year after a busy and often unpredictable session marked by thousands of new bills, hundreds of new laws, a challenging State Budget, and increasingly acrimonious partisan disagreement. Throughout, the Maine State Bar Association engaged on several key issues of importance to lawyers, including the current crisis surrounding the provision of indigent legal services, ensuring sufficient funding to Maine's Judicial Branch, and issues associated with the practice of law.

### Indigent Legal Services

As it has in recent years, the Maine Legislature once again heavily debated how best to fund and oversee the provision of indigent legal services in Maine. Against the backdrop of a lawsuit against the State of Maine by ACLU of Maine challenging the sufficiency of Maine's system for providing indigent legal defense, the Legislature took up proposals to increase funding and expand the newly developed public defender program operated by the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services. The Legislature also considered further steps to sufficiently fund and oversee services provided by the private defense bar. One bill that did pass was a proposal from the Judicial Branch calling for greater opportunities for judges to assign cases to private lawyers, but this bill was heavily amended to allow for a more limited judicial assignment process while at the same time providing some additional funding for indigent legal defense services. However, more remains to be done, including addressing concerns from the private bar that funding for legal defense is anticipated to run out in early 2027 absent additional state appropriations, and perceptions from the Governor and Judiciary that the public defender services are not taking on enough cases to help address the current backlog of cases involving indigent defendants.

### Funding Maine's Court System

The Legislature's Judiciary and Appropriations Committees devoted substantial attention to court operations, staffing, and technology. Maine's Judicial Branch came forward with a substantial package of funding initiatives designed to stabilize dockets, reduce backlogs, and improve courthouse safety. MSBA supported many of the staffing and modernization measures supported by the Judiciary, but MSBA emphasized that other steps to streamline process must preserve due process and reliable public access. Only a portion of the proposed funding initiatives were passed.

### Other Key Issues in 2025

More than 2,000 bills were introduced in 2025, stretching the Legislature's capacity to act before adjournment in June. Among those, several were of broad interest to lawyers. LD 1802, which sought to clarify when indigent criminal defendants are entitled to state-funded counsel, was vetoed by the Governor, and the veto was sustained. LD 958, which addressed eminent domain and tribal land, was also vetoed and sustained. Finally, the Legislature carried over LD 1822, a comprehensive consumer-data-privacy proposal, setting up continued debate in 2026. Numerous other bills impacting a wide spectrum of legal practice areas were also considered during the 2026 session as reported in our weekly tracking sheet for MSBA.

### Admission to the Practice of Law

This year saw two bills addressing how lawyers get admitted to the Bar in Maine. LD 783 sought to amend the requirement that lawyers attend law school as a condition of bar admission. Under this bill, prospective lawyers could also qualify for admission through a qualified 4-year apprenticeship program. This proposal was opposed by MSBA, the Judiciary, and the Board of Bar Overseers before eventually dying in the Senate. Meanwhile, LD 530 sought to modify the burden of proof

for bar admission in cases where applicants have previously been convicted of a crime. MSBA testified neither for/nor against the bill, which ultimately failed to proceed.

### **Partisan Balance Narrows in Legislature**

Since it adjourned in June, the Legislature's composition has shifted. With Sen. Rick Bennett (R-Oxford) and Rep. Ed Crockett (D-Portland) unenrolling to run for Governor as independents, and Rep. Kristin Cloutier (D-Lewiston) resigning from the House to serve as chief of staff for Senate President Matthea Daughtry (D-Cumberland), the Senate now stands at 20 Democrats, 14 Republicans, and one Independent, and the House stands at 74 Democrats, 73 Republicans, and three Independents.

### **2026 Session Looms**

The 2026 Session will kick off in early January with roughly 400 bills carried over from the 2025 session. Added to the mix will be around 90 bills from the Mills Administration covering housing, land use, energy, artificial intelligence, emergency services, and court administration. Finally, legislators submitted nearly 250 new bill requests prior to cloture in September, only a portion of which will be allowed to proceed following review and approval from the Legislative Council. Overall, we expect the 2026 session to ramp up quickly as it takes on many key challenges, including the anticipated loss of federal funding associated with the federal Big Beautiful Bill Act, the need to ensure sufficient funding for indigent legal defense, data privacy, updates to the probate court system, and many other important issues.

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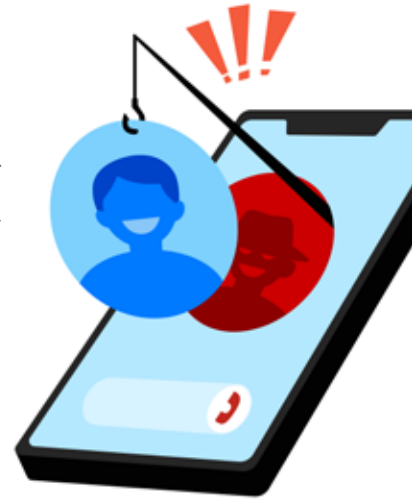
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Since 1998, MARK BASSINGTHWAIGHTE, ESQ. has been a Risk Manager with ALPS, an attorney's professional liability insurance carrier. In his tenure with the company, Mr. Bassingthwaighte has conducted over 1200 law firm risk management assessment visits, presented over 400 continuing legal education seminars throughout the United States, and written extensively on risk management, ethics, and technology. Mr. Bassingthwaighte is a member of the State Bar of Montana as well as the American Bar Association where he currently sits on the ABA Center for Professional Responsibility's Conference Planning Committee. He received his J.D. from Drake University Law School.



## Don't Fall for the Call: What Lawyers Need to Know About Vishing Scams

For years, criminals have used phones to scam people out of money or personal information, often targeting those who were not very tech-savvy. Today, however, cybercriminals are using “vishing” attacks to up their game. Vishing—short for voice phishing—is a type of social engineering scam where criminals impersonate trusted entities such as banks, government agencies, vendors, or even IT support. Their goal is to use real-time manipulation and emotional pressure to trick victims into downloading malicious software or revealing sensitive information like login credentials, credit card numbers, or bank details.

Vishing attacks take phone scams to a new level of sophistication, making it difficult even for tech-savvy people to recognize them. This is partly because criminals now use spoofing tools that make it appear their calls come from familiar or trusted numbers. These tools make victims believe they're speaking with legitimate organizations. Making matters worse, with the vast amount of personal data available through social media and large cyberbreaches like Equifax, criminals have all the information they need to craft highly convincing scams. The following examples illustrate how serious these attacks can be.

