ABA Day Digital Recap

What Thousands of Advocates Accomplished Online

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the ABA transformed the 24th annual ABA Day in Washington into ABA Day Digital 2020 -- our first fully online lobby event and digital conference. Normally, approximately 350 bar leaders from across the country join the ABA annually to storm Capitol Hill in person. Organized under state captains, each team meets with its congressional delegation to advocate for issues of great importance to the legal profession. While many participants were disappointed that they did not get to mingle with colleagues in person this year, thousands of legal professionals made time to engage with us and their congressional delegations online. This required many to venture from their comfort zone and become proficient in using technology to advocate in powerful and different ways.

ABA Day Digital included live panels, TED talk style presentations, Twitter takeovers, Tweetstorms, and more, punctuated with requests for taking specific advocacy actions throughout the two days of the event. Participants advocated for issues of particular importance during this pandemic by sending letters, making calls, and posting tweets directly to their legislators. Through these tools, we were able to effectively advocate for robust Legal Services Corporation funding, preserving the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, authorizing the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide legal aid to homeless veterans, and increasing rural America’s access to broadband/high speed internet.

The ABA challenged advocates to let their legislators know how important these core issues are during the pandemic, and they did not disappoint. ABA Day participants submitted about 1,500 advocacy actions to congressional offices, including about 1,300 emails and over 200 tweets. By issue, that’s over 700 actions for LSC, over 200 for PSLF, over 180 for rural broadband, about 250 for homeless veterans’ legal aid, and over 100 for our internet only issues.

In addition to facilitating direct advocacy actions, ABA Day also included a digital conference on Twitter, where our followers were able to learn more about our core issues through panel discussions, live videos, written materials, and more. From ABA President Judy Perry Martinez’s kick-off message to ABA President-Elect Trish Refo’s closing message, we had almost 6,000 combined views on the videos we showed throughout the day. Over 900 people watched President Martinez’s opening statement alone.

Our digital participants were extremely engaged on Twitter, and many retweeted ABA Day posts to their networks. The @ABAGrassroots Twitter account had over 1,100 interactions,
including about 400 retweets and about 700 likes. The promotion leading up to ABA Day Digital through the end of the event also yielded 115,000 impressions, which means that the tweets appeared and were seen 115,000 times.

What do all these numbers mean?

This year, under less than ideal circumstances, the ABA pivoted from a traditionally in-person event to the association’s first fully digital advocacy event. We encouraged advocates, including many young lawyers who have never participated before, to reach out digitally to their legislators, and we provided the online tools and information they needed to make an impact. As a result, we were able to help them successfully engage with their congressional delegations by taking about 1,500 advocacy actions from the safety of their own homes.

The ABA Day Planning Committee and Governmental Affairs Office are extremely proud of this year’s ABA Day advocates, old and new, for being so active and engaged during such an unprecedented time. Thank you for making time to join us to amplify the voice of the legal profession, improve access to justice, and advance the rule of law.

If you have any questions about ABA advocacy or would like to get involved visit ambar.org/grassroots for more information.
ABA Day Digital: What’s Next?

Keep the Momentum Going

ABA Day 2020 Digital was the perfect opportunity to connect with your elected officials, but now you may be wondering what comes next. Your advocacy efforts during ABA Day were important and effective, and now we want to help you amplify your impact and strengthen your congressional relationships by following up with additional small but significant actions that you can take when you have time. We have put together some really easy ways below for you to continue to build relationships with your Members of Congress and plug in to future advocacy efforts.

Plugging into the Larger Picture

Debriefing after a major campaign is one of the best ways to share what you have learned with other advocates and coordinate with the ABA policy team. We therefore hope you will fill out the ABA Day survey and let us know how your advocacy efforts went. Your feedback will help shape how our ABA Governmental Affairs team interacts with your congressional offices next time we reach out, and your experience this year will help shape ABA Day next year. If you were not able to join us last week for ABA Day, you can still participate by sending messages to your elected officials from here and continuing with the rest of the steps in this article.

Following Up

If you spoke with your Members of Congress or their staff over the phone or through an online teleconference service, the most important step you can now take is to simply follow up with an email thanking them for their time and producing any information you may have promised. This acts as a great second touch point and signals to the office that you look forward to keeping the lines of communication open. It also affords the opportunity to offer your perspective on an ongoing basis, if you feel comfortable doing so.

Keeping the Relationship Alive

Checking in periodically and offering assistance to staffers with whom you have interacted is a great way to nurture the relationship and assure that it is a two-way street. Continuing the relationship throughout the year will not only give you the opportunity to represent the legal profession or provide updates on issues your Member cares about on a regular basis, it will also make your future advocacy requests that much more meaningful.
You also do not need to wait for next ABA Day to advocate on issues. We hope you will continue to send advocacy messages through the ABA Grassroots portal. These tools make connecting with your elected officials over email, phone, or social media easy to do at your convenience. To make this even easier, be sure to join the ABA Grassroots Action Team and you will be contacted when new campaigns arise.

