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# A Message from the President and Executive Director

In the next several months you will be asked to help us shape the direction of our Bar for several years to come. We join together to ask for your input and support in that effort.

In 1936, Roberts P. Hudson said, “No organization of lawyers can long survive which has not for its primary object the protection of the public.” As a Bar, it is our charge to bring life to that noble goal. To serve others we must first focus on ourselves.

At first blush that sounds a bit self-serving. Far from it. Unless we strengthen our profession’s ability to withstand increasingly strong economic and societal challenges we will have less and less ability to serve our clients and fellow citizens well.

We must be able to adapt to changing expectations and create the tools to allow us to deal with dynamic financial and market pressures.

That goal is the heart of the Bar’s strategic plan that we have discussed in many previous *Bar Journal* articles.

It was the consistent theme you articulated during the formulation of that plan. When we asked how the Bar should change you most often said: Stay out of divisive issues and quixotic programs and focus instead on helping us at our desks. Assist members and firms with technology, law office management, legal research, and e-filing. Actively protect the public from unlicensed persons who prey on families and businesses. Help make our profession more competent, ethical, and professional, and work with law schools to start that effort earlier. Develop ways to enrich the quality of our professional lives, so that it is easier to help the public. Enhance our Justice Initiatives so they are more effective and less expensive. This advice

came not only from middle and larger-sized firms but even more from solos and government lawyers.

We have worked hard these past two years to win increased trust and support from our members and the Supreme Court. We have turned away from a path that could have made us irrelevant to the average lawyer. Today we are leaner and more focused on our core functions.

In this article we will summarize for you where we are and where we have been told by you to head. Accomplishing our goal will mean a modest dues increase after 10 years of no increases. We obviously, as a new president and executive director, wish it were not so, but the alternative is stagnation and fiscal instability. As you consider the question of a dues increase, please bear in mind our common goal: making the practice of lawyering more useful to the public and more rewarding to us.

The traditional way to justify the need for a dues increase focuses on just two questions: how long has it been, and how does the requested amount compare to other states? On both counts a dues increase in Michigan is well justified. By the next dues billing it will have been a full decade since the last dues increase, and the ABA survey on state bar association dues shows that we are

now well below the dues amounts paid by lawyers in many other states, including states with demographics most similar to ours.

But those reasons alone should not be enough to justify an increase. We have also made many changes at the State Bar to earn the respect and trust needed to justify your membership dues.

These changes start with a **new attitude of accountability and responsiveness.**

- Our Strategic Plan was not the brainchild of a State Bar president, or even of the Bar’s elected representatives. Rather, it was the product of extensive outreach to all segments of our diverse membership.
- We have acknowledged past mistakes, including ineffective oversight and management of our building renovation project, and corrected them.
- We have repudiated “spin control.”

We have a **new leadership structure and philosophy** in place.

- In addition to a new executive director whose national reputation rests upon experience in professional ethics and discipline, we have a new finance director with corporate and association business experience, and a new general counsel with extensive and respected governmental credentials.
- Non-Board members with accounting expertise have been added to the Board’s

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Finance Committee to increase the quality of our financial decisions.

- The working dialogue between our elected leadership and Bar staff has been increased and broadened.
- The management structure of State Bar staff has been streamlined and flattened.

We have **demonstrated increased competence** at every level.

- We have replaced deficit spending with balanced budgets.
- We have made difficult but necessary program changes, such as downsizing the Annual Meeting and *Bar Journal*, while preserving the features our members tell us they value most.
- We have upgraded the quality of several services, including financial reporting and analysis and section support.
- Our bylaws and policies and procedures are systematically being modernized and clarified.

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We have **broadened our outreach** to all segments of the profession, instituting regular meetings with sections, committees, the Supreme Court, law schools, and governmental agencies, and incorporating extensive use of surveys and focus groups as a regular feature of our decision-making process.

We have **refocused the public policy activity** of the Bar to areas affecting administration of justice on which there is a broad consensus of our membership, shifting from a large public policy agenda defined by Bar leadership, to a limited number of key public policy goals reflecting broad consensus.

We have **maintained the quality of our core regulatory functions** (character and fitness, ethics hotline, and UPL enforcement), while introducing popular new services such as e-Journal and continuing critical support for access to justice initiatives. But our quality and improvements cannot be sustained at current revenue levels.

We have developed the foundation to build a **new emphasis on programs most often requested by Bar members**, such as:

- New research aids
- Technology improvements, including e-filing
- Law office management help
- Coordination with law schools to provide not only traditional academic training but also in professionalism
- Coordinating with discipline system to provide not only prosecution but educational diversion programs to help lawyers serve their clients better and avoid client complaints
- Providing for proactive ways to help lawyers relate to social and economic changes
- Providing a definition of law that protects the public, distinguishing the legal profession and provides added resources to prosecute those who would practice law without a license and harm the public.

**M**any other professions, from doctors to plumbers to accountants, have higher membership dues than those that State Bar of Michigan members are required to pay. No profession today faces greater challenges from the rapidly changing economic landscape or more diverse public responsibilities. Without a Bar united in its common desire to improve our profession, those who attack us for their own special interests will control the way law is practiced, to the detriment of the public and lawyers. United, we will emerge a stronger and more relevant profession than ever. ◆