

# Nicoal Sperrazza

Redefining Leadership

BY SIET MILNE-WRIGHT

The Colorado and Denver Bar Associations welcomed Nicoal Chae Sperrazza as the new executive director and chief executive officer of both organizations this winter. Sperrazza, a seasoned attorney and respected leader in Colorado’s legal community, brings extensive experience in legal practice, management, and leadership. With this appointment, she makes history as the first woman of color, the first Millennial, and the youngest executive director to lead the CBA and DBA.

The legal profession, rooted in tradition, has long favored established networks that often excluded women and diverse voices. As bar association leadership evolves, the challenge is to increase engagement by meeting members where they are and ensuring meaningful inclusion of new perspectives. This article explores how Sperrazza is navigating these challenges and shaping the future of the CBA and DBA.

## Rebuilding a Stronger Legal Community

Historically, bar associations fostered camaraderie, but often in ways that excluded broader perspectives. With rapid changes in the digital landscape, the challenge now is to rebuild that sense of community while promoting inclusivity.

“Forging the same path that’s always been the path is clearly not in members’ interests. Our organizations are declining in membership, and that tells us we can’t just keep doing the same thing over and over,” said Sperrazza. “What attracted me to this position was not only the opportunity to get us back to basics but also the chance to chart a new way forward that excites people.”



1 Nicoal with son Eli at CBA-CLE’s Family Law Institute.

2 Passing the ceremonial gavel to current DBA President Annie Martínez.

Sperrazza’s primary objective for the associations is clear: ensuring members see real value in their membership. To her, this is a straightforward target. Membership must have tangible benefits—offering quality programs, professional opportunities, and events that matter.

As the new leader, Sperrazza aims to rebuild confidence in the associations and ensure they are something members can be proud of. She also wants new attorneys to have the same mentorship and professional development opportunities that helped her early in her career.

## Prioritizing Inclusion and Mentorship

Many assume mentorship is a one-size-fits-all solution, but Sperrazza believes authentic professional development requires multiple mentors across various spheres—practice areas, leadership, and personal identities.

“I was lucky,” she shared. “I found a lot of support from different areas of different bