Fred Rogers, the host of Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood, used to tell a story. When he was a boy, he would watch the news and see scary things. His mother would tell him, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

Mr. Rogers went on: “I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.”

The video we just saw is about scary things, things like addiction and depression that can ultimately lead to the most frightening thing of all—the suffering and tragic death of a loved one.

I know this way too deeply from personal experience. So do many of you. And if you haven’t endured something like this directly, it’s highly likely you know someone who has.

Who are the helpers? It’s people like the lawyers in the video. In facing up to their stigmatized health issues, they are brave. In standing up to help others, they are heroic.

Helpers are people like Bree Buchanan, the director of the State Bar of Texas Lawyers Assistance Program and chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Lawyer Assistance Programs.

Bree and her gifted colleagues are the driving force behind the video and other efforts throughout the bar to promote lawyer well-being.

Each of you knows helpers in this space, and we are indebted to all of them. We need to encourage these efforts. We need to be helpers ourselves. We need help as long as it takes to make unhealthy conditions and behaviors in our profession the exception—and healthy conditions and behaviors the rule.
Our lives, our service to clients, and the lives of our colleagues and loved ones depend on our help. The ABA, state and local bars, law schools—everyone—must continue to give lawyer well-being our complete support.

We find helpers in other situations where the news is scary or violates our sense of fairness and justice. We are appalled by reports of immigrant children held in unsafe and unhealthy conditions in violation of federal and state law, court settlements, and common decency.

The ABA called on authorities to immediately end this inhumane and illegal treatment and provide lawyer access to Customs and Border Protection facilities.

We urged Congress to approve funding to ensure the appropriate treatment and care of unaccompanied immigrant children in government custody.

We insisted that the administration enforce laws and settlements that guarantee humane, minimal standards of care for vulnerable children, no matter how they arrived in our country.

Our immigration courts cannot meet the standards that justice demands, because they are not truly independent. This issue is particularly crucial as immigration courts struggle with crisis-level backlogs of almost 900,000 cases, affecting children, adults, and their families seeking safe haven in our country.

The ABA joined with the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the Federal Bar Association, and the National Association of Immigration Judges to call on Congress to establish a separate immigration court system, independent of the U.S. Department of Justice. We need to protect immigration judges and the courts from even the slightest possibility of political pressure or interference.

Helpers don’t just speak. They act. It was a privilege to work with extraordinary helpers during two visits this past year to ProBAR, the ABA’s Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project in South Texas.
ProBAR is one of several projects of the ABA Commission on Immigration that promote due process for immigrants.

The ProBAR staff and pro bono volunteers are helpers. So are the surrounding community members, known as Team Brownsville. Every day, they show up in the Rio Grande valley heat and walk across the bridge into Mexico. They serve breakfast and dinner and water to the asylum seekers waiting on the other side to be metered into the United States to start the asylum process.

In recent months, the ABA has received an outpouring of online donations for our work with ProBAR, our Immigration Justice Project in San Diego, and our Children’s Immigration Law Academy in Houston. Online donations largely have come from non-ABA members, and non-lawyers.

How did these helpers respond when asked what inspired them to give? One donor wrote: “After research, I feel that legal assistance is what is primarily needed by immigrant and migrant families in the US and arriving daily. I wish I could give more.”

Another donor wrote: “I have a toddler who had a nice dinner tonight and is safe asleep in his bed now. I cannot bear the thought that there are children at the border hungry and sleeping on concrete. And I felt helpless, so we're donating.”

Wrote another: “You uphold the American values I was brought up to revere.”

And another: “My support for building the wall led me to a deeper understanding of the need for legal representation for immigrants claiming asylum.”

And, finally: “My father had the privilege of immigrating to this country legally. I want to help others do the same.”

Let me thank the volunteer members and staff of the Commission on Immigration for all their help to strengthen the ABA’s voice as we uphold our nation’s values of justice and fairness. And the Fund for
Justice and Education for its outstanding job raising money and awareness for our work at the border.

We see on the news something else that’s scary: natural disasters. They can be deadly, and they always uproot lives. Some of us have lived through a natural disaster. All of us appreciate the first responders, the community volunteers, and others who help.

As your president, I tried to help by calling attention to the helpers among us who provide pro bono legal services to disaster survivors, in locations across the country far too numerous to mention.

On behalf of a grateful Association, let me thank the ABA Young Lawyers Division for their continued leadership in this area and all the legal aid and state and local bar programs who work with us. And thank you to those who have helped by doing pro bono and spreading the word about opportunities to help.

A month ago, at the encouragement of the ABA Center on Human Rights, I travelled to Poland to speak out against the government’s undermining of the country’s independent judiciary. The lawyers and judges there very much appreciated the ABA’s show of support. And they are very concerned.

All Americans should be concerned at the prospect of a politicized judiciary here at home. I have seen firsthand how it can happen. We can never let this happen here. We must always fight for an independent, fair, and impartial judiciary.

