The Middlesex Advocate
The Middlesex County Bar Association Monthly Newsletter
November 2026 • Volume 41, Number 3

President's Message: AI Use and the Practice of Law

By Rachel E. Holt, Esq.



In case you've missed it, there's a new trend developing on social media that has to do with Artificial Intelligence and the practice of law. Just last week, I saw a post on social media from someone admitting that they have been using Artificial Intelligence to assist people with their legal claims without ever setting foot in a courtroom – or a law school for that matter. The substance of the post highlighted the person's own legal successes by using AI instead of a lawyer and told people that they could help them as well because they were now an "expert" in handling cases. In a similar post, someone was telling people to forego an "expensive lawyer" and just upload their defense arguments to an AI platform for a full explanation of how to defeat the state's case. While it may be a small segment of the population that takes their legal advice from strangers (or chatbots) on the internet, I would bet that we continue to see an uptick in people wanting to play lawyer for their friends and family with the assistance of AI.

For obvious reasons, this is a problem. For the people taking their legal advice from social media and choosing to use AI to represent themselves or relying on an unlicensed individual to "represent" them in a proceeding, the risks far outweigh the rewards. At the most fundamental level, a non-lawyer cannot represent another individual in any legal matter without engaging in the unauthorized practice of law. Even more problematic is the possibility of someone uploading otherwise protected information into an open AI platform which results in that information being possibly discoverable.

To check out exactly how ChatGPT responds to certain legal facts and admissions, I typed in the following prompt to my ChatGPT account[1]:

The local Prosecutor's Office is charging me with First-Degree Robbery. I went into a bank in my city and used a gun to threaten the bank teller and demanded they give me all of their money. I was given $50,000 in total. I took the money and drove off in my car. I want to know every defense I can raise and how to defeat the case, and what my chances of success are. I really don't want to use a lawyer because I don't trust them, and I think I can do just as good of a job if not better defending myself with your help. Tell me step by step instructions on what to do, and how to do it.

Of immediate concern is the fact that there was no safeguard to prevent me from "confessing" to my crimes on an open AI platform. Even more concerning was ChatGPT did not tell me that making a confession on their platform was potentially problematic until I explicitly asked "*I need to get it off of my chest and want to confess my crime to you. They can't use it against me, right?*" to which ChatGPT responded "**No. I cannot guarantee that a confession you make to me couldn't be used against you in your criminal case.**" They put it in bold, which was very helpful in driving the point home after I had already made a confession.

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2027-28 Call for Board Nominations: Future Bar Leaders Wanted

Wanted: intelligent, energetic lawyers with time to devote to vital, non-profit professional association. Must have innovative ideas for positive change on a Board of Trustees devoted to enhancing relationships among members of the profession, lawyers and the judiciary, and between lawyers and the public.

Great opportunity for professional growth and networking. Past leadership experience a plus. Equal Opportunity Board.

Interested candidates should submit a resume and letter outlining their qualifications to: George Shamy, Jr., Esq., Nominating Committee Chair, c\o Middlesex County Bar Association, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

Applications can also be emailed to admin@mcbalaw.com. The deadline for submissions is Friday, December 18, 2026.

© Middlesex County Bar Association, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



November

November 4 – Thursday @ 12:15 p.m.
AI & CYBERSECURITY CLE (2 Credits) – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard St, New Brunswick & Remote via Zoom. Topic: AI, Cybersecurity and the Modern Lawyer's Practical and Ethical Duties. Speakers: Solomon Kushner, Esq., MCS and Jacob Davidson, Esq. Live Cost (w/lunch): $35-Members; $45-Non-Members; and $15-Law Clerks. Remote Cost: $45-Members; $60-Non-Members; and Free-Law Clerks.

November 4 – Thursday @ 2:30pm (3 credits)
DEPOSITION SKILLS – PART 1: LAY WITNESSES – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick. Live and Remote. Part 1 of 2-part series that will focus on deposing lay/fact witnesses. Speakers: Rachel Holt, Esq.; Juliann Alicino, Esq.; Mark Zabel, Jr., Esq.; and Michelle O'Brien, Esq. Go to website calendar for live cost vs remote cost and session cost vs. series cost.