The first example concerns a partner at a small estate planning firm who received a call from someone claiming to be with the firm's IT service provider. Using a spoofing tool, the correct company name and number appeared on his caller ID. The caller calmly explained that a security breach had been traced to the firm's IP address and that there was unusual activity on its email server that needed to be stopped. The caller asked the lawyer to log in to the network and open a link sent via email to install a security patch. Worried about unauthorized access to client data, the lawyer followed the caller's instructions—including giving the caller remote access to his computer to finalize the update. The result: the lawyer's actions allowed a criminal to install spyware and, within an hour, use the

lawyer's email account to send phishing emails to firm clients.

The second example involves an associate at a family law firm who received a call from someone claiming to be a representative of the state bar's disciplinary board. The caller said a complaint had been filed, referenced legitimate bar rules, and explained that to initiate the process, the lawyer needed to confirm her identity immediately. The caller warned that failure to cooperate could be noted and might even result in suspension. The associate provided her bar number, date of birth, and the last four digits of her Social Security number. The criminal then used the stolen information to impersonate the lawyer in an attempt to defraud clients.

The final example involves a call from someone claiming to be from a lawyer's bank. The caller was pleasant and professional, saying there was suspicious activity in the lawyer's personal account and accurately providing some personal information. The call went something like this: “I'm calling from [lawyer's bank]. Someone's been using your debit card ending in 8774. One charge is for \$1,473.82 on Amazon. I'll need to verify your Social Security number, which ends in 3006. Is that correct?” The lawyer replies yes. “Thank you. Now, if you could provide your full debit card information, we can stop this unauthorized activity.” Believing the call was legitimate, the lawyer complied—giving the criminal full access to their checking account, which was emptied while the lawyer was still on the phone.

There are several steps one can take to avoid falling prey to these types of scams; but the most important one is this.

**Never volunteer information or assist someone in accessing any account, financial or otherwise, if you didn't initiate the call.** Just because someone shares accurate personal information about you doesn't mean you can trust them! The best course of action would be to hang up and call them back using a phone number you've verified independently (e.g.,



from their official website, a bill, or a statement) to determine if something is amiss. Never use a number the caller provides. Additional steps to take include the following:

- 1) **Always be wary of unsolicited calls.** Legitimate organizations, such as banks or government agencies, typically won't call out of the blue and ask for sensitive information. If you receive an unexpected call, especially one with a sense of urgency or is coupled with scare tactics, you should become suspicious. Stop, take a breath, and think logically. Remember that legitimate organizations don't use such tactics.
- 2) **Also be wary of voicemail.** Voicemail can be used as something of a Trojan Horse. In short, scammers often leave voicemails that sound quite credible, prompting call-backs that initiate the real con.
- 3) **Trust Your Gut.** Be aware that emerging AI voice cloning tools allow scammers to mimic voices, adding a layer of realism that's hard to detect. So, if something about a call (or voicemail) feels off, trust your instincts and hang up. You are not obligated to continue the conversation. Pay attention to details like poor call quality, unusual background noise, or a robotic-sounding voice, which can be signs of a scam.
- 4) **Don't trust Caller ID.** Scammers can spoofed numbers to make it look like they're calling from your bank, the IRS, or even a family member.
- 5) **Use two-factor authentication on every personal and work account that makes it available.** This adds an extra layer of security, making it harder for a scammer to access your accounts even if they obtain your password.
- 6) **Conduct mandatory training on these types of scams.** Anyone at your firm could be the target of a vishing scam, thus everyone must be taught how to recognize and respond to vishing attacks. The goal is to create a healthy culture of skepticism toward unsolicited requests for information or actions.

*Mark Bassingthwaight, Esq. Is the resident Risk Manager at ALPS Insurance. To learn more about how ALPS can support your solo or small firm visit: [alpsinsurance.com](http://alpsinsurance.com).*



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COLIN MARQUIS-BOUTIN is the Sections & Committees Coordinator at the Maine State Bar Association. He can be reached at [cmarquisboutin@mainebar.org](mailto:cmarquisboutin@mainebar.org).

## Cultivating Leadership in the Maine Bar: Meet the Leadership Academy Class of 2026

The Maine State Bar Association (MSBA) proudly welcomes its Leadership Academy Class of 2026—a dynamic group of 14 attorneys from across the state who bring a remarkable range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to this year’s program. From a former captain of 100-ton ferries and a former software engineer to the founder of a nonprofit dedicated to diversifying Maine’s legal profession and increasing access to justice, this class reflects the diverse paths that lead to leadership within the law.

The MSBA Leadership Academy is a cornerstone program designed to cultivate future leaders within Maine’s legal community. Over the next nine months, the Class of 2026 will explore the challenges and opportunities facing the profession while developing the skills, insights, and connections needed to shape its future. The program provides a unique opportunity for participants to engage deeply with colleagues, mentors, and institutions that form the backbone of Maine’s justice system.

The Academy kicked off in late October with a session facilitated by Starboard Leadership Consulting. Fellows completed the Everything DiSC® assessment, a powerful tool for understanding personal work styles and communication preferences. Through this interactive session, Fellows learned how to harness their individual strengths to collaborate effectively with peers who think and work differently—a critical leadership skill in today’s multifaceted legal landscape.

Throughout the program, Fellows will gain firsthand insight into the workings of Maine’s judicial and legislative

branches, explore the management of law firms of varying sizes, and learn what businesses look for when hiring legal counsel. Sessions will also cover digital marketing strategies, community engagement, and other practical skills essential for modern legal leaders.

The 2026 Academy introduces two exciting new components. First, an optional mentorship program will pair interested Fellows with experienced MSBA leaders, including members of the Board of Governors, section and committee chairs, and Life or Judicial Members. These one-on-one connections will foster professional growth, broaden networks, and strengthen Fellows’ ties to the statewide legal community.

Second, a new post-Academy engagement requirement will ensure that learning translates into lasting impact. After graduation, each Fellow will complete a follow-up project or ongoing service commitment to the MSBA that builds on their Leadership Academy experience. Examples include creating a new member resource, presenting a CLE program, joining a committee, or volunteering to lead an MSBA section.

The Class of 2026 will graduate in June at the MSBA’s Summer Bar Conference at the Samoset Resort in Rockport, marking the culmination of a program that blends professional development, service, and collaboration.

As the Fellows begin their journey, we look forward to seeing how their diverse experiences—and their shared commitment to leadership—will continue to shape Maine’s legal community for years to come.

