

February 9, 2017
Orange County Bar Association
Board of Directors Letter to Members



Dear OCBA Members:

We want to address OC Lawyer magazine's January 2017 President's Page written by Michael Baroni, the reactions OCBA has received and some of the things we are doing as a result.

While some have expressed support for Mr. Baroni – and warned us that we must stand with him – many more have told us they are disappointed, angry and frustrated about the column and the fact it was included in OC Lawyer.

The President's Page has long been an open forum for the president to share his or her views with OCBA members. Our expectation for that column has not changed; those views should relate to OCBA's mission and not to polarizing political issues.

While as lawyers we are proponents of free speech, the content was inconsistent with the OCBA's mission, unreflective of OC Lawyer magazine's purpose, and inappropriate for the OC Lawyer President's Page. The Board did not review the column prior to publishing, and the column does not represent policy or views of the Board or the OCBA.

We understand that many of you are upset and disappointed. Protocols are being put into place to prevent a repeat of this situation. We will also maintain the OCBA's focus on its mission "[t]o enhance the system of justice, to support the lawyers who serve it, and to assist the community served by it." The OCBA is equally committed to its vision statement, which reads in part: "[w]e will demand inclusivity, charity, and relevancy by and for our members as they strive for the betterment of themselves while being professionally fulfilled. Our Bar will continue to insist on promoting the integrity and honor of the legal profession while insisting on access to justice for all Orange County residents."

As you all know, the OCBA cherishes diverse membership, diverse outreach, diverse opinions, and enriching the community. Here are some steps we are taking:

First, we want to use this experience as an opportunity to come together as a Bar and assure our members that the Board remains dedicated to furthering the OCBA mission. Going forward, we will have an editorial committee review draft President's Pages prior to publication.

Second, we have reached out to our affiliate bars to hear their concerns. OCBA roundtable discussions with affiliate bar leadership will occur in February to consider next steps, such as conducting implicit bias workshops, coordinating community outreach efforts, and discussing ways the OCBA can better serve its members and affiliates.



Third, we will better communicate to our members the OCBA's important ongoing work to help vulnerable segments of our community, including:

- OCBA and its Lawyer Referral & Information Service ("LRIS") "modest means program" is providing critical immigration legal services to persons and families who do not otherwise qualify for pro-bono services;
- OCBA's diversity task force is conducting a multi-year "glass ceiling" initiative, providing diversity and inclusion seminars and partnering with the Orange County Superior Court to explore establishing a committee to examine complaints of bias in the Court system;
- OCBA-sponsored pro-bono legal services are being made available to Orange County's homeless population; and
- The OCBA's charitable arm, the Charitable Fund, is providing more than \$170,000 in grants and other resources this year to Access to Justice initiatives at the Public Law Center, Legal Aid Society, Veterans Legal Institute, UCI Saturday Academy of Law, Laura's House and others. We hope that with your support, we can keep growing this fund.

Fourth, we want to continue to listen to our members and community. You are an integral part of our Association. Your questions, comments and thoughts are always welcome. At the OCBA, we embrace diversity in every form. We want to provide more forums and opportunities for vigorous, respectful and constructive dialogue on the issues and concerns important to our legal community.

In 2016, more than 1,100 OCBA members committed their time and resources towards the OCBA's important work. That work must continue. To do that, we need you to be an active part of the OCBA.

Thank you.

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