The ABA will always deploy our helpers, the dedicated members of our Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary, who evaluate the professional qualifications of judicial nominees. The pace of nominations and confirmations in recent years has been extraordinary, and the committee has risen to the challenge. This year alone, the committee, led by chair Paul Moxley, evaluated 137 nominees, more than twice the average.

Our hard-working committee members are helpers of the highest caliber. Their evaluations are thorough, authoritative, respected, and absolutely necessary to help ensure the quality of our system of
justice and preserve the impartiality and independence of our judiciary.

Our judicial evaluations serve another essential purpose: They are tools in the search for truth. Our justice system relies on fact-finding. Witnesses are sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Facts matter.

Finding facts and searching for truth are grounded in a free press, as enshrined in the First Amendment. A free press holds authority accountable. It exposes wrongdoing and shines a light on problems we need to solve.

Lawyers and other seekers of justice are therefore natural allies with a fair and independent news media. This year’s Law Day theme explored these concepts. The ABA is grateful to all of you and the organizations you represent back home for organizing and participating in Law Day activities.

Law Day and other initiatives of our Division for Public Education are essential. So is ABA Legal Fact Check, produced by our Media Relations and Communications Division. We must continue to keep alive the flame of public awareness of how democratic institutions preserve our liberty and help us pursue justice.

A year ago, I pledged to you that we would deliver a clear, concise, consistent, repeated, and repeatable message about the ABA and on behalf of America’s lawyers and judges. I promised to help solidify the ABA as the gold standard of law practice.

We are moving forward with talent and energy to expand our reach and show the legal profession and the world why the ABA matters and why we are the place to be for every lawyer.

We stand for professional excellence, and we stand for justice. Time and again, I have witnessed a new sense of energy and appreciation for the ABA—from the numerous bar associations that are working to promote lawyer well-being, to those who steadfastly work with the ABA year after year in our mutual fight for legal aid funding.
From Alaska, North Carolina, and Florida, where I met with disaster legal services staff and volunteers; to Denver, where I met with promising young diverse lawyers at the Collaborative Bar Leadership Academy.

From Washington, D.C., where Justice Kagan appeared with the ABA at Georgetown Law School to underscore our profession’s obligation to pro bono service; to New York, where George and Amal Clooney stood with us to highlight Trial Watch, our joint project to observe trials throughout the world involving human rights and to democratize a system of trial monitoring.

From San Diego, where I was honored to speak at the first Annual Meeting of the new California Lawyers Association, to Uzbekistan, where the ABA Rule of Law Initiative is working to establish institutions of law.

The ABA matters, and I tried my best to be a helper.

I appreciate all your help, as dedicated volunteer members and staff. Our Association needs you, our profession needs you, and our country needs you to continue to be helpers in the ABA community.

Let me especially thank my law firm, Corette Black, Carlson & Mickelson, for their help. And, of course Cindy, the most important helper of all.

As I conclude my service as your president, I need to note one last thing of great concern to our members, our fellow lawyers, and our neighbors and citizens.

People get scared, and rightfully so, when bigotry and hatred emanate from powerful news organizations, candidates for public office, and prominent government officials.

Bigotry and hatred can easily lead to threats and violence. We are outraged, and frightened, when threats and violence are directed toward judges and lawyers. We are outraged and frightened when threats and violence are targeted toward specific populations, on behalf of specific ideologies.
But as we mourn those whose lives were tragically ended too soon, we can never forget the impact that violence has had on our staff and volunteers who work in border communities, where their race makes them a target.

Violence destroys lives. It needs to stop—whether it’s from the glut of handguns in our homes and streets or from mass shootings of easily available weapons of war. Any one of us, in an instant, can be randomly shot in a public space. Any one of us, in an instant, can get a call that a loved one was methodically gunned down or struck by a stray bullet.

Leading medical organizations are working to reduce gun violence as a public health threat. We in the ABA must continue our leadership and collaboration with them and our allies as we encourage discussion, evidence-based solutions, and advocacy from a legal and Constitutional perspective.

As we help, we will do so with civility, because lawyers know that civil engagement is a model for peaceful conflict resolution. We must be steadfast in setting the highest standards for civil discourse without personally disparaging others. As lawyers, we need to speak out in our communities.

Words matter. How we treat each other matters. In our public discourse, we must be aware of our own words and actions. We must talk to each other with mutual respect, no matter how much we disagree. And there’s no room—ever—for racial, ethnic, religious, or gender-based insults. As lawyers, we can help by continuing to promote civility no matter how ugly our public discourse becomes.

Each of us needs to be helpers more than ever. We need to be helpers to serve our members, improve our profession, and promote the values we stand for. We need to be helpers who say no to division, helplessness, and fear.

We need to be helpers who stand for the ABA’s values of unity, diversity, inclusion, and equal justice for all.
For as Mr. Rogers noted, “If you look for the helpers, you’ll know there’s hope.”