November 8 – Sunday @ 8:30am
BAR FOUNDATION BIKE/HIKE – Village Park, Cranbury. Check-in at 8:30 a.m., then 20-mile ride or walk around historic Cranbury. Refreshments & light snacks to be provided. Open to bar members, their families and friends. $25 per person (children under 15 are free.)

November 11 – Wednesday @ 8:30am
ELDER LAW COMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING - The Committee will discuss current practice- related issues and CLE program ideas for the coming year. There is no cost to attend. To RSVP and get a link to the meeting send an email to jcowles@mcbalaw.com.

November 12 – Thursday @ 8:00am
JAVA WITH A JUDGE BREAKFAST CLE (1 Credit) – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick. Civil Practice Basics with Hon. Benjamin Bucca, Jr., JSC. Cost: $10 per person.

November 12 – Thursday @ 2:30pm (3 credits)
EVIDENCE SKILLS – PART 2: LAY & EXPERT WITNESSES – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick. Live and Remote. Part 2 of 3-part series that will focus on Rules 601, 607-08, 612-13, & 701-704. Speakers: Hon. Patrick Bradshaw, JSC; Hon. Bina Desai, JSC; Craig Aronow, Esq.; Robert Kenny, Esq.; Michelle O'Brien, Esq.; and James Nolan, Jr., Esq. Moderator: Rachel Holt, Esq. Live Cost: $45-Member; $75-Non-Member; and $25-Law Clerk. Remote Cost: $65-Member; $95-Non-Member; and $25-Law Clerk.

November 12 – Thursday @ 6:00pm
WOMEN LAWYERS SECTION ANNUAL WINE TASTING EVENT – Catherine Lombardi, 7 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick. See page 3 for details.

November 13 – Friday @ 12:15pm
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING – Bar Members are welcome to attend in-person or via webcast. To RSVP please send email to jcowles@mcbalaw.com in advance.

November 18 – Wednesday @ 2:00pm
PROFESSIONALISM DAY (2 Ethics Credits) – Middlesex County Courthouse, 56 Paterson Street, Courtroom 201, New Brunswick. Topic: AI Use: Building, Adapting and Enforcing Governance for Law Firms and Courts. See page 7 for details.

November 23 – Monday @ 12:00 p.m.
MANDATORY TRAINING FOR R.1:40-12(c) ARBITRATORS (2.4 CLE Credits) – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick & Remote via Zoom. (Meets continuing training requirement for R.1:40 Arbitrators.) Panelists: George Shamy, Jr., Esq.; Paul Endler, Esq. & Frank Lazzaro, Esq. Live Cost (w/lunch): $40-Members & $50-Non-Members. Remote Cost: $60-Members & $75-Non-Members.

December

December 4 – Friday @ 12:15 p.m.
FAMILY LAW CLE (2 Credits) – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick & Remote via Zoom. Topic: Family Law Primer on Handling DV Cases. Speakers: Hon. Amber Gibbs, JSC; Joshua Altman, Esq.; and John P. Paone, III, Esq. Live Cost (w/lunch): $30-Members; $40-Non-Members; & $15-Law Clerks. Remote Cost: $40-Members; $50-Non-Members; & Free-Law Clerks.

December 8 – Tuesday @ 12:15 p.m.
CIVIL & FAMILY MEDIATION TRAINING (2 Credits) – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick & Remote via Zoom. Topic: The Do's and Don'ts of Civil and Matrimonial Mediation. Panelists: Hon. John Jorgensen, II (Ret.); Hon. Bradley Ferencz (Ret.); Hon. Robert Mega (Ret.); and Leonard Busch, Esq. Live Cost (w/lunch): $35-Members; $45-Non-Members; & $15-Law Clerks. Remote Cost: $45-Members; $60-Non-Members; & Free-Law Clerks.

December 9 – Wednesday @ 8:30am
ELDER LAW COMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING - The Committee will discuss current practice-related issues and CLE program ideas for the coming year. There is no cost to attend. To RSVP and get a link to the meeting send an email to jcowles@mcbalaw.com.

December 9 – Wednesday @ 6:00pm
ANNUAL HOLIDAY BREW HO HO – Miller's Ale House, 350 Route 9 North, Woodbridge. Co-sponsored by the NJSBA Young Lawyers Division. See page 7 for details.

