The Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP) has jurisdiction over matters relating to lawyer assistance programs as they provide professional assistance to lawyers, judges and law students who have alcohol and other substance use disorders and mental health issues. The Commission (1) supports and seeks to improve existing services, including diversity outreach, and, as appropriate, assists in the development of new lawyer assistance programs, (2) provides educational and training opportunities for lawyer assistance program staff and volunteers, the legal profession, the judiciary, law students, legal educators and the public, (3) disseminates information to and creates and fosters platforms for communication among lawyer assistance program staff and volunteers, and (4) develops and advances policies that better enable lawyers and judges to obtain assistance and return to good health, protect the integrity of the legal profession and the judiciary and protect the public.

As the organized bar’s sole national entity dedicated to lawyer assistance, the Commission approaches its mission through several avenues. It produces an annual conference; provides extensive outreach; offers technical assistance; conducts and advances research; addresses the needs of specific populations; and advances policies designed to protect the public while helping lawyers in need of assistance.

Each fall, the Commission produces the National Conference for Lawyer Assistance Programs. The conference provides the opportunity for representatives from law schools, the judiciary, the organized bar, bar admissions authorities and the disciplinary community to learn more about lawyer assistance and to form effective relationships with state lawyer assistance programs. The 2017 Conference was held on October 17 – 19, in Kansas City, MO. Over 240 people attended the Conference, which was followed by a full-day planning session for the Commission. The 2018 Conference will be held in Charleston, SC on September 25 - 27.

Over the past two years CoLAP has taken the lead on research, first surveying law students and then surveying lawyers to identify the incidence of alcohol and drug use, mental health issues and help-seeking behaviors. The law student research was financed through the ABA Enterprise Fund. The data revealed that students are reluctant to seek help because of concerns about admission and job placement. The information was integral to updates to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Toolkit for Law Students, which is relied upon around the country.

The Commission then collaborated with the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation to conduct research on the incidence of alcohol and drug use, mental health issues and help-seeking behaviors among lawyers for the first time since 1991. The first detailed release of information was in an article in the January/February 2016 issue of the Journal of Addiction Medicine.

As a result of these research endeavors, the Commission joined with others to form the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being. In August 2017, the Task Force issued a report calling for widespread changes in the legal profession’s culture. The Commission is now working with the
Task Force and the ABA Working Group to Advance the Well-Being in the Legal Profession, a Presidential initiative, to advance the recommendations set out in *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*. The Commission is also in the midst of the 2017 Comprehensive survey of Lawyer Assistance Programs.

The Commission is active in providing and contributing programming both within and outside the ABA. Its Education Committee coordinates workshops, provides panelists and otherwise explores educational opportunities. In July, CoLAP participated in presentations at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals Annual Training Conference and the Association of Recovery in Higher Education Collegiate Recovery Conference. In October, it produced an ABA Free CLE webinar on lawyer wellness and participated in the 43rd National Conference of Professional Responsibility. In an effort to expand its reach, CoLAP is also experimenting with social media outlets. In June, it collaborated with the National Bar Association to provide a Live Twitter Chat on suicide prevention. Based on the success to that program, it held another Twitter Chat in December, on problem gambling. The Commission has also produced a series of podcasts that share the stories of lawyers who have successfully recovered from their addictions. This series, entitled “Voices of Recovery,” is designed to reduce stigma and encourage lawyers to seek assistance.

In order for LAPs to function at the top of their abilities, CoLAP conducts peer assistance evaluations. At the 2017 Midyear Meeting, the Commission conducted a “train the evaluator” program attended by 18 potential peer evaluators. In 2017, the Commission provided evaluations for programs in West Virginia, New Mexico, and North Dakota, and Delaware.

CoLAP also has an active communications platform, including its newly redesigned website, listservs, blog (the CoLAP Café), Facebook site and Twitter account (@abacolap). The Commission’s blog has at least one substantive post each week.

As part of its policy agenda, CoLAP collaborated with the Committee on Model Rules for Continuing Legal Education to advance a resolution at the 2017 Midyear Meeting requiring lawyers to obtain CLE credit for programs addressing the prevention, detection and/or treatment of substance use or mental health disorders. The resolution was approved by the House with near unanimity. The Commission is advancing the implementation of this policy. The Commission is also collaborating with the Working Group to Advance the Well-Being of the Legal Profession to file a resolution embracing the recommendations set out by the Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being. Additional implementation efforts will also be considered over the course of 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Bree Buchanan, Chair
February 2018