

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division *The Affiliate*

ABA Day in Washington, 2010

By Francine Bailey

Beginning on April 20, 2010, attorneys from all over the nation descended on Washington, D.C., to participate in the fourteenth annual ABA Day. The purpose of ABA Day is to provide an opportunity for bar leaders from the ABA and state and local bar associations to participate in meaningful, effective "Hill visits" with elected officials.

"Active participation is vital to successfully educate the Administration and Congress about issues of importance to lawyers," says this year's Chair of the ABA Day in Washington Planning Committee, Laurel G. Bellows, of Chicago, Illinois.

Priorities

During these visits, a limited number of pre-selected ABA legislative priorities are presented to members of Congress. Participants are expected to include most, if not all of these issues in visits to their representatives and senators. By using this process, the ABA has been successful in enacting or advancing several legislative priorities.

This year, one priority was funding for the politically independent Legal Services Corporation (LSC). The LSC currently awards competitive grants to 137 independent local legal services programs and serves every congressional district in the country. In addition to requesting funding, participants also advocated for the reauthorization of LSC for the first time since 1977. Currently, similar bills are pending in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The ABA strongly supports the reauthorization of LSC, which will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of legal services to the poor.

A second priority promoted was the Civil Rights Tax Relief Act of 2009. It was introduced by Representatives John Lewis (D-Ga.) and James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) and Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) and Susan Collins (R-Me.). This legislation is necessary because the 1996 Small Business Job Protection Act made non-economic damages in employment discrimination cases taxable, while non-economic damages in personal injury cases are tax-free. ABA Day gave attorneys the opportunity to discuss how this change has made settling employment cases more difficult and addressed the differences in the amounts of settlement payments before and after the legislation.

Past legislative priorities have included preservation of the attorney-client privilege, enactment of portions of the Civil Rights Tax Relief Act, and passage of the McDade/Murtha law requiring government lawyers to adhere to state ethical standards.

Participation

Regardless of political affiliation, lawyers from all over the nation can benefit from participation in ABA Day. The ultimate goal of ABA Day is to bring to the forefront the issues that are of importance to lawyers everywhere.

Experience with lobbying is not necessary to participate in ABA Day. Organizers of the event have prepared training sessions so attendees get the greatest benefit out of the Hill visits. ABA Day participants can attend workshops and an issues-training session to help them prepare for the Hill visits. These sessions prepared participants for the face-to-face meetings with their representatives and senators.

ABA Day is not limited to Hill visits, however. Participants also had the opportunity to attend a "Welcome Dinner" at the Canadian Embassy, a "Congressional Reception" at the Library of Congress, and a Capitol Hill breakfast at which invited leaders of Congress and representatives from the President's staff were in attendance.

A wide range of opportunities were available during the short weekend, from catching up on CLE credits to intensive training on strategies for lobbying members of Congress.

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Opportunity for Young Lawyers

ABA Day is not just for more established attorneys. During the 2008 presidential election, the participation of young lawyers substantially increased. This is a trend that ABA Day Committee members hope to continue.

The “great thing about ABA Day is that attorneys are able to unite behind a common vision: public policy that impacts us,” said Angela Rye, the ABA Day Liaison to the ABA YLD. She told *The Affiliate* that ABA Day is an opportunity for young lawyers, regardless of political affiliation, to get involved with the legislative process. “It is a worthwhile endeavor for young lawyers,” said Rye. She explained that “participation will assist in a young lawyer’s development into an excellent attorney.”

ABA Day will contribute to a solid foundation and allow the opportunity for connections in the courtroom, offices, and the halls of Congress. If you or any of your members are interested in learning more about ABA Day, go to www.abanet.org/poladv.

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