American Bar Association
President Judy Perry Martinez
Remarks as Prepared to the ABA House of Delegates
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Thank you, Chair Bay. My fellow delegates and ABA members, dedicated staff, and honored guests.

Every lawyer knows that Dr. Martin Luther King was an incomparable champion of justice. What makes his message especially powerful is the observation that a just world flows from the dignity we hold for each other and in ourselves.

As Dr. King said, “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'”

Dr. King relayed a powerful truth. Every person must have opportunity to develop and employ their fullest talents. Each and every one of us has a duty to put our unique abilities to their highest and best use in service to one another.

This is what makes our communities run. This is what keeps our republic intact. This is what drives our constant quest to become a more perfect union.
Your service in this House advances our voice for the profession. Your service is essential to our nation of laws and the promise of justice for all. Gathered today, we embody the hundreds of thousands of lawyers who, every day, work with the highest integrity on behalf of the clients and causes to which they devote their lives.

Who every day give their professional best as they preside in our courtrooms, serve as clerks and mediate disputes.

Who contribute legal scholarship and educate and mentor law students, who themselves carry the torch of justice for future generations.

We are the voice of lawyers who make a difference for their communities through pro bono and public service.

Who build on their knowledge and skills through lifelong learning and commitment—through bar service and other contributions—to causes greater than themselves.

Who speak up and advance solutions when man-made constructs, obstacles and biases hold back colleagues in our profession or obstruct paths to justice.

Who apply their legal skills to address challenges involving housing and homelessness, veterans, seniors, immigrants, asylum seekers, gun safety, human trafficking, climate change, cybersecurity, voting rights, and public health.
Who demonstrate and promote civility as essential to till the soils of trust and confidence in which our democratic institutions are rooted.

Every day—in the courtroom, in the conference room, and in the classroom—thousands upon thousands of lawyers articulate and implement our commitment to fairness and opportunity through the rule of law and not men.

Americans of all backgrounds are paying renewed attention to issues of justice. They’re talking about due process, evidence, attorney-client privilege, fair trials, and just punishment; the imperative of the oath to protect and defend the Constitution, no better demonstrated than when lawyers and public servants operating within the framework of law are able to do so free from obstruction, intimidation, and retribution.

However rough our current places and spaces are, however long the arc of the moral universe may be, justice is and always will be our guidepost.

With us today is the Honorable Nathan Hecht, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Texas and a longtime member of the American Bar Association.

Chief Justice Hecht is here in his role as president of the Conference of Chief Justices.

The ABA is strengthened by our work with the Conference of Chief Justices and the organization with which it works closely, the
National Center for State Courts. Together we have forged a continuing commitment to address the challenges and opportunities presented by our shared mission of judicial independence, a fair and impartial judiciary, access to justice for all, and a strong and competent legal profession in support of the rule of law.

Justice Hecht has joined and led conversations with those who know the intellect and power that lawyers and judges, when gathered with committed allies from the legal sector and other fields, can apply to access to justice challenges and intractable social problems.

And other judges within our ranks know the ABA provides a prominent forum for their concern and commitment.

Judges and their fellow public servants bring important experience to the ABA. They offer valuable perspectives. They provide authoritative legal knowledge. And they deliver critical leadership.

Our profession and the ABA are honored, and made better, by the invaluable service of our judicial and public service members.

Bar associations of all types have a special responsibility to ensure the public understands and appreciates the criticality of our justice system’s independence.

The personal attacks on our judges and prosecutors must cease.
No one, no one, should interfere with the fair administration of justice. And no one, no one, should have to live in fear for following the law and upholding our Constitution.

Such attacks feed into an alarming trend. A recent report of the Center for Strategic and International Studies describes how foreign operatives are undermining our nation by spreading fake news on social media—messages that exacerbate public divisions and stoke mistrust of democratic institutions, including our courts and judges. The report calls for a national effort, as an urgent national security priority, to promote public understanding of our justice system. Civics education, as a cornerstone of trust and confidence in the court system, was in fact the central call to action in Chief Justice Roberts’ year-end report on the federal judiciary.

The American Bar Association has, and always will, lead in educating the public about our courts, our justice system, and the rule of law. Thanks to the continued diligence of your bar associations and communities, our flagship education initiative, Law Day, chaired this year by Pamela J. Roberts, has been going strong for more than 60 years.

As important as Law Day is, it is not all the ABA does in civics education.

Our public education initiatives range from the Judicial Division’s National Judicial Outreach Week in March, to ABA Legal Fact Checks prepared by our Media Relations and Communications Division. From our Division for Public Education’s National Civics and Law Academy
to our annual civics survey to the Silver Gavel Awards that encourage public understanding of the law.

And as I’ve communicated with you previously, we launched an engaging social media campaign on the rule of law in our democracy, called, “Stand with Us.” Please share these posts on your social media accounts and other networks.

You all know about our singular opportunity this year to talk about democracy and the hard work needed to expand civic participation. That’s the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women the right to vote and thereby launched the largest expansion of democracy in our country’s history. The ABA’s Centennial effort, chaired by U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Margaret McKeown, offers unparalleled opportunities throughout the year for your bar associations, courts, and others to engage in civics education, to encourage voting, and to explore voting rights and equal rights today. Enthusiasm is evident from the participation of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in our program at Georgetown Law School last week to the more than 120 bar associations, state courts, and other groups—in all 50 states—that have or will showcase our educational and inspiring 19th Amendment exhibit.

The ABA promotes public awareness and stands for fair and impartial courts through another indispensable program: our longtime public service of evaluating nominees to lifetime positions on the federal bench. No other organization focuses solely on integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament. No other organization is as thorough and focused solely on professional qualifications.
The volunteers and staff of our Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary, chaired this year by former ABA President William Hubbard, perform under heavy workloads and substantial time constraints. They deserve our deepest appreciation.

