

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Prioritizing Mental Health and Wellness in the Legal Profession

BY JULIE CAVANAUGH-BILL, PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF NEVADA

After the tragedy in Summerlin on April 8, anyone who says mental health and wellness are not germane to the practice of law are – in my book – out of touch with the realities of our profession. As attorneys, we face one of the highest levels of scrutiny in terms of societal pressures to hide any vulnerabilities or “weaknesses.”

But what is the truth? The truth is we are all human. We all have fears, personal and family issues, and times when we need support and guidance. And that is OK.

When was the last time you took a moment to reflect on the state of your well-being, and what you can do to enhance it? For lawyers more than most, it is critical to take the time to reflect on our individual and collective well-being, especially within the demanding environment of the legal profession. Mental health is a topic that’s very personal to me. This issue is close to my heart and crucial for our community’s vitality.

I am very proud of the State Bar of Nevada and the efforts it has put into providing wellness resources to licensees and members of the legal profession. Engaging in trauma sessions following the recent tragedy, I was surprised to learn that there are still many attorneys and members of the judiciary who are not aware of the state bar’s resources. Although you can find them all on the state bar’s wellness page at www.nvbar.org/for-lawyers/resources/wellbeing, I want to take a moment to list some of the most important wellness resources:

- **Therapy/Private counseling:** Three free therapy sessions – the initial inquiry and all sessions are completely confidential with no attorney or judicial identifying information – call **1-866-828-0022** or visit the wellness page for more information.
- **Substance abuse/mental health:** Call Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL) at **1-866-828-0022** for a confidential conversation about yours or a fellow attorney’s potential abuse of alcohol or other substances before the issue gets worse. The Nevada Lawyer Assistance Program (NLAP) also provides a diversion approach to some

matters of discipline if the underlying cause is substance abuse or mental health problems – it is a voluntary program that places the attorney on a path of evaluation and treatment. In both the northern and the southern state bar offices, the state bar holds weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) sessions and has information for other AA meetings in your location. Visit the wellness and LCL web pages for days and times.

- **Ethics Hotline:** Ethics counsel stands ready to answer questions regarding ethics issues (this includes conflict issues, client relationship matters, ethical billing practices and more) for all attorneys – take some stress off and call **702-382-2200** or toll free **1-800-254-2797** to get neutral, professional guidance on ethics questions you may have.
- **Ethics Advisory Opinions:** The Standing Committee on Ethics is available to review situations and issue Advisory Opinions if needed. Nevada Supreme Court Rules 222-228 govern the procedure, and requests can be made through the committee chair – contact **702-382-2200** for more information.

With respect to this important issue of *Nevada Lawyer*, please join me in expressing appreciation to the authors who provided the insightful articles featured herein. County Commissioner Justin Jones and Judge Bita Yeager’s piece on “Decriminalizing Mental Illness: Adapting the ‘Miami Model’ to Nevada” offers possible solutions to this widespread problem. Dr. Sunshine Collins provides a self-assessment quiz in her article “How Do You Measure Up? Substance (Mis)Use Among Law Professionals.” Scott M.

Abbott's contribution, "Mental Health Support for Attorneys Through the ADA," provides invaluable insights into specific requests attorneys can make to improve their work environment. And Jeffrey A. Collins' piece, "Empowering Legal Minds: Navigating Stress and Achieving Well-being in the Legal Profession," offers guidance for attorneys navigating stressful and challenging situations. Jeffrey Collins' article, in particular, further emphasizes resources available through the state bar, underlining its commitment to supporting the mental health of its members.

The legal profession is renowned for its rigor, tenacity, and unyielding dedication to justice. However, this pursuit often exacts a toll on the mental well-being of those who serve within its ranks. Long hours, high-stakes cases, and intense pressure can leave even the most resilient among us feeling overwhelmed and exhausted.

Yet, despite the prevalence of mental health challenges within our profession, there remains a lingering stigma surrounding seeking help. Too often, attorneys feel compelled to suppress their struggles, fearing that acknowledgment of vulnerability may be perceived as weakness. However, keep in mind that prioritizing your

mental health is not a sign of weakness, but rather a testament to your strength and resilience.