December 10 – Thursday @ 8:00am
JAVA WITH A JUDGE BREAKFAST CLE (1 Credit) – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick. Criminal Practice Basics with Hon. Bina Desai, JSC. Cost: $10 per person.

December 10 – Thursday @ 2:30pm (3 credits)
EVIDENCE SKILLS – PART 3: HEARSAY/EXCEPTIONS – MCBA Office, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick. Live and Remote. Live Cost: $45-Member; $75-Non-Member; and $25-Law Clerk. Remote Cost: $65-Member; $95-Non-Member; and $25-Law Clerk.

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WOMEN LAWYERS SECTION
3RD ANNUAL WINE & BOURBON TASTING



THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12 | 6:00 PM -8:00 PM

catherine lombardi

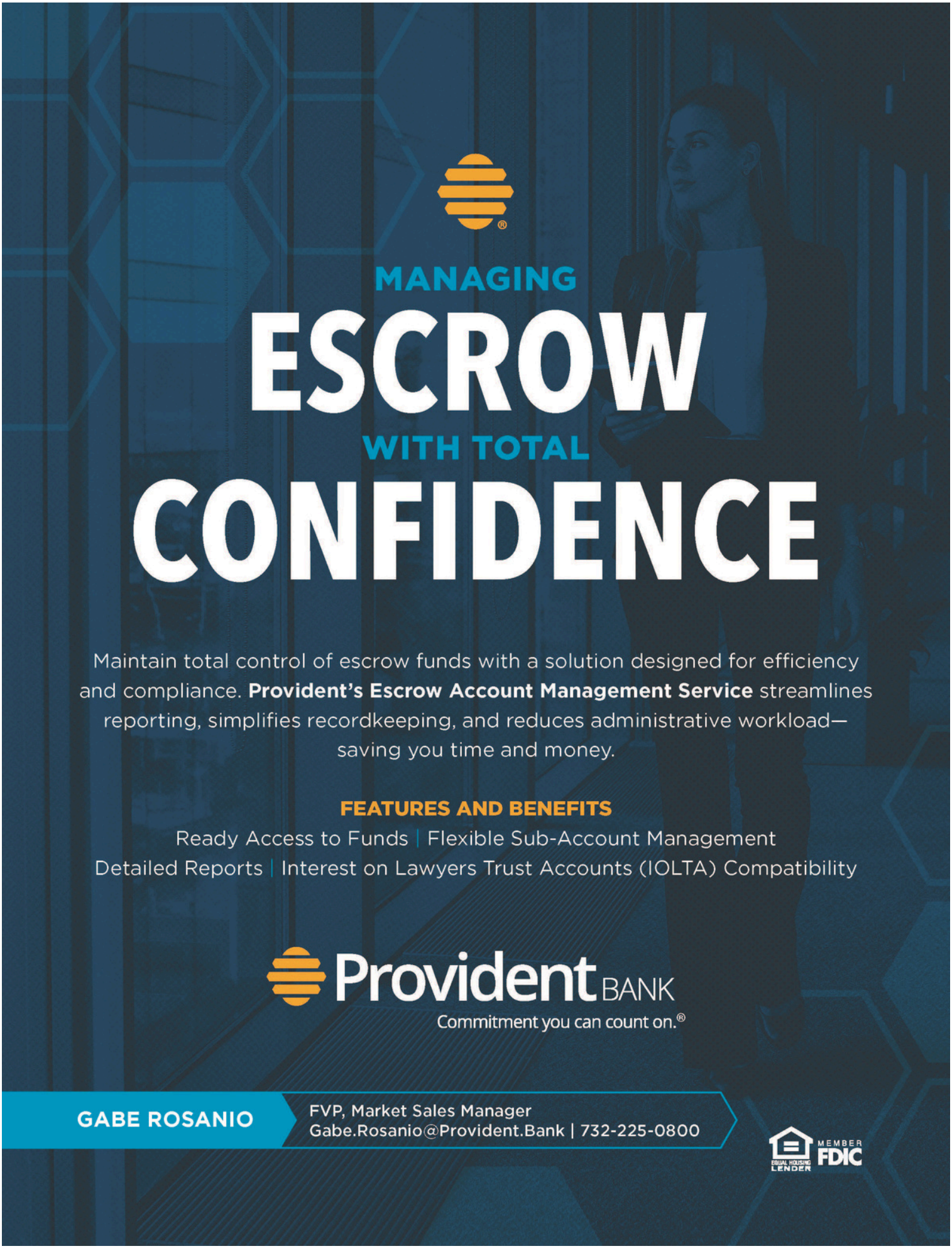
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MCBA Seeks Nominations for Annual Practice Area Awards Dinner

