

Maine State Bar Association 2024 Annual Report of the Wellness Committee

Attorney Well-Being was a predominant theme for the MSBA in 2024.

To attempt to reduce the stigma attached to health issues, the *Maine Bar Journal* started a column in which lawyers and judges could tell their stories in the hopes that others who are afraid to get help understand that they are not alone and so that their peers would see that health issues are not a sign of weakness and not the end of a legal career. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Jonathan Dunitz, Justice John O'Neil, Krystal Williams, and Caitlin LoCascio-King for their willingness to tell their stories. In addition to the quarterly columns, Volume 39, No. 2 was The Attorney Well-Being Issue, with several articles addressing various elements of attorney wellness. The MSBA also began a Wellness Wednesday email blast with a quick, weekly tip on well-being.

During the year, we dedicated most of the Bar Talks to an element of attorney Well-Being. We began in February with Julia Teitel, the Executive Director of the Maine Assistance Program for Judges & Lawyers and Aria Eee, the Executive Director of the Board of Bar Overseers to talk about the roles of their organizations in fostering attorney wellness. We then followed the Institute For Well-Being In Law's five themes for Well-Being Week in Law. In April, we welcomed MEMICs Sam Keltos to discuss physical well-being. In May, Laura Ligouri of Mindbridge joined us to talk about spiritual well-being. September focused on social well-being and volunteerism, with Michelle Anderson from Junior Achievement, Gretchen Johnson from The Center for Grieving Children, and Dierdre Smith from the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project. To get people ready for the holidays, October's Bar Talk addressed Emotional Well-Being with Kim Ringle of the Ringle Law Firm, and Paula Shagin of Green Button Counseling. We finished up the Well-Being Bar Talk theme in November with Occupational and Intellectual Well-Being, featuring Marcia Levy from UMaine Law School. We encourage all our members to revisit these Bar Talk sessions through the Bar Talk Archive: [Bar Talk Archive 2020 - Maine State Bar Association](#)

Our Bar Conferences also featured in the well-being theme. In January, at the Law Business & Society Summit, the Thursday night reception was held at the Portland Museum of Art instead of a bar or a ballroom at the Eastland Hotel to de-emphasize alcohol and, instead, promote social interaction and networking. We received at least one letter thanking us for holding a reception in a place that felt welcoming to all. In June, the Summer Bar Conference included a track dedicated to Attorney Well-Being. Once again using the Well-Being Week in Law's five themes, we had important discussion on various aspects of attorney well-being and the importance of taking care of ourselves and each other. We were even able to qualify a one-hour session on yoga for general CLE credits because of the importance of wellness to the practice of law. The feedback from the summer bar conference's well-being focus was positive, including quite a few attendees who said they would go to the Summer Bar Conference every summer if it included a well-being track. The wellness committee is happy to report that the 2025 President, Susan Faunce, is including wellness in her Summer Bar Conference.

The work that we did was recognized here at home with great feedback from members. It was also recognized by the National Conference of Bar Presidents, which asked immediate past president, Jonathan Dunitz to speak on two panels at the Midyear Meeting in January 2025 to talk about how we address attorney well-being in Maine. The MSBA is very proud of its well-being efforts in 2024 and looks forward to building on them.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Wellness Initiative Committee