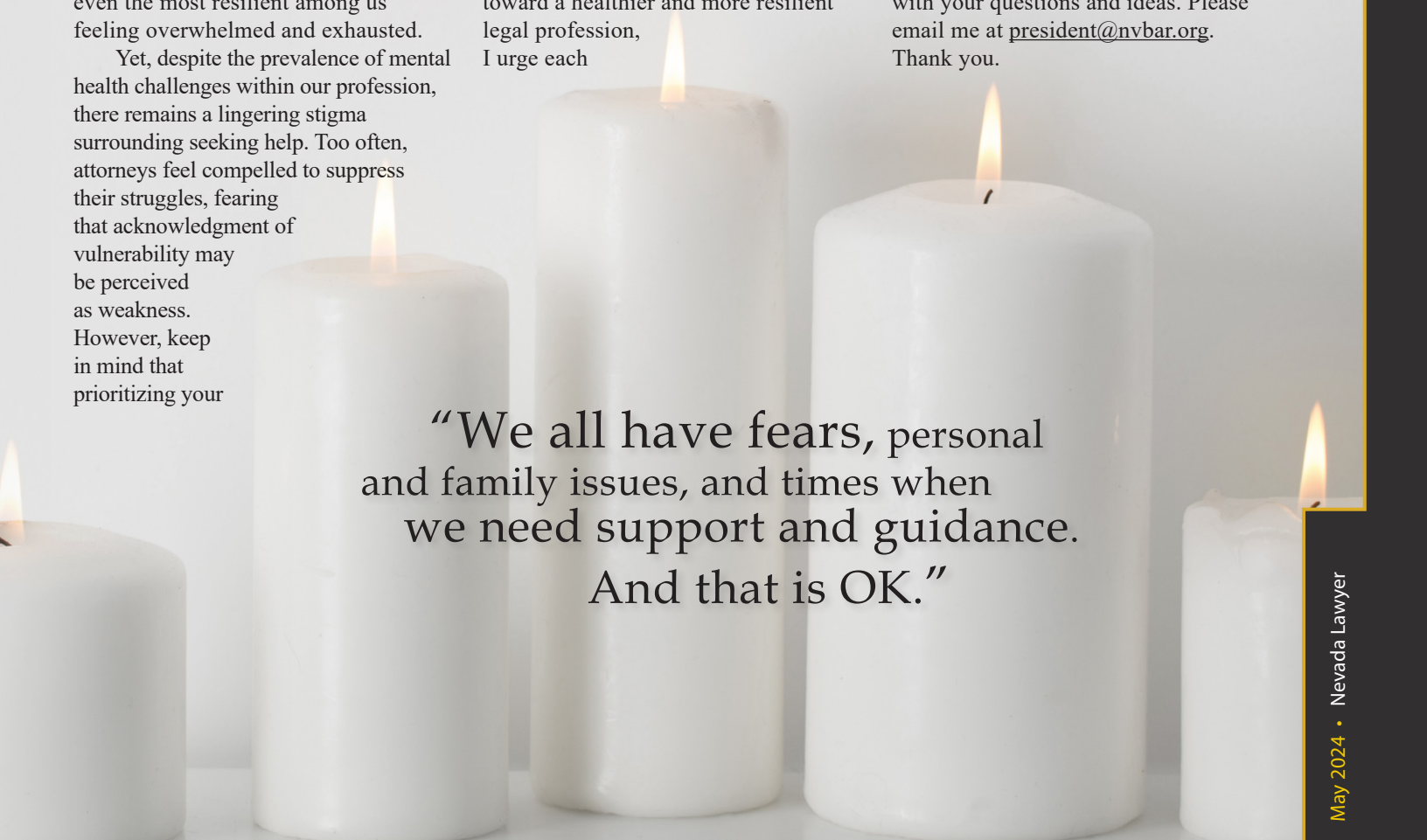
Recognizing the unique stressors faced by legal professionals, it's imperative that we foster a culture of openness, civility, and support within our community. We must dismantle the barriers that hinder individuals from seeking the assistance they need and deserve. This entails not only advocating for productive change but also fostering a supportive environment within our firms, organizations, and communities.

Dedicating yourself to practicing civil and professional behavior is a great place to start providing this support. The state bar has a Creed of Professionalism and Civility available on its website to offer guidance on how to commit yourself to this practice.

As we embark on this journey toward a healthier and more resilient legal profession, I urge each

and every one of you to prioritize your mental well-being. Whether you are seeking counseling, engaging in self-care practices, or simply reaching out to a trusted colleague, know that you are not alone. Together, we can create a future where mental health and wellness is valued and supported within the legal profession.

I extend my deepest condolences to those affected by the tragedy in Summerlin and gratitude to each of you for your unwavering dedication to the pursuit of justice and to those individuals and organizations who stepped up to provide assistance. As we continue to navigate the complexities of our profession, let us do so with compassion, empathy, and a steadfast commitment to supporting one another. As always, if you have questions about any other issue germane to our work as a state bar, I invite you to write me with your questions and ideas. Please email me at president@nvbar.org. Thank you.



"We all have fears, personal and family issues, and times when we need support and guidance. And that is OK."