While the coronavirus pandemic may continue to alter Congress’s schedule, another step you may be able to take is to reconnect with your Members during the August recess, when they normally return to their home offices to meet with their constituents. Although Members may not hold in-person town hall meetings this August, they will be holding virtual events or exploring other ways to engage with their constituents to find out what is on their minds. These events provide opportunities for you to reach out and ask if there has been any progress on the issues you brought up with them during ABA Day. To assist you, we will have a packet of materials and suggested messaging for you closer to August.

Finally, the best way for you to stay involved and up to date on legislative developments regarding ABA Day issues and emerging issues of importance to the legal profession is to follow the Governmental Affairs team on Twitter @ABAGrassroots where we will continue to post updates, breaking news, and chances for you to get involved.
ABA Day Digital: As Told by Participants

Randi Brent Starrett, Most Advocacy Messages Sent, Solo Practitioner

"I was excited to participate in the 2020 ABA Day called ABA Digital this year. The event, usually held in person in Washington, DC is the yearly opportunity for ABA members and leaders to meet with their congressional representatives and staff to advocate for the ABA's initiatives. The issues often differ but usually include lobbying for funds for the Legal Services Corporation. This issue is the one closest to my heart as it provides funding for legal aid organizations and helps those most at need in our communities. This includes our neighbors and friends, and often individuals with disabilities.

This year, due to COVID 19, the in-person event was instead conducted digitally. The event was held on Twitter with introductions by ABA leadership and panel discussions concerning the issues. ABA members were then given calls to action to contact their senators and representatives through emails, phone calls and virtual in-person meetings using technology.

Although I missed the collegiality and camaraderie of walking the halls of Congress with my Florida team members, the virtual event was an amazing way to continue to communicate with our senators and representatives. The platform was easy to use but very effective. Even when ABA Day returns to an in-person event, hopefully in 2021, I suggest that the ABA continue to include the virtual option. This would be a great way to involve more ABA members in the lobbying, along with providing the opportunity for participation by individuals that have difficulty travelling, due to time constraints or even disability."

Bill Weisenberg, ABA Day Captain, Ohio

"ABA Digital Day represented the strong collaboration between the ABA, Ohio State Bar Association and the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation. The ABA-GAO provided both substantive and technical information enabling the OSBA and OAJF to effectively communicate with its delegation on the issues identified for our lobbying efforts. Collaborative advocacy has been a hallmark of the relationship between the ABA and the OSBA and access to justice commissions across the country and the feedback thus far tells us they did hear from us. Since digital advocacy may well be the
future, we are off to a good start and the tools provided by ABA-GAO enhanced our collaborative
effort.”

**Keith Kupferschmid, Speaker, CEO, Copyright Alliance**

“The 2020 ABA Day Digital events provided an outstanding mechanism for bringing together bar
leaders from across the U.S. to discuss key challenges and legislation that are important to our
members and to so many others. It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to share why the CASE
Act is critical to creators in this country, and how it will enable them to protect their works and
livelihoods.”

**Jennifer Springer-Joseph, First-time Advocate, US Department of Labor**

“Having never advocated before, I was not sure what to expect or if I was even making a difference.
But having the ABA walk me through some of the easier ways of reaching out to my member of
Congress first, made me realize how easy it really was. My member was really receptive of
everything I had to say, and I am actually looking forward to reaching out again. I am going to look
into going to Washington next year, but I really appreciated having the online portion as a first year
participant.”

**Robert Kutcher, Teleconference Participant, Louisiana State Bar President**

"While being quite different than previous ABA Day events, we were glad to be given the
opportunity to meet with certain of our Congressional staffs remotely by participating in ABA Day
Digital. It was certainly a different experience. The ability to meet this ABA Day was of particular
importance as we shared with our Congressmen the essential, front-line position that civil legal aid
organizations play in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tools provided by the ABA truly allowed us to expand our reach. Visiting remotely allowed us to
include directors of the Louisiana Legal Service Programs in our visits who were able to share civil
legal aid information relevant to constituents affected by the current health crisis. The social media
templates encouraged the LSBA and other Louisiana organizations to tweet and post to Facebook.
The template letters and emails increased the contact from supporters with our Congressional
Delegation.

We appreciate the willingness of Senator Cassidy’s and Representative Abraham’s staff members to
meet with us. They were attentive and supportive. Besides allowing us to continue this important
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effort, visiting remotely allowed us to maintain the LSBA’s 20 year tradition of participating in ABA Day in Washington!"

**Gene Vance**, Long-time ABA Day Attendee, *Stoll, Keenon, Ogden, PLLC*

"As a longtime ABA Day attendee, I was concerned that the virtual model would not allow for as much useful interaction. My concern was without merit. Virtual ABA Day worked very well for us. We had excellent visits with several of our Kentucky members and other visits with very capable staff members. Although we spent time on each call lamenting our inability to visit in person, each call, whether video or otherwise, was very productive and resulted in useful and supportive conversations on the ABA’s legislative priorities for 2020. Having a virtual event allowed for greater participation and I think a combination of in-person and virtual should be considered for future events."