Celebrating 100 Years of the Criminal Justice Section

The American Bar Association Criminal Justice Section was founded in 1920 in St. Louis, Missouri and is one of the oldest sections of the ABA. After the founding of the ABA in 1878 and the membership and scope of the ABA continued to grow, the Association recognized the need to have an entity focused on criminal law.

The Criminal Justice Section's earliest work examined deficiencies within the law and has contributed to the development of the criminal justice system as we know it today through policy advocacy and the Criminal Justice Standards, originally commissioned in 1964. Those original Standards spanned the entire criminal justice process, including pre-trial release, discovery, jury trials, sentencing, appeals and post-conviction remedies. They also covered topics such as the prosecution and defense functions, the function of the trial judge, fair trials and free press.

The Criminal Justice Section continues to examine the criminal justice system, and with diverse membership including judges, defense attorneys, prosecutors, academics and other criminal justice professionals, seeks to represent the unified voice of criminal justice in its work. The Standards Project has grown, and the Section now has over 40 committees and additional task forces addressing the most pressing criminal justice issues. The Section continues to strive for diversity and inclusion and addressing women’s issues in the field of criminal justice.

We have chosen the motto, “Perfecting our Vision in 20/20” for this centennial year. As the motto indicates, we will take the chance to reflect on our history, to learn from our own deficiencies and to move forward with a perfected vision of our priorities and goals for the next 100 years. There will be reflections and projections of our history made available in our publications, at our events and on our website. We invite you to join us in celebrating 100 years of criminal justice progress and ask you to renew your commitment to help us achieve more in the coming 100 years, as there is still much work to be done.