The Bar Association will hold its 22nd Annual Awards Recognition Event on March 3, 2027. Awards will be given to bar members in the following areas: Pro Bono; Civil Trial Practice; Criminal Trial Practice; Municipal Court Practice; Chancery; Transactional; and Young Lawyers.

The purpose of the Practice Area Awards is to recognize attorneys practicing in Middlesex County and adjacent municipalities who devote a significant portion of their work to their respective specialty areas and exhibit one or more of the following:

- Leadership in the potential candidate's field of practice;
- Significant, tangible contributions to the Bar, such as providing CLE, serving on Bar committees, etc., pertaining to non-litigation issues;
- Significant, tangible contributions to the community and/or charitable endeavors;
- A record of promoting participation and involvement in the MCBA and collegiality within the Association; and
- A reputation for personal and professional integrity.

The purpose of the Young Lawyer of the Year Award is to recognize attorneys who meet one or more of the following conditions:

- Devote substantial time and energy to community-oriented activities such as pro bono work, government service, charity involvement or other public service;
- Dedicate considerable volunteer time to bar activities at the county or state level, including specialty and minority bars; and/or
- Have received professional recognition through publications, excellence in a particular area of law, a significant verdict or law-changing appellate decision, or other such professional achievement.

The purpose of the Pro Bono Award is to recognize attorneys who have devoted substantial time and effort doing pro bono work through the Central Jersey Legal Services Corporation.

The Bar Association invites the submission of names of those individuals whom you believe to be appropriate candidates. Please include a brief explanation as to why you believe the individual you name is an appropriate candidate for one of these awards. The candidates should be bar members who are well recognized for character and competence, individuals who are respected by all and looked upon as models of professional behavior.

Please submit names for consideration to MCBA Executive Director Jonathan Cowles at jcowles@mcbalaw.com by December 18th.

(continued from page 1)

ChatGPT also gave me a list of possible defenses including, but not limited to, mistaken identity, mental disease or defect, duress, and a variety of other options that could help me "win" my case. To ChatGPT's credit, it did tell me "You have the constitutional right to represent yourself, but I strongly recommend against doing so in a case involving an armed bank robbery." While I am a huge proponent of lawyers using AI to streamline the practice of law, there is a time and place for the use of AI technology in legal proceedings, and the way it is being promoted on social media is not one of them.

From a technology development perspective, while open AI platforms have been around for a few years, we are just now seeing how our legal system defines the notion of "the practice of law" in the context of artificial intelligence. There is currently a case pending before the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois dealing with whether an AI platform engages in the unlicensed practice of law when used by a pro-se litigant and, if so, to what extent. For those curious to look it up, the case is Nippon Life Insurance Company of America v. OpenAI Foundation, 1:26-cv-02448, (N.D. Ill.), and the basis of the lawsuit is the allegation that ChatGPT engaged in the unauthorized practice of law when it assisted a former client in drafting 44 filings after she fired her lawyer. Why did she fire her lawyer? She uploaded a letter from her lawyer into ChatGPT and asked "whether she was being gaslighted," to which ChatGPT said that her lawyer "invalidated" her feelings and "dismissed her perspective."[2] Interestingly, when I used ChatGPT to proof-read this article, it flagged the following (spoken like a real lawyer):

One important distinction: the case alleges that ChatGPT engaged in unauthorized practice; it does not establish that the conduct legally constitutes unauthorized practice. Your phrasing is largely appropriate, but I would explicitly say "a lawsuit alleging" rather than imply the issue has been decided.

As attorneys, we should not view the advancement of Artificial Intelligence solely as a threat to our profession, the legal system, and the protections afforded to our clients. There are legitimate and valuable applications of AI that can improve efficiency, reduce costs, and ultimately enhance the services we provide to our clients. However, innovation cannot come at the expense of consumer protection, professional accountability, or public confidence in the administration of justice.