# Meet the Class of 2026

**Toni Berube**

Firm: Lanman Rayne Nelson Reade, Falmouth

Practice Areas:

- Estate Administration
- Residential and Commercial Real Estate

Law School: New England Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Volunteer, Camp Ellis Harborfest in Saco
  - Youth Leader for High School Students, Calvary Christian Church
- 

**Cyrus Cheslak**

Firm: Verrill Dana, LLP, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Construction Law
- Commercial Litigation
- Civil Litigation

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Co-Chair, Verrill Dana Wellness Committee
  - Member, Verrill Dana Associate Development Committee
- 

**David Dyer**

Firm: Verrill Dana, LLP, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Intellectual Property
- Patents

Law School: William Mitchell College of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Chair, Maine State Bar Association Intellectual Property Section
  - Director for Maine, New England Bar Association
- 

**Paige Eggleston**

Firm: Bernstein Shur, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Labor & Employment Law
- Municipal Law

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Board Member, University of Maine Board of Visitors
- Chair, Maine State Bar Association New Lawyers Section



**J.R. Fallon**

Firm: Libby O'Brien Kingsley & Champion, Kennebunk

Practice Areas:

- Criminal Defense
- Family Law
- Litigation
- Municipal Law
- Trusts & Estates

Law School: Suffolk University Law School

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Major, Air Force Reserve
  - Judge Advocate General, U.S. Air Force
- 

**Lucas Fortier**

Firm: Bernstein Shur, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Appellate Practice
- Commercial Litigation

Law School: Boston University School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Coach, Freeport High School Mock Trial Program
- 

**Charles King**

Firm: Berman & Simmons, P.A., Lewiston

Practice Areas:

- Personal Injury Litigation and Appeals

Law School: Tulane University Law School

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Presented on legal research and writing at the MSBA Bar Conferences
- 

**Joseph Mavodones**

Firm: Norman Hanson & DeTroy, LLC, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Commercial Civil Litigation
- Professional Negligence
- General Liability (State/Municipal Administrative Proceedings)

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Coach, Cape Elizabeth little league and youth soccer
- 

**Abaigeal Ridge**

Firm: Berman & Simmons, P.A., Lewiston

Practice Areas:

- Medical Malpractice
- Personal Injury

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Volunteer, Cumberland Legal Aid Refugee and Human Rights Clinic
- Coach, Yarmouth Middle School Girls Basketball

**Michael Skolnick**

Firm: Archipelago Law, LLP, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Land Use
- Zoning
- Real Estate

Law School: Vermont Law School

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Member, Greater Portland Board of Realtors Young Professionals Committee
  - Active Member, Surfrider Foundation (coastal ecosystem protection)
- 

**Star Wagner**

Firm: Petruccelli, Martin & Haddow, LLP, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Civil Litigation (Boundary Disputes, Personal Injury, Professional Negligence, and Wrongful Death)

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Panel Member, Maine Medical Malpractice Screening Panel
  - Founding Member, Parents in Law at UMaine School of Law
- 

**Rosalie Wennberg**

Firm: Gideon Asen, LLC, Auburn

Practice Areas:

- Medical Malpractice
- Personal Injury

Law School: The George Washington University School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Chair, Bernstein Shur Green Committee
  - Volunteer Campaign Manager, Anne Carney for House District 30
- 

**Krystal Williams**

Firm: Providentia Group PLLC, Portland

Practice Areas:

- Corporate and Business Law (Transactional)
- Civil Litigation
- Real Estate Transactions

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Founder, Alpha Legal Foundation
  - Corporator, Mascoma Bank
- 

**Hanna Wurgaft**

Firm: Brann & Isaacson, Lewiston

Practice Areas:

- Education
- Employment
- Litigation

Law School: University of Maine School of Law

Select Leadership Experience & Community Involvement:

- Oversees/Leader of the Brann & Isaacson Summer Associate program
- Secretary, Maine Diversity Summer Associate Program

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CAROLINE WILSHUSEN, ESQ. is the Dean of Student Services and Director of Admissions at the University of Maine School of Law.



## From Classrooms to Courtrooms: Building a Path to Justice

On Wednesday, Oct. 22, high school students from Katahdin High School, George Stevens Academy, Hampden Academy, Foxcroft Academy, and Orono High School converged on the Penobscot Judicial Center. The purpose was clear: to give them an in-depth look at how the rule of law operates in their communities and introduce them to the people and the roles that comprise our justice system.

### Addressing Maine's Access to Justice Crisis

Maine's access to justice crisis is both well-documented and deeply felt, particularly in our rural communities. The current supply of legal representation—both criminal and civil—is insufficient to meet the needs of those facing housing loss, domestic abuse, or criminal charges. Furthermore, a shortage of attorneys hinders community development, limits support for entrepreneurs, and delays essential services like estate planning.

The Access to Justice: From Classrooms to Courtrooms project was born from this urgent need. Originating from the statewide high school Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) programs, this initiative represents a unique collaboration between the Maine Judicial Branch, the University of Maine School of Law (Maine Law), and the Maine State Bar Association (MSBA). Support from the Alpha Legal Foundation, the Penobscot County Bar Association, and the Justice Action Group made the inaugural event possible. This informal collaboration relied on the generous donation of time and talent from each organization, as well as financial contributions from Verrill and the MSBA to support the students' day.

### A Realistic View of a Legal Career

Participating schools eagerly embraced the opportunity. Emily Albee, a teacher from Hampden Academy, emphasized the project's value:

"I am thrilled for our Law & Ethics students to be invited to participate. Normally, our students engage in a lot of classroom theoretical learning. This structured Access to Justice experience allowed them to have access to subject matter experts, gain a full understanding of court procedure, participate in a mock trial, and experience a law school class. Law school can seem daunting to high school students, but I am hopeful this realistic opportunity will inspire confidence and passion for this career field. Engaging high school students with real-world experiences helps create a manageable and realistic perspective of the legal process, which is vital given Maine is experiencing a critical shortage of lawyers."

The interactive day provided students with a comprehensive experience of both law school and the courtroom. Students were asked to complete significant preparatory work, including reading a case brief and materials for a mock trial. They began the morning with a foundational law school class taught by Maine Law Professor Anthony Moffa, before moving to the courtroom.