The ABA will never waver in providing this essential and unparalleled service to our nation.

In so many other ways, the ABA fights for judicial independence and due process.

One of the many injustices of U.S. immigration policy is the lack of basic structural and procedural safeguards to ensure judicial independence, access to justice, and due process in our immigration courts. As I stated when I testified before Congress last month, we need a new immigration court system—an Article I court—that guarantees the independence of its judges and removes them from Department of Justice control.

The ABA Governmental Affairs Office rallies support for court funding and security, criminal justice reform, access to justice, and many other matters of concern to our profession. We mobilize our members to fight proposals that would undermine traditional state court regulation of lawyers, interfere with the confidential attorney-client relationship, and impose burdensome regulations on attorneys engaged in the practice of law.
We work every day to secure funding for the Legal Services Corporation. Despite four straight years of Administration proposals to defund the agency, you and your colleagues have gathered at ABA Day in Washington and advocated tirelessly back home, resulting in a record amount allocated to LSC for this year.

Joining us today is an outstanding lawyer and public servant, a friend of the ABA, and a steadfast ally in our commitment to access to legal services for all. For more than 9 years, Jim Sandman has served with extraordinary leadership and eloquence as president of the Legal Services Corporation. As we salute Jim before his departure this week, we are grateful that he will continue to advocate for access to justice for all Americans as President Emeritus of LSC. Last Friday, it was my honor to present Jim with a presidential citation. Jim, please stand so this entire body can thank you.

America’s dedicated legal aid lawyers leverage and foster valuable pro bono services in their communities. The ABA is a national leader in encouraging pro bono with a number of initiatives, including the National Celebration of Pro Bono each year in October. As Pro Bono Week focused last fall on domestic and sexual violence, we had more than 1,600 pro bono events, an increase of almost 200 from the prior year, and activities were held in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Through the ABA Young Lawyers Division’s longtime agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and our cooperation with state and local bars, we organize and train pro bono volunteers to serve disaster survivors. Throughout 2019 and so far this year, we
have responded to 15 declared disasters nationwide, fielding more than 5,000 calls from survivors for assistance with insurance, housing, and other matters.

Lawyers can also volunteer through ABA Free Legal Answers. Thanks to the participation of your state and local bar associations, more than 6,800 lawyers have registered on the site to volunteer, and we are approaching 100,000 submitted questions.

Despite our successes, we cannot deny that legal aid funding and pro bono will never come close to fully addressing our nation’s unmet legal needs. We—the ABA, the leaders of state, local, and affinity bars and our affiliated organizations—need to encourage bold thinking and urge robust discussion and data gathering about ways to deliver greater efficiencies for lawyers and the potential for meaningful innovations in the long overdue delivery of justice for all. We must continue to lead conversations across the country on how innovation can close the justice gap. We cannot and will not continue to fail those who need legal services.

Our daily attention to keeping our profession strong and relevant anchors the hope and promise of a strong nation and peaceful world.

Our continued work through the ABA Rule of Law Initiative and Center for Human Rights is a beacon of hope for those who are denied democracy and peace.

Our continued work through the ABA Diversity and Inclusion Center and its commissions that do groundbreaking work on race, ethnicity,
gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disabilities—I know, I am certain—will someday soon mean that we will look at our justice system, our profession, and see the entirety of America.

Our work through our sections, divisions, forums, and committees for improved competency, stronger ethics, and greater attention to wellness is a testament to our collective belief as a profession that we are obligated to our nation and to our communities to be our best every day.

The activities of the vibrant organizations that are represented in this House make a difference to the administration of justice, and they make a difference to the rule of law. Whether a state bar marshals its members to serve the public, speaks up for equality or against injustice, or stands tall to protect its judiciary from unfair attacks, it advances the rule of law and does what the nation, our Constitution, and our oath given by our state supreme courts call on lawyers to do.

Only the American Bar Association provides national leadership to support activities that are critical to our democratic freedoms. We are indebted to our staff, led by Jack Rives, and our members whose collective hard work has enabled us to start reaping the rewards of our investments in membership development, providing lawyers more value and a greater sense of belonging in our national voice for the profession.

Membership recruitment is how we strengthen our voice. We need each of you to share, with your colleagues back home, your passion for the ABA—why you belong, why you participate and lead, why you
know ABA membership makes you a better lawyer. Help them understand what you already know. Being a part of the ABA is part of something much bigger than any one of us.

You and the lawyers you embody are the Michaelangelos of justice, and you are always with me as I speak on the ABA’s behalf. That is true whether I am visiting with prosecutors in Boston, public defenders in Jackson, MS, administrative law judges in Asheville, legal aid lawyers in Tucson, law students and faculty in Washington, DC, Remain in Mexico refugees on the streets of Matamoros, legal innovators in New York, law firm and bar leaders of Hawaii, tribal leaders on the lands of the Coushatta Nation, solicitors and barristers of Hong Kong, the leading climate change scientists and environmental practitioners gathered by the ABA in Mexico City, or the Chicago Bar Association’s volunteer lawyer tutors and their grade school students from the city’s impoverished south side.

Thanks to the example you set, my message to the children of Chicago was simple: Lawyers care. Lawyers take action. Lawyers lead. And lawyers make a difference.

The challenges are many, and our work is never done, but I do know this: If we continue to do our job well, with dignity for all people, with civility, respect, and decency for all—even those with whom we vehemently disagree—we will stay focused on our mission to serve and seek justice. We will be united in our purpose, certain of our influence, never in fear of the future, and always confident in our power to achieve a more just nation and world.