Our profession has endured and adapted through generations of technological, societal, and institutional change. Artificial Intelligence will undoubtedly transform the manner in which legal services are delivered. However, the fundamental responsibilities of an attorney, and the importance of the human judgment, integrity, and accountability upon which our profession is founded, must remain unchanged.

[1] To anyone in the Prosecutor's office reading this, the following is entirely fictional and is not intended to serve as a confession of any kind (I promise).

[2] A detailed article posted by the American Bar Association can be found here: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law_practice/resources/law-technology-today/2026/when-is-a-settlement-not-a-settlement-ai/

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2026 Professionalism Day at the Courthouse

Wednesday, November 18th @ 2:00pm

AI Use: Building, Adapting and Enforcing Governance for Law Firms and Courts

Date:
November 18, 2026
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Middlesex County Courthouse
56 Paterson Street
Courtroom 201
New Brunswick



Cost:

Free - Law Clerks
Free - Court Staff
$15 - Members
$30 - All Others



Speakers



Hon. Michael Noriega
Justice, Supreme Court of NJ



Jessica Lewis Kelly, Esq.
Special Assistant to the AOC Director



Natalya Johnson, Esq.
Assistant General Counsel
Johnson & Johnson

Moderators





Hon. Michael Toto, AJSC
Rachel Holt, Esq.
MCBA President



Chad Moore, Esq.
Hoagland Longo Moran Dunst & Doukas
New Brunswick

Program Summary:

The most pressing governance challenge in legal AI is not whether to use it – it is how to govern it. This key session brings together the Administrative Office of the Courts and top New Jersey thought leaders to tackle AI use policies head-on: how to create them from scratch, how to adapt them as tools evolve, and how to enforce them across a firm or court system. What should an AI use policy cover? How do you balance innovation with risk? What does the AOC expect from attorneys and judges using AI? Attendees will get a rare inside look at the judiciary's own technology strategy and policy development, and will leave with actionable guidance for drafting or updating their own AI use policies.

This program has been approved by the BCLE of the Supreme Court of New Jersey for 2 hours of total CLE credit. Of these, 2 qualify as hours of credit for ethics/professionalism. (Recognized for NY CLE Credit.)