*Left: Law School Class with Professor Anthony Moffa of the University of Maine School of Law.*



*Left: Students from George Stevens Academy with teacher Caroline Richards*

*Right: Mock Court Event Attorneys Zachary McNally of Hale & Hamlin, LLC in Ellsworth, Erica Veazey of Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Assistant Attorney General Jason Anton, and Justice Andrew Mead of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court and co-chair of the Justice Action Group*

For the mock trial, students were placed in “juries” and guided through the exercise by a distinguished group of legal professionals: Attorneys Zachary McNally of Hale & Hamlin, LLC in Ellsworth, Erica Veazey of Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Assistant Attorney General Jason Anton, and Justice Andrew Mead of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court and co-chair of the Justice Action Group.

Attorney McNally provided a powerful example. A native of rural Maine, he realized at age 22 that the legal profession offered a path to use his critical thinking skills to help people, make a good living, and remain in the community he loves. His participation underscored the program’s core message: young Mainers must know that becoming a lawyer or serving in another law-adjacent profession is a viable option for them, and that mentors are available to support their journey to fill the tremendous need for legal services in our rural areas.

“Rural communities in Maine provide incredible opportunities for young people to engage in the career fields that interest them,” says Attorney Veazey. “As legal professionals practicing in rural areas, we have an obligation to our local communities to highlight the many opportunities available here. We must encourage local students to think about how they can build rich

and meaningful careers in service to others, right here in their own backyards.”

The day culminated in a Lunch & Learn, connecting students with judges, attorneys from various practice areas, and the law-adjacent professional staff essential to courthouse operations. The initial planning meetings with statewide ELO program coordinators confirm that many high schools would be eager to bring legal programming to their students.

If you are interested in hosting a program in your community, we encourage you to connect with your local high schools, community colleges, or universities to understand what programming they’re already offering and where you can lend your services.

We hope to replicate this program next year and create smaller model programs to share with stakeholder organizations. If you would like to discuss this program, please reach out to Jenny Anderson, Director of Court Services at the Maine Judicial Branch ([jenny.anderson@courts.maine.gov](mailto:jenny.anderson@courts.maine.gov)), or Carrie Wilshusen, Dean of Student Services and Director of Admissions at Maine Law ([caroline.wilshusen@maine.edu](mailto:caroline.wilshusen@maine.edu)).

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## We're excited to welcome our new Litigation Associate, **Ryan C. Harke**

Woodman Edmonds is pleased to announce that Attorney Ryan C. Harke has joined the firm as an associate. Attorney Harke is a graduate of the University of Maine School of Law, where he was an editor of the Maine Law Review. Following a one year Judicial Clerkship for the Maine District Court, Ryan joins the firm's litigation department, handling civil litigation, personal injury, criminal defense and real estate/foreclosure litigation.



Contact: **Ryan C. Harke**  
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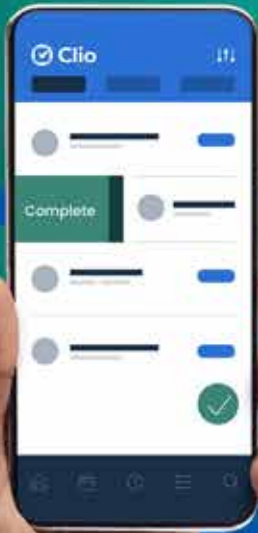
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JEANA CHO  
to the Firm



KRZ is thrilled to announce the addition of Jeana Cho to the firm. Jeana is joining KRZ's Family Law team after having practiced law in New York for more than a decade.

Her family law practice focuses on helping clients navigate divorce, custody, and related family matters with clarity, compassion, and practical solutions.

Jeana has a certification in divorce mediation and intends on joining Maine's Guardian *ad Litem* roster this fall.

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DANIEL J. MURPHY is a shareholder in Bernstein Shur's Business Law and Litigation Practice Groups, where his practice concentrates on business and commercial litigation matters.

## BEYOND THE LAW: DENNIS CARRILLO

As summer days go, you could not ask for more. At the old Winslow Congregationalist Church, an older couple are joyfully dancing next to the green space and stage where The Cellar Dwellers are playing. It is the annual blueberry festival, with blueberry pies, barbecue chicken, and other treats for sale. In front of the stage, two laughing children sitting on neighboring lawn chairs and tempting fate, rocking back and forth to the beat of the music. In the golden hue of late afternoon sun, The Cellar Dwellers are pumping out fresh renditions of classic rock tunes and are the focal point that holds all the merriment together. Dennis Carrillo, a guitarist and one of the lead singers for The Cellar Dwellers, is clearly having fun and pulls off his guitar solos and flourishes with precision. When not making music, Carrillo maintains a diverse litigation and business law practice at Cloutier Carrillo – Capital City Law PLLC in Augusta. He recently sat down with the *Maine Bar Journal* to discuss his pastime.

### Could you tell us about The Cellar Dwellers?

The group is a bunch of friends that I've met over the years. Our drummer, Jim Wood, is the former head of transportation at KVCAP. I was on the board at KVCAP, and I got talking to him about music. He is a great drummer. I met Isaac Schmidt, our other guitar player, because we were both taking lessons from the same person at one point. That guitar teacher put us together. I met our bass player, Jon Lourens, because his wife worked with the wife of our previous lead singer. Erin Gagne, our keyboardist, is the granddaughter of our drummer. We are all friends who have met through music.

### How did this group sort of come together?

I had played with our bass player, Jon, in a previous band. Once the pandemic hit, the band was on ice for a while. We got back together when we could. We chose the name The Cellar Dwellers because we rehearse in a basement. It is also a sports term for the team at the bottom of the standings, and we like the underdog persona. We got together just for fun, not necessarily to play gigs, but it all came to pass organically as players were added.

**I'm introverted by nature. The guitar was like a suit of armor or a superhero's cape. You are protected by this thing that everyone thinks has magical powers, and it enables or emboldens you to sing things you would never say and do things you would never otherwise do.**





**How did you first get interested in guitar?**

I always loved music. Around the end of freshman year in high school, some friends and I just sort of decided we were going to start a band. We arbitrarily assigned people to instruments. We thought, this summer, we will work on our instruments and then we will have our band. I was one of the few who worked on music over the summer. I really enjoyed it.

**Were there any guitarists or groups that you wanted to emulate during that time?**

I liked what was called “New Wave” music at the time. This would be the Police, U2, the Cars, and bands like that. To me, this was different from a lot of classic rock. It was edgier, and it had these ambient, spacious arrangements, with arpeggiating chords and chorus effects. It was more focused on song structure than on soloing, and that appealed to me because I was writing my own songs. It was also more accessible in the sense that I was just starting out on guitar, so I couldn’t play Stairway to Heaven and Van Halen covers. I learned to play barre chords from The Clash, those palm-muted, chunky, staccato, eighth note rhythms. And that style of music just seemed more authentic in that the style varied to suit the different people playing it. Even when I could eventually play Hendrix note for note, I still wasn’t Hendrix. I wanted to sound like me.

