

The State Bar of Michigan Provides SOLACE

By Molly Ranns

For many, life moves along, some days more rapidly than others, with little thought about an unexpected event upending what one knows to be true. Imagine, then, the experience of such a perilous situation that a solution seems impossible.

Perhaps while traveling overseas a young child becomes ill and due to language barriers and insurance confusion, treatment options seem bleak. Maybe a spouse is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness and knowledge of specialists or available care options are unknown. Needing pet care while away for cancer treatment, frequent flyer miles in order to get family members across the country for a funeral, an office ramp for a recent disability — life often demands that we deal with the unexpected. While these types of personal challenges may not be difficult to imagine, the connections and resources needed to face them may be much harder to visualize — that is, unless you live in a state that provides SOLACE. SOLACE offers easy access to supportive and meaningful connections through one's own legal community.

What is SOLACE? Who does it help?

The SOLACE Program, which stands for Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel — All Concern Encouraged, was established in

Louisiana in 2002.¹ A few months after U.S. District Court Judge Jay C. Zainey took the bench, the wife of friend Mark C. Surprenant, a New Orleans attorney, suffered a brain aneurism.² Thankfully, Surprenant's wife survived, and out of this event an idea was born.³ That idea was SOLACE, and it prompted the realization that many legal professionals face challenging personal tragedies, often leaving them feeling overwhelmed and desperate. It also spurred the realization that the legal community has an abundance of compassion, resources, and connections to offer. Now, Michigan joins a growing number of bar associations to offer SOLACE to its members⁴ by providing members of Michigan's legal community with meaningful and compassionate ways to come together and help others in need due to a sudden, catastrophic illness, injury, or event.⁵ All members of the Michigan legal community are eligible to request assistance through SOLACE — judges, lawyers, court personnel, paralegals, legal assistants, legal administrators, law students, and their immediate families.⁶ The way the program works is quite simple, and its effects can be significant and potentially life changing.⁷

How does SOLACE work?

When a member of the legal community is affected by a sudden catastrophic event

or learns of a fellow member in need, they simply submit a SOLACE Request for Assistance form.⁸ Someone with the SOLACE implementation team works directly with the member in need to craft a message which will go out everyone in the legal community who has opted to receive SOLACE correspondence.⁹ Within days, hours, or even minutes, volunteers can respond by providing relief using the SOLACE@michbar.org email address.¹⁰

Imagine if 5,000 lawyers, judges, law students, legal professionals, and other stakeholders in the legal community opted in to SOLACE. If each volunteer had 10 family members or friends in his or her network of support, that's more than 50,000 people who could help in times of need.

What can I do?

We are all just one unexpected or unplanned event away from a drastic change in our lives.¹¹ If you wish to be part of SOLACE and join the rapidly growing network of members of the Michigan legal community willing to offer support, opt in to become a SOLACE volunteer.¹² It's free to join, and the help provided through SOLACE can be priceless.

Hopefully, you or your loved ones will never need SOLACE assistance. But by receiving SOLACE correspondence, you will

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witness firsthand what attorneys and those in the legal community can do for one another during times of need. These emails are a reminder that should you ever need help, it is truly one click away. If you are a member of a local or affinity bar, an employee in a law firm, or a law school student or staff member, contact SOLACE@michbar.org to find out how your organization can get involved and partner with SOLACE and be the eyes and ears for those in need.

Again, submitting a SOLACE request is free, but the potential impact of the assistance provided by members of Michigan's legal community is not only helpful but, in many cases, positively life changing. If you know someone in the legal community strug-

gling because of a catastrophic illness, injury, or event, fill out a request form on their behalf or let them know that SOLACE exists. There is no request too big or too small to provide SOLACE. During difficult times, let us come together instead of standing alone. ■



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ENDNOTES

1. Zainey, *SOLACE: More Than 5,000 Legal Professionals in the Network to Assist Colleagues*, 57 Louisiana B J 232 (2010), available at <<https://www.lsba.org/documents/Committees/SOLACEArticle5000LegalProfessionals.pdf>> [<https://perma.cc/XVQ5-LQNC>]. All websites cited in this article were accessed June 12, 2021.
2. Moran, *Source of Solace*, ABAJournal.com (December 1, 2018) <https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/solace_founder_judge_jay_zainey>.
3. *Id.* at 233-235.
4. SOLACE: *Coming Together Instead of Standing Alone*, SBM <<https://www.michbar.org/solace>> [<https://perma.cc/MXC4-ZSY9>].
5. *Id.* at "Guidelines."
6. SOLACE, Federal Bar Ass'n (2021) <<https://www.fedbar.org/about-us/outreach/solace/>> [<https://perma.cc/4J3D-6CWK>].
7. Centola, *Providing SOLACE to the Legal Community*, *The Federal Lawyer* (March 2015), p 59, available at <<https://www.lsba.org/documents/Committees/SOLACEArticleLarryCentola.pdf>> [<https://perma.cc/P3AS-C4SY>].
8. SOLACE: *Coming Together Instead of Standing Alone*.
9. *Id.*
10. *Id.*
11. Ritter, *SOLACE: A New State Bar of Texas Member Benefit for Peace of Mind*, State Bar of Texas <<https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=articles&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=41387>> [<https://perma.cc/6DA7-FRY5>].
12. <<https://www.michbar.org/solace>>.

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