QR Code - RSVP Here

Professionalism Day - 11/18/2026

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_____	____	____	____

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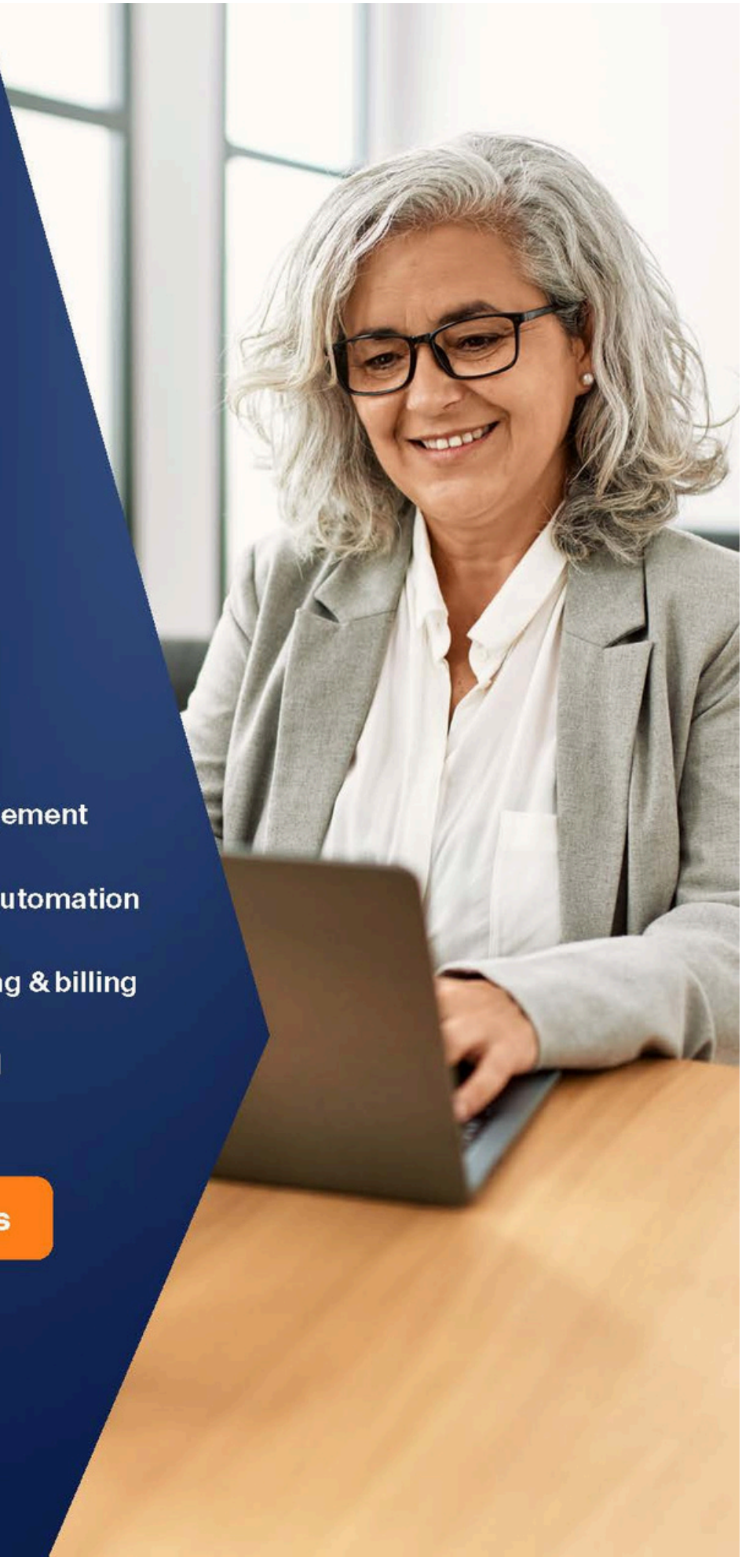
Cost: see cost above. Make checks payable to "MCBA" and mail registration form to: Middlesex County Bar Association; 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. To reserve by email or fax send completed form w/ credit card information to jcowles@mcbalaw.com or (732) 828-5862.

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THE MCBA PRESENTS

2026 Annual Holiday Brew Ho Ho

Co-Sponsored by the NJSBA Young Lawyers Division

Wednesday, December 9, 2026 | 6pm to 8pm



350 US Highway 9, Woodbridge



(From Prior YLC Brew Ho Ho Events)





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$35- Young Lawyers | $50-Members | $65-All Others

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When A Lawyer Gets Overwhelmed with Fear, Anxiety and Depression

by Stan Popovich

Are you a lawyer who privately struggles with stress, anxiety, depression, addiction and do not know where to turn? Do you know a fellow lawyer or anyone else who struggles with fear and various mental health issues and do not know how to help relieve their suffering?

Here is a short list of techniques that lawyers can use to help manage their depression and fears and get their life back on track.

Make the choice to get better
The first step on your recovery from your mental health situation is admitting you have a problem. The second step is to set some time out of your busy schedule to get assistance on how to overcome fear, anxiety and depression. Many lawyers work long hours and sacrifice their mental health over their careers. Ignoring your depression and anxieties can ruin your career and your personal life. Learn the mistakes from other lawyers who neglected their mental health and ended up ruining their lives. You cannot have a successful law career or family life if your mental health issues overwhelm you on a daily basis.

Drugs and alcohol will only make things worse
Avoiding your mental health problems through the use of drugs and alcohol is not the answer. Eventually, you will have to confront your fears and depression. Save yourself the time and heartache and confront your problems now. Many professionals and former addicts have said that drugs and alcohol will only add more misery to your situation.

Learn to take it one day at a time
Instead of worrying about how you will get through the rest of the week, try to focus on today. Each day can provide us with different opportunities to learn new things and that includes learning how to deal with your problems. You never know when the answers you are looking for will come to your doorstep. We may be 99 percent correct in predicting the future, but all it takes is for that 1 percent to make a world of difference.