**Did you have public performances in high school with that group?**

I did. Our first gig was at a neighborhood festival in Florida. The festival had a talent show. Our band came on and played a bunch of obnoxious punk covers. I remember an older gentleman sitting directly in front of us with his hands over his ears the whole time. We were playing on a large stage for the first time. I kept walking too far from my amp and unplugging my guitar. We would turn around and knock the necks of guitars against each other. It was rough. And we ended up losing to a 6-year-old child who sang the national anthem.

**Was it still exhilarating to be on stage?**

It was very exhilarating to be on stage and to be creating something with other people. It is like a “one plus one equals more than two” situation. I enjoyed the camaraderie of it.

I’m introverted by nature. The guitar was like a suit of armor or a superhero’s cape. You are protected by this thing that everyone thinks has magical powers, and it enables or emboldens you to sing things you would never say and do things you would never otherwise do.



**That is interesting because when you're playing with a group, there is a conversation with other players, but there is also a conversation with the audience.**

For sure, you feed off the audience. It's wonderful when you can feel that the audience is engaged. Sometimes it is hard to come by, and you must win them over. If you happen to be on the introverted side, like me, it can be very accessible way to communicate and share.

**I was impressed with The Celler Dwellers' gig at the Winslow Blueberry Festival. The band was really solid and each member brought something to music. When you're on stage with The Celler Dwellers, how do you stay focused during the performance?**

You have to concentrate on the music. It is similar to a meditation practice, where you focus on being in the moment. You have to cut off that running, editorial chatter in your brain and just operate on nothing but direct experience.

Another way to think about it is that performing music live is like surfing or skiing. If you are dialed-in, it just flows. You ride the momentum and adjust on the fly, but if you overthink it, you instantly wipe out. When you're playing music in a band, live in front of an audience, if you get distracted thinking about your upcoming solo, or a string that's out of tune, or any other extraneous thought, it can all fall apart. So, playing live is an

exercise in being in the moment. As an over-thinker, it is a good exercise for me.

**How often does the band practice?**

Around once a week and every once a blue moon, twice a week. We also practice on our own individually.

**How do you select tunes to play together?**

There is no hard and fast system. We try to be democratic and give everyone equal access to picking the songs. Different people come in with different song ideas, and we'll try them out. Some are great songs, but for whatever reason, they just don't work well, while others are a great fit. Sometimes there are songs that you think will not work, and they work well. We try to mix up the genres and eras, but trend toward the '80s and classic tunes.

**At the Winslow gig, I was impressed with the band's rendition of the Talking Heads song "Wild Life." Everyone was locked in. There were great flourishes on the guitar, the bass was walking up and down, and the beat was solid. Are there particular songs that really challenge the group?**

New songs are always challenging. They are not yet burned into your muscle memory. Some songs are tricky no matter how long we've been playing them. One example is "Times Like These," by the Foo Fighters. The verse and the chorus are not





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very hard, and there's no guitar solo. But there is a long, repetitive riff at the beginning of the song and in the bridge, where the timing is syncopated. On the record, there might be two or three guitars, so trying to cover this ground while locking in with the drums, is challenging. When it works, it sounds great.

**Does the band have any regular gigs together?**

We almost always play at Oakfest, a festival in Oakland held each summer. We often play at some of the local gazebos and play at a couple of American Legion halls, the local ones, especially in Oakland.

**Any favorite gigs to date with The Cellar Dwellers?**

You know, I think it would have to be those American Legion Hall gigs. They are long, 4-hour gigs. That is a long time to play! They wrap up late and the audience is enthusiastic. One of the first times we played there, we started to run out of material and had to stretch things out with some Grateful Dead-type jams and improvising. It was challenging and fun. I also had my brother Max in town, and he joined us on the stage for some jamming on the fly. Max is a professional guitar player, a hired gun who tours with different bands. My brother Steve also plays guitar on semi-professional level. I am the duffer of the bunch!

**Any overlap between your pastime and your legal world?**

It is not intentional, but I am always surprised at how many clients come to me through other musicians who I have played with or through people in the audience. I also would say that music is a nice outlet because practicing law is very stressful. Playing music helps with stress, combats burnout, and keeps you directed toward your highest self. You can accept that you are imperfect and just have fun doing your best to do justice to the music. That mindset is helpful in the legal field too.

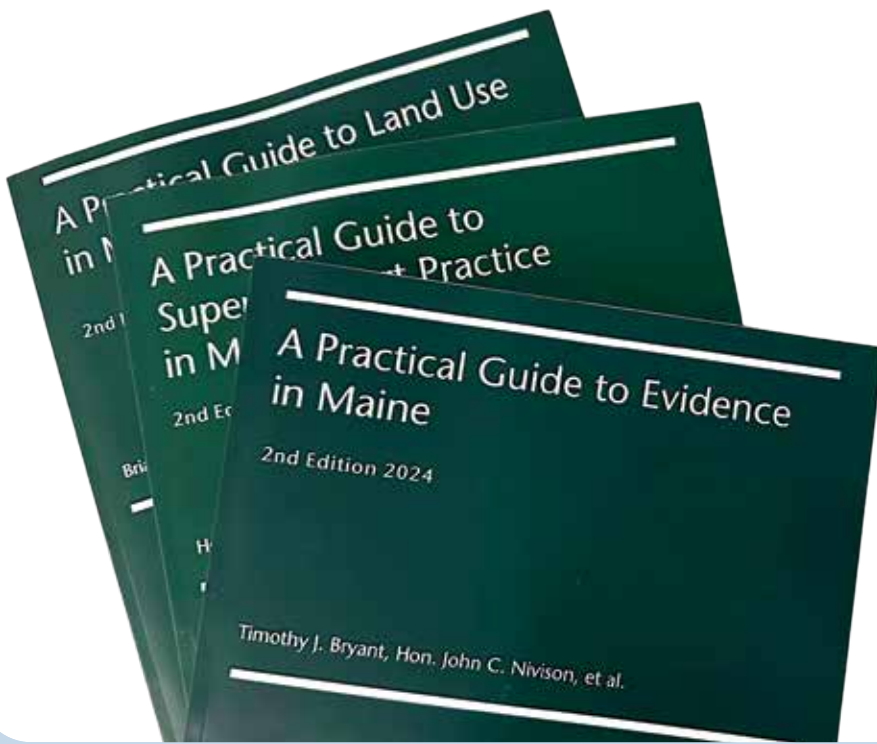
**What is the best advice you've ever received?**

I'll try to keep it musical. There's a Miles Davis quote that I found. He said that when you hit a wrong note, it's the next note that makes it good or bad. He explained that musicians at all levels make mistakes, but it's what you do after the mistake that shows the level of player you truly are. This is true in music. Good musicians will hit a wrong note, but they're so musical that the following note expands the context of the melody in a way that makes the wrong note sound right. In the past, if I hit a bad note, I'd shrug my shoulders and hang my head. Now, I just keep smiling and think outside of the box, tapping my inner Miles Davis or Jerry Garcia.

