

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free ...”<sup>1</sup>

BY ANN MORGAN, ESQ., PRESIDENT,  
STATE BAR OF NEVADA

**When I was president of the Washoe County Bar Association, my favorite speech was the one I gave at the naturalization ceremony. I have been told that the two best court appearances for any attorney are an adoption ceremony and a naturalization ceremony.**

I have not had the privilege of attending an adoption ceremony, but I can affirm that the naturalization ceremony is quite possibly the best hearing I have ever attended, even including the swearing-in ceremony for attorneys.

I personally know two immigrants who are now American citizens. One is an attorney who immigrated from Ireland, took and passed the New York Bar, and then was stymied in her efforts to take the Nevada Bar Exam. She was only allowed to sit for the bar when the Functional Equivalency Committee (FEC) finally agreed (but only after the deadline for taking the February bar had passed) that her five years as a licensed New York attorney as well as her Irish law school provided the relevant legal education, equivalent to that provided by an American Bar Association-accredited law school. Throughout this process, she was supported by her law firm, which kept her employed, even when it became clear that she was not going to be able to take the bar until July. Her quest to take the Nevada Bar Exam occurred simultaneously with her quest to become a legal permanent resident; indeed, she had her green card interview the day before her FEC interview and drove



requests each year to help with immigration issues. They have a dedicated team of four attorneys who help thousands of clients each year but are overwhelmed with need. They offer training and mentorship to those wishing to accept a case. If your law firm or organization has five-10 attorneys willing, they will offer a free CLE to the group (and you get CLE credit for the pro bono work itself!) For more information, please contact Mike Wendberger, the new pro bono director at Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada:

[mwendberger@lacsnc.org](mailto:mwendberger@lacsnc.org); 702-386-1429.

I also spoke with Noah Montague of Washoe Legal Services. She advises that most of their immigration matters are refugee cases. They are asked to assist between 75-100 people per year. These clients are in the U.S. as a part of a refugee program, are already vetted, and are looking for help to fill out the paperwork to become a green card holder. Washoe Legal Services also provides training to any interested attorneys. For further information, please call 775-329-2727 or see [www.washoelegalservices.org](http://www.washoelegalservices.org).

Finally, the state bar offers two hours of online CLE on Immigration 101—Family Based Immigration and Deportation defense. The seminar discusses several aspects of family-based immigration law including citizenship, adjustment of status, family-based petitions and deportability, forms of relief for people in removal proceedings, and the process in immigration court.

In Nevada, Rule 6.1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct states that each attorney licensed to practice law has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay. Attorneys are to aspire to provide a minimum of 20 hours of such legal services. This obligation can be met by providing services to those seeking to become citizens of the U.S. What better way to comply with our oath, further the administration of justice, and potentially have the opportunity to attend one of the best ceremonies available to us, than to help someone navigate the immigration system?

Here is the oath that is taken by those who have successfully passed their citizenship test (emphasis added):

all night from Reno to Las Vegas to attend the FEC interview. She succeeded in both quests and, last year, Bronagh M. Kelly of Woodburn and Wedge was named the Young Lawyer of the Year by the State Bar of Nevada.

The second immigrant I have known for more than 20 years. She immigrated from Mexico. She was helped in her quest for citizenship by my sister, also an attorney, who grilled her for hours on the questions she needed to answer for the citizenship test. My sister advises that the exercise resulted in a better understanding of our Constitution than she had following law school. My husband, the Hon. Bruce Beesley, swore our friend in at her naturalization ceremony two years ago at the National Judicial College. Our entire family was present, along with our friend's children, to celebrate the occasion.

What the now-citizen immigrants had in common was the help of attorneys.

It is difficult to get accurate statistics on how many citizenship applicants there are in Nevada or how many immigration attorneys there are in Nevada. My friend and former partner, Margo Chernysheva, an immigration attorney in Las Vegas, advises that there were more than 900,000 applications for naturalization submitted in the U.S. in 2020. See <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/reports/2020-USCIS-Statistical-Annual-Report.pdf>. Active immigration attorneys who are members of the American Immigration Lawyer Association in Nevada number approximately 100. Clearly there is a gap that needs to be filled.

Barbara Buckley, executive director of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, advises that they receive thousands of

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the armed forces of the United States when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me God.

Here is the oath I took when I became president of the State Bar of Nevada (emphasis added):

I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution and government of the United States and the Constitution and government of the United States and the Constitution and Government of the State of Nevada against all enemies, whether domestic or foreign and that I will bear true faith allegiance and loyalty to the same and that I will faithfully perform all the duties of the office of President of the Board of Governors of the State of Nevada on which I am about to enter, so help me God.

Very similar oaths.

Both oaths impose obligations in exchange for a recognition that we belong to something greater than ourselves.

So don't wait. Reach out to a legal services entity. Get trained, get inspired, get involved, and "faithfully perform" the oath you took when you became a licensed attorney in Nevada. Help someone on the path to becoming a citizen of the U.S.

**ENDNOTE:**

1. "The New Colossus" by American poet Emma Lazarus (1849-1887).



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