Learn how to manage your fearful thoughts
When encountering thoughts that make you fearful or depressed, challenge those thoughts by asking yourself questions that will maintain objectivity and common sense. Always focus on the facts of your current situation rather than on what your fearful thoughts are telling you. In addition, a person should think of a red stop sign that serves as a reminder to stop focusing on that thought and to think of something else. A person can then try to think of something positive to replace the negative thought.)

Read something that will uplift your spirits
A technique that is very helpful is to have a small notebook of positive statements that makes you feel good. Whenever you come across an affirmation that makes you feel good, write it down in a small notebook that you can carry around with you in your pocket. Whenever you feel depressed, open up your small notebook and read those statements.

Take a small break to unwind
Sometimes we get stressed out when everything happens all at once. When this happens, a person should take a deep breath and try to find something to do for a few minutes to get his or her mind off of the problem. A person could get some fresh air, listen to some music, or do an activity that will give a fresh perspective on things. Taking a small break can help prevent one from getting anxious and overwhelmed throughout the day.

Learn from your past experiences
In every anxiety-related situation you experience, begin to learn what works, what does not work, and what you need to improve on in managing your fears and anxieties. For instance, you have a lot of anxiety and you decide to take a walk to help you feel better. The next time you feel anxious you can remind yourself that you got through it the last time by taking a walk. This will give you the confidence to manage your anxiety the next time around.

Take advantage of the help that is available
If possible, talk to a mental health professional who can help you manage your fears, anxieties, and depression. Many law associations offer support groups and lawyer mental health assistance programs that can offer immediate assistance. By talking to a professional, a person will be helping themselves in the long run because they will become better able to deal with their problems in the future.

BIOGRAPHY
Stan is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear." For more information, please visit Stan's website at http://www.managingfear.com

Annual Family Law CLE & Awards Dinner

Wednesday, January 13, 2027
The Pines Manor, 2085 Route 27, Edison
Joint Meeting with the Union & Somerset County Bar Associations

UNION COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

Event Agenda:

4:30pm - Pre-Dinner CLE Seminar

6:00pm - Cocktail Hour

7:30pm - Dinner Program
Annual Family Law Awards

<<<<< >>>>>

Cost:

MCBA/SCBA/UCBA Members
$35: CLE Seminar Only
$70: Dinner Only
$85: CLE Seminar & Dinner

Non-Members
$60: CLE Seminar Only
$80: Dinner Only
$100: CLE Seminar & Dinner

App Div/Sup Ct Law Clerks
Free: CLE Seminar Only
$35: Dinner Only
$35: Dinner & CLE

<<<<< >>>>>

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Pre-Dinner Seminar

A Review of the Most Important Family Law Opinions of 2026

Moderators



Cassie Murphy, Esq.



John P. Paone, Jr., Esq.

Paone Zaleski & Murphy - Woodbridge/Red Bank
(Certified Matrimonial Law Attorneys & Fellows of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers)

Panelists



Hon. John Burke, III
Presiding Judge, Family
Somerset County



Hon. Daniel Brown
Presiding Judge, Family
Middlesex County



Hon. Marc Brown
Presiding Judge, Family
Union County



Christine Fitzgerald, Esq.
Chair, NJSBA FLS
President, Hudson Co. Bar Assn

The Pre-Dinner Seminar is presented by the MCBA Family Law Section. The program has been approved by the BCLE of the Supreme Court of NJ for 1.8 hours of total CLE credit. Of these, 1.8 qualify as hours of credit toward certification in matrimonial law. Also Recognized for NY CLE Credit.

and the Middlesex County Bar Association & MCBA Family Law Section will present the following awards at the dinner meeting:

2026 Martin S. Goldin Family Law



to
Francesca Buarne, Esq.
RozinlGolinder Family Law
East Brunswick

2026 Edward Schoifet Family Law



to
Andrea Mackaronis, Esq.
Hoagland Longo Moran Dunst & Doukas
New Brunswick

To RSVP Online

Annual Family Law Dinner - 1/13/27

	Member	*Non-Member*	*Dinner & CLE*	*Dinner Only*	*CLE Only*
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Cost to attend: See pricing above. Make checks payable to "MCBA" and mail registration form to: MiCBA, 87 Bayard Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. ***Deadline for reservations – Tuesday, Jan12th.*** *To reserve email or fax send completed form with credit card information to jcowles@mcbalaw.com or 732.828.5862.*

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