---

**BEYOND THE LAW** features conversations with Maine lawyers who pursue unique interests or pastimes. Readers are invited to suggest candidates for Beyond The Law by contacting Dan Murphy at [dmurphy@bernsteinshur.com](mailto:dmurphy@bernsteinshur.com).





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## The Maine Justice Foundation Announces 2025 Grants and Call for Nominations for Annual Awards

The mission of the Maine Justice Foundation is to sustain, promote, and partner with legal aid providers and social justice organizations to inspire and support fairness and justice in Maine. We fulfill this mission by providing grants to civil legal aid organizations and community non-profit organizations working to advance fairness and justice across all areas of Maine society including crucial areas such as the legal system, healthcare, education, the workplace, food security, natural resources, and housing.

The Maine Justice Foundation is proud to announce the 2025 grantees whose work is strengthening communities across the state. Supported by the Fairness & Justice Fund, the Racial Justice Fund, the LGBTQ+ Fund, the ESO Fund, and IOLTA,<sup>1</sup> the Foundation has awarded a total of \$3,705,741.00 in grants this year to advance fairness and justice, and opportunity for all Maine people. This year's grantees represent a wide range of projects, each tackling important challenges with creativity and impact. Their work demonstrates the difference that targeted support can make in building a fairer, more just Maine.

We are also excited to announce the nomination process for three prestigious awards, recognizing extraordinary leadership and dedication in advancing fairness and justice statewide.

### Fairness & Justice Fund 2025 Grant Recipients

This year, the Maine Justice Foundation launched the new Fairness & Justice Fund to support projects that strengthen communities across the state. The Fund is designed to be flexible and responsive, allowing resources to be deployed quickly when urgent needs arise, while also supporting a broad range of initiatives that address important community challenges.

Through this fund, we are proud to invest in organizations that deliver practical solutions and create measurable impact.

By providing timely financial support, the fund helps these organizations expand their reach, improve their programs, and respond effectively to emerging needs throughout Maine.

The Fairness & Justice Fund is supported by the Fairness & Justice Alliance, a membership program open to everyone who wants to get involved. By becoming a member, you will join a dynamic and inclusive group that champions fairness in all aspects of life, from the justice system, the workforce, in education, and beyond. Learn more about the Fairness & Justice Fund and Alliance and how to get involved at <https://justicemaine.org/grants-and-programs/fairness-and-justice-alliance/>. We are pleased to announce the first three organizations supported by the Fairness & Justice Fund. The 2025 grantees are:

- Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
- Maine Lawyers for the Rule of Law

### ESO Fund 2026-2028 Grant Recipients

The ESO Endowment Fund was established in 2011 by an anonymous donor who dedicated it to providing support for low-income people in need of civil legal assistance in Washington and Hancock counties. The donor's intention was to keep families safe and healthy, help the elderly with essential services, and ensure children have the opportunities they deserve. The ESO grants operate on a three-year cycle, and these awards will be made in 2026, and annually renewed through 2028. This round of grants will strengthen access to legal services for residents with limited resources, provide free legal help to workers and older Mainers facing challenges that threaten their basic needs, and expand access to legal services for survivors of domestic violence. The Foundation has awarded grants to three organizations serving these communities, continuing the Fund's mission of providing consistent, long-term support to meet local needs.

The 2026-2028 grant recipients are:

- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
- Legal Services for Maine Elders
- Next Step Domestic Violence Project

*Past ESO Fund Grantees:*

- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
- Legal Services for Maine Elders
- Volunteer Lawyers Project

### **LGBTQ+ Fund 2025 Grant Recipients**

Founded in 2016, the LGBTQ+ Fund provides support for nonprofit organizations that address the civil legal aid needs of low-income LGBTQ+ Mainers. While the movement for LGBTQ+ equality has seen considerable progress, the fund continues to ensure that legal protections and resources remain accessible across the state.

The fund's growth is supported by gifts from individuals, businesses, and foundations. It operates under the guidance of a volunteer Advisory Committee, which outlines the programmatic scope, issues requests for proposals, and reviews and recommends grants. In 2023, the fund executed its first public request for proposals, and 2025 marks its second grant round. The fund supports a broad range of initiatives, including training for service providers, legal information and resources, healthcare access, community programming, and leadership development opportunities for LGBTQ+ Mainers.

The 2025 grantees of the LGBTQ+ Fund are:

- Alford Youth & Community Center
- Equality Community Center
- Equality Maine Foundation
- Kindling Collective
- Mabel Wadsworth Center
- Maine TransNet
- OUTMaine

*Past LGBTQ+ Fund Grantees*

2023 Grantees:

- Alford Youth & Community Center
- Equality Maine Foundation
- Maine TransNet
- NASW (National Association of Social Workers) Maine
- OUTMaine

### **Racial Justice Fund 2025 Grant Recipients**

Since its founding, the Racial Justice Fund has served as a powerful catalyst for advancing racial justice throughout Maine. The fund was created by twenty-two leading Maine companies and private foundations in the summer of 2020 and has continued to grow through the generous support of individuals, businesses, and foundations while simultaneously issuing annual grants to community organizations. To date, the fund has grown to nearly \$1 million and awarded more than \$180,000 in grants to initiatives addressing systemic racism and supporting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities statewide.

Focused on dismantling barriers inside and outside the legal system, the fund empowers organizations and individuals to drive meaningful, lasting change in crucial areas such as the legal system, healthcare, education, the workplace, food insecurity, natural resources, and housing. Over the past four years, its grants have supported a wide range of innovative projects across multiple sectors and communities.

