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Presentation Paper of the New York State Bar Association

NYSBA Background

The New York State Bar Association (NYSBA), with 60,000 members, is the nation's largest voluntary statewide association of lawyers.

The NYSBA has long served a dual role as an advocate for the profession and for the public. Often it is difficult to separate these two responsibilities, but during the last few decades with the growing complexity of society and our legal system, the NYSBA's public role has gained both emphasis and breadth.

During the past decade, the Association has initiated programs addressing a wide range of public concerns; from child abuse to the problems of the elderly; from governmental corruption to the high cost of justice.

The New York State Bar Association is the statewide organization of the legal profession. It is composed principally of practicing attorneys, judges, law teachers, and many non-practicing lawyers who are business executives, government officials, court administrators and so forth. It represents practitioners in specialized areas of law, as well as affiliated, law-related organizations and groups with special interests or needs.

NYSBA History

The New York State Bar Association was formed in Albany on November 21, 1876 and one year later, by legislative act, was written into the New York State Constitution as part of Chapter 210.

The purposes of the Association are: (1) to cultivate the science of jurisprudence; (2) to promote reform in the law; (3) to facilitate the administration of justice; (4) to elevate the standard of integrity, honor, professional skill and courtesy in the legal profession; (5) to cherish and foster a spirit of collegiality among the members of the association; (6) to apply its knowledge and experience in the field of law to promote the public good; (7) to

promote and correlate the same and similar objectives in and among the bar organizations in the State of New York in the interest of the legal profession and of the public; (8) and to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States and the constitution of the State of New York.

Membership in the State Bar is open to lawyers admitted to practice and in good standing before the bar of New York as well as to members of the profession in good standing in any other state or country.

Approximately one-third of all NYSBA members, not counting law students, are 36 years of age or younger.

NYSBA Structure

House of Delegates—The control and administration of the NYSBA is vested in the House of Delegates, the decision and policy-making body of the Association. The House meets four times a year (January, April, June and November). Action taken by the House of Delegates on specific issues becomes official NYSBA policy.

At the present time, the House of Delegates is composed of 235 members. A simple representational formula allows many diverse associations of lawyers within the state to be represented in this forum.

Executive Committee—The 23-member Executive Committee has the authority to act and speak for the NYSBA, consistent with previous action of the House of Delegates, when the House is not in session.

The Executive Committee may meet from six to eight times yearly. It oversees the general operation of the Association and develops specific plans of action.

The Executive Committee is composed of the President, President-elect, Treasurer, and Secretary of the Association. In addition, there are vice-presidents from each of the twelve judicial districts in the state and six members-at-large. The immediate past president is also a member of this body. All officers are elected to serve one-year terms.

Officers—NYSBA officers are elected by the House of Delegates and include the President-elect (who automatically becomes President of the year following that of election), Secretary and Treasurer.

The President—serves for one Association year, from June 1 to May 31. The president and his or her designee is the official

spokesperson in expressing policy of the Association as determined by the House of Delegates. Unless otherwise provided, the president appoints the chairs and members of standing and special committees of the Association.

The President-Elect—serves a term of one Association year, from June 1 to May 31, chairs the House of Delegates, and performs such other duties as the president may assign, or the duties of the president, should the president become disabled and unable to perform the duties of office.

Sections, Committee and other special groups—The Association's current structure includes 23 specialized substantive law sections, and more than 60 standing, special and other committees. Many of these groups publish material dealing with their field of expertise, much of which is not available through commercial publishers. These units also sponsor conferences, seminars and institutes, monitor legislation, conduct studies and make policy recommendations to the NYSBA House of Delegates.

Sections—range in size from approximately 500 members to more than 5,000. Each section draws its membership from lawyers or judges with common professional interests. These operate much like "mini bar associations" with their own officers, dues schedule and committees. They address professional development, improvement of laws and continuing education in a variety of substantive law fields. The sections can and do have subcommittees which tackle specialized single legal issues that may be part of the overall section jurisdiction. Standing and special committees have smaller memberships, and generally focus on specific assignments or narrower issues.

Offices—The Association is headquartered at One Elk Street in Albany. The actual structure combines a new building with five 19th century townhouses, welding them together to form a single unit. The design of the building won the 1968 Progressive Architecture Design Award, as well as the American Institute of Architect's 1972 Honor Award. In 1990, an expanded and refurbished State Bar Center was rededicated. The bar's "new" 37,000 square foot home features the Gallery of the Bill of Rights, with 10 panels representing a nationally renowned artist's depiction of the Bill of Rights, and memorabilia explaining the life and times of two United States Supreme Court Justices from New York. A "corporate" museum with exhibits depicting "The Legal Heritage of New York State," illustrating the country lawyer, judicial excellence, and the public service character of the legal

profession, highlights the first floor of the renovated State Bar Center. The annual budget of the Association is approximately \$16 million. No tax dollars are used to support bar activities.

Staff—The Executive Committee appoints the Executive Director who supervises a professional and administrative staff of more than 115 employees. The staff implements decisions of the House and Executive Committee in the administration of Association affairs, assists members in carrying out their activities and expedites the dissemination of information. The staff subdivided into several functional areas, including administration, accounting, continuing legal education, law office economics and management, lawyer assistance, legislation, marketing, media services and public affairs, meeting planning and arrangements, printing, pro bono legal services and membership.

Public Education and Communication—The New York State Bar Association informs the public about legal rights, the law, courts and the legal profession through publications produced by the Department of Media Services and Public Affairs. Such as, The Courts of New York, which includes an explanation and description of the court system in New York State and the Legal Handbook for New York State Journalists.

The Association's home page on the Internet (<http://www.nysba.org>) contains useful information for the public including the full-text of selected public information pamphlets "Why you need a will," "Divorce and separation in New York State," to cite two examples; copies of recent news releases as well as an archive of past releases; the full text of reports with recommendations issued by Sections and Committees and a "click-on-the-county" map of New York State that provides information on lawyer referral services, pro bono programs, and law schools.

The bar also prepares news releases, researches background papers, drafts speeches, and produces broadcast public service announcements. The department conducts news conferences, arranges for editorial board meetings at major newspapers and background sessions for radio and television news editors. In addition, numerous media inquiries are handled monthly concerning the law, legal profession and the bar.