

Together We Are Making a Difference

BY PHYLLIS G. BOSSIN



It is hard to believe that the end to my year as section chair is drawing near. The year has flown by, and being chair of the Section of Family Law has been one of the most gratifying experiences of my life. I am so proud of all that we have accomplished together. I have been amazed at the dedication of so many people who have worked hard to make this year a success. I set out to accomplish many things and am proud to say that many have been brought to fruition.

One of the major goals of the year was to increase member features and benefits. We have gone a

long way toward doing this by:

- creating a new monthly e-newsletter,
- revamping our Web site,
- redesigning *Family Advocate*,
- creating a new on-line resource center,
- conducting CLE teleconferences, and
- making meeting materials available on CD-ROM.

We have adopted policies to make our section stronger:

- a diversity plan;
- long-range plan to take the vision for our section well into the future and provide continuity from year to year;
- sponsorship plan to help us become less dependent on dues revenue; and
- financial plan and investment policy to make our section stronger.

We have been leaders in the

national discussion on same-sex marriage. Our Working Group on Same-Sex Marriages and Non-Marital Unions has completed a white paper that will provide legal analysis on these complicated issues to state and local bars, state legislatures, and the media. Our section co-sponsored, with the Section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities, a resolution adopted by the ABA House of Delegates in February 2004, urging the federal government to leave this issue to the states. We will be presenting a presidential showcase program on this important issue at the ABA Annual Meeting in Atlanta in August.

I had the unique and exciting opportunity to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the ABA position, an experience I won't soon forget.

We have provided important public service. In San Juan, we produced a full-day training for military legal service personnel and attorneys in the private sector who deal with military personnel. Through a partnership with Thomson-West, we taped this program and offered it at no cost to military service personnel worldwide through the ABA LAMP Web site, our Web site, and West's Web site. We have nominated this program for the Section Officers' Conference (SOC) Meritorious Service Award. We also have prepared a Judge's Checklist for the Service-members Civil Relief Act, which we have distributed to as many judges around the country as possible so that they will understand their

obligations under this act.

Every day lawyers are portrayed poorly in the media. We are blamed for the high cost of health insurance, for medical malpractice actions, and for being sleazy divorce lawyers. Although the image is negative, our section work shows that we are caring and committed to helping our clients through the most painful and difficult times of their lives and to helping their children survive this process with as little damage as possible. Whether it is through our adoption of standards for representing children in divorce cases, our CLE programs with top-notch professionals, our drafting of standards for adoption, or the many other things we do, we are helping people and hopefully becoming the best lawyers we can be.

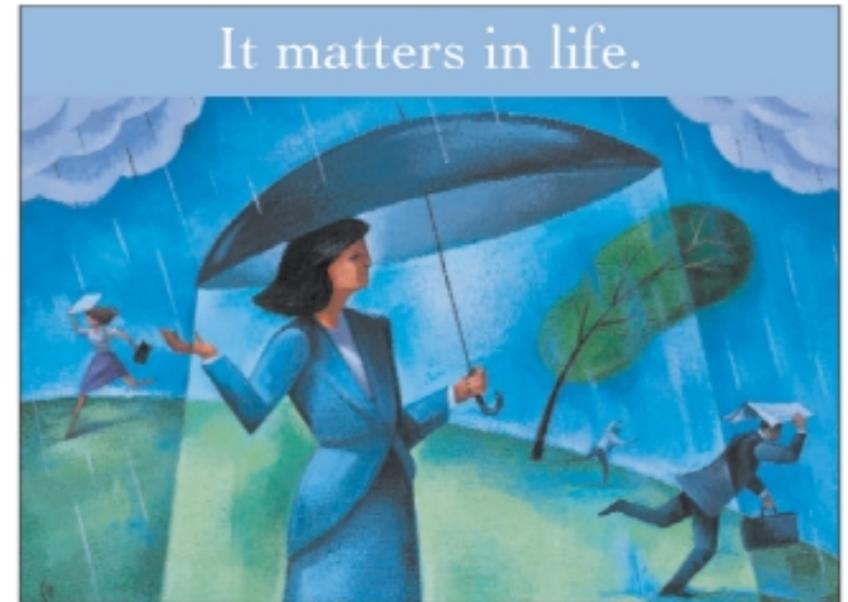
One of the many pleasures of serving as section chair has been the opportunity to be involved with the "big ABA" and to see the big picture of what the ABA is all about. The work that the ABA does makes me proud to be a lawyer and a member. I have had the privilege this year of sitting on the Justice Kennedy Commission, which came into being after Justice Kennedy spoke at the annual meeting in San Francisco and called upon the ABA to take on the issue of mandatory minimum prison sentences and racial disparity in sentencing and prison conditions. Through the hard work of this dedicated group, the ABA has a good chance of making a significant difference in this area.

Likewise, I have learned of projects such as those undertaken by the Commission on Immigration Policy, Practice and Pro Bono. This commission has completed and submitted to the House of Delegates for consideration at the annual meeting in August

proposed Standards for the Custody, Placement and Care; Legal Representation; and Adjudication of Unaccompanied Alien Children in the United States. Because most of us don't practice immigration law, we are not aware of the terrible conditions that alien children face upon entering the United States, including indefinite periods of detention

in jail-like facilities. The work of this commission, first by setting up a pro bono program for attorneys to represent detainees and now in the promulgation of these standards, should make every single one of us proud to be part of this organization.

As the year draws to a close, I thank everyone for the opportunity to serve the section this year. **fa**



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