Guiding the fund's vision and grantmaking process is a dedicated Advisory Committee whose members bring deep experience, leadership, and personal commitment to the work. The current committee includes Dr. Evelyn Silver (Co-Chair), Reginald Parson (Co-Chair), Mary Herman, Shelly Anarado Okere, Francys Perkins, William S. Harwood, and Janis Cohen. We are grateful for their generosity, expertise, and continued service in shaping the future of grants from the fund.

With 11 applications submitted this year, the fund continues to attract innovative proposals from organizations addressing some of Maine's most pressing challenges. After a careful review process, six organizations were selected for funding based on the strength of their applications, demonstrated community impact, and alignment with the fund's priorities.

The 2025 grantees are:

- Healthy Acadia
- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
- In Her Presence
- Ladder to the Moon Network
- Maine Inside Out
- Mindbridge

Over the past four years, the Racial Justice Fund has had the privilege of supporting organizations collaborating closely with their communities to meet urgent needs, open doors, and strengthen opportunities. Their efforts reflect meaningful understanding of the people and places they serve in Maine, and their work has helped shape the fund's impact across the state.



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### *Past Racial Justice Fund Grantees*

#### 2023 Grantees:

- Alpha Legal Foundation – Maine Justice Corps
- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
- In Her Presence
- Ladder to the Moon Network
- Maine Commission on Public Defense Services
- Maine Inside Out

#### 2022 Grantees:

- Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
- In Her Presence
- Indigo Arts Alliance
- Ladder to the Moon Network
- Maine Inside Out
- Mindbridge

#### 2021 Grantees:

- Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
- Health Acadia – Downeast Diversity
- League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund
- Maine Inside Out
- Sunlight Media Collective
- The Third Place

### **The Maine Justice Foundation Requests Nominations for the 2026 Howard H. Dana, Jr. Award, New Lawyer Award, and Downing Award**

The Maine Justice Foundation presents three annual awards: the Howard H. Dana, Jr. Award, the New Lawyer Award, and the Downing Award.

**Howard H. Dana, Jr. Award:** Established by the Foundation in 1984 and named for Justice Howard H. Dana, Jr. in 1988, this award is presented as a means of recognizing an individual lawyer’s significant contributions to Maine bar projects that enhance access to civil legal assistance to Maine community members in need and for outstanding service in the advancement of the Foundation’s mission of ensuring access to justice for all.

**New Lawyer Award:** Established by the Foundation in 2010, this award recognizes lawyers who have been in practice for fewer than ten years, exemplify the ideals of increasing access to justice, make outstanding and recognized pro bono services or other contributions to the legal profession and public good, and demonstrate a strong commitment to the mission of the Foundation.

**Downing Award:** The Downing Award was created by the family of Thomas P. Downing, Jr. after his untimely death in 1985 and recognizes legal aid staff dedicated to access to justice for vulnerable and low-income Mainers. Tom Downing was one of the first attorneys to work at Pine Tree Legal Assistance after its inception. A long-standing process is in place to identify annual honorees with representatives of Tom Downing's family, and the Executive Directors of the six core legal aid providers.

**We respectfully request nominations for the 2026 Dana Award and New Lawyer Award**

Please submit the name of any attorney(s) you would like to nominate for the Dana Award and/or the New Lawyer Award to Michelle Draeger at [mdraeger@justicemaine.org](mailto:mdraeger@justicemaine.org) and Linsey MacDougall at [lmacdougall@justicemaine.org](mailto:lmacdougall@justicemaine.org) by November 30, 2025. Please explain how each nominee meets the award criteria identified above.

The Maine Justice Foundation is proud to steward programs that support attorneys, non-profit organizations, legal service providers, and communities working toward a fairer and more just Maine. Through our grant making efforts, we remain focused on expanding access to legal help and supporting those leading meaningful work across the state. We are grateful to the many individuals and partners who make this progress possible, and we look forward to continuing these efforts in the years ahead.

**ENDNOTES**

1 The FY25 Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) grants totaled \$3,440,241.00.

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## My Final Column

In the spring of 2014, I retired from my position as director of the Legal Research and Writing Program at the University of Maine School of Law. I had loved my job, teaching and mentoring students for almost 20 years, and wondered how I would ever know when to retire. One day, however, I knew it was time to step aside and let the next generation take up the challenge.

Everything had changed so much since I began teaching in 1995. At many law schools, students were now handing in assignments electronically, and professors were using electronic shortcuts to grade them. My style had been to write personalized comments in purple ink on actual papers. I found the use of canned, electronic “bubbles” abhorrent, while recognizing their efficiency.

Soon after I retired, I accepted another job, unpaid of course, writing a regular column in the *Maine Bar Journal*. Having taught students to write throughout my career, beginning at Unity College in 1978, I wanted to see if I could be a writer as well as a writing teacher. Over the past 11 years, I have been grateful for the opportunity to hone my writing skills and share my insights and opinions with my esteemed colleagues in Maine’s legal community.

My job as a legal writing commentator for the *Maine Bar Journal* has been as exciting and meaningful to me as my career as a legal writing professor. Nevertheless, just as I knew when it was time to retire from teaching, I know it is now time to let younger people comment on the state of legal writing in the age of artificial intelligence (AI).

### *Res Ipsa Loquitur* Over the Years

In my first column, I discussed when to use Latin phrases and when to avoid them in legal writing. I declared my guiding, legal writing principle to be “keep it simple,” which applied to all decisions about legal writing, including whether to use Latin phrases. Ironically, I chose the Latin phrase *Res*

*Ipsa Loquitur* as the name for my column because I liked its English translation: “The thing speaks for itself.” I thought it was the perfect title for a column about legal writing. For my next column, “Hail to the Chiefs,” I interviewed the three living chief justices of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court: Justices Saufley, Wathen, and McKusick. From them, I gained the wisdom and insight that informed every column I wrote from then on.

All three justices agreed that the hallmarks of great legal writing are accuracy, clarity, and conciseness. They advised lawyers to identify the issues clearly at the outset of a brief, then describe the relevant facts truthfully, state the law that applies fully and accurately, and explain concisely how that law should apply to the facts of the case. According to Chief Justice Saufley, lawyers need to provide judges with the necessary facts and law “to enable them to do the right thing.” Chief Justice Wathen challenged lawyers to clarify their thinking to the extent that they could summarize their theory of the case “in words that would fit on a bumper sticker.” Chief Justice McKusick, the consummate grammarian, reminded lawyers to “apply the grammar, punctuation, and citation rules they learned in school.”

Taking this advice to heart, I wrote 43 columns over the next 11 years on subjects that included grammar, punctuation, citation (including citation anxiety), persuasive writing, using humor and figurative language in legal writing, amicus briefs, proofreading, legal analysis, electronic communication, legal typology, using illustrations in brief writing, using the correct word, plagiarism, AI, mystery-writing lawyers, and tributes to Judge Frank Coffin, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and John Lewis. I also attempted to make sense of what was happening after Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 in articles on the rule of law and stare decisis in a post-Trump world. On the same subject, I wrote articles discussing truth, lies, and whether texts and tweets should even be classified as writing. Hands down, my most popular column was “Comma Sutra,

For me, great legal writing will always be the kind of writing described by our three chief justices: accurate, clear, concise, honest, and grammatically correct. If that is not what the future holds, I will be content to pass the torch (or in this case, the computer mouse) to the next generation.

or the Ten Commandments of Comma Usage.” After that column was published, I received numerous messages of thanks from lawyers and judges, who said they were keeping the column nearby on their writing desks. My favorite column dealt with writer's block. In “Procrastination and Perfection: The Scylla and Charybdis of Writer's Block,” I suggested that lawyers’ fears about imperfection can lead to paralyzing procrastination, resulting in incapacitating writer's block.

The column of which I am most proud deals with using proper pronouns for gender non-conforming people throughout the legal system. That column, called “Using Proper Pronouns: An Ethical Imperative,” came out before the president issued an executive order proclaiming that only two genders exist: male and female. I was glad I could state my case for recognizing and honoring people’s authentic genders before the president started dishonoring them. I received messages of thanks and support for this column, but the most important communication I received was from an 11-year-old, non-binary member of my family, who felt so affirmed by the article they taped it to the wall in their bedroom.

### The Future of Legal Writing

Just as I decided to retire from teaching when the emphasis shifted from personal to electronic communication, I know it

is time to retire from column-writing because issues regarding legal writing are now focused on AI: how to use AI ethically and effectively, how to tell whether students’ assignments were created by AI, what to do about lawyers and even judges citing phantom cases made up by AI in briefs and opinions.

I worry about the future of legal writing, especially if law students, lawyers, and judges come to rely on AI too heavily. No matter how clever a machine might become, it can never replace a human being, imbued with integrity, compassion, and genuine creativity. If the future of legal writing lies in learning how to best utilize AI, it is time for me to step back and let someone else figure out how that will happen.

For me, great legal writing will always be the kind of writing described by our three chief justices: accurate, clear, concise, honest, and grammatically correct. If that is not what the future holds, I will be content to pass the torch (or in this case, the computer mouse) to the next generation.

Thank you for reading my column and inspiring me to keep writing for the past eleven years. Sharing my thoughts with you has been among the greatest honors of my legal career.



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## Two Milestones, One Message: There Is Hope

As some of you may recall, in the first issue of the *Maine Bar Journal* the year I served as MSBA President, I shared my experience with depression. I described first being diagnosed in 1996 but not truly focusing on staying well until an on-again, off-again relationship with anti-depressants landed me in Spring Harbor Hospital in December 2005. My intent then was to help destigmatize depression so others might feel safe seeking help—and so colleagues might learn how to offer support.

This article picks up where that one left off. My goal now is to offer encouragement to anyone who feels discouraged: there is hope.

For me, hope sometimes appears in weird places. The most recent reminder came this past September or October, as I sat in my office at Verrill searching for my scissors (and to be clear, for those who might be triggered, this article *does not* have to do with self-harm). My practice group had recently moved to a new floor, and my desk setup had changed. As I looked for those scissors, it struck me that I was just a few months away from two milestones—both connected to my lowest point.

Scissors and depression milestones may sound unrelated, but to me they symbolize how far I've come. After my hospitalization, I took a medical leave before slowly returning to full-time practice. Not long after coming back, I couldn't find my scissors and jumped to the conclusion that my colleague, Karen Wolf (now Magistrate Judge Wolf), had

removed all sharp objects from my office as a precaution. Moments later, I opened the correct drawer and found them—right where they had always been—because I was not a danger to myself or anyone else.

The first milestone—December 2025—marks 20 years since my hospitalization. On the day I was admitted, I didn't know what was going to happen or if I'd ever practice law again. What mattered most then was simply being safe. Two decades later, something as small as misplaced scissors reminds me that depression, once treated, didn't end my life or my career.

Reflecting on these 20 years, I've learned countless lessons. One of the most important came my first night at Spring Harbor. During intake, after repeating my medical history for what felt like the hundredth time, the staff member asked me what makes me happy. Without thinking, I said: music, photography, and cooking. They responded, "You have some cool hobbies." It was a small comment, but it helped me breathe again. I realized I'd drifted away from the things that made me *me*. That was the start of my recovery—the moment I began to find my way back.

While I no longer play my horn, I listen to music every chance I get. I take my cameras almost everywhere. And I just remodeled my kitchen so I can find even more joy in cooking. I've learned how easy it is to lose oneself in a law career—but also how much better we are, as lawyers and as people, when we hold onto what makes us happy.

**I realized I'd drifted away from the things that made me me. That was the start of my recovery—the moment I began to find my way back.**





Asking for help and committing to my well-being allowed me to do things I once thought impossible. I've worked on complex cases, traveled the country, met incredible people, and served as a bar leader—something that was nowhere on my radar in December 2005.

That brings me to my second milestone. On Dec. 31, 2025, my term as the MSBA's Immediate Past President—and with it, my service on the Board of Governors—will conclude. This milestone represents one of the highlights of my career. Serving on the Board and leading this 135-year-old organization has been both a privilege and an honor. Over the past decade, I've had the joy of working alongside a dedicated staff, Board, and eight Presidents. Together we've strengthened the MSBA and its ability to serve our members.

Your support—especially as I worked to bring attorney well-being to the forefront—has been a pinnacle of my career. It continues to inspire my passion in my new role with the National Conference of Bar Presidents' Executive Council. I cannot thank you enough for the trust you placed in me and for helping advance attorney wellness in Maine and beyond.

I hope you and the MSBA will continue this journey toward well-being. Our profession is more resilient, our clients better served, and our justice system sounder when we take care of ourselves and one another.

Here's to remembering—and truly enjoying—what makes you happy. And here's to hoping I keep losing my scissors for many years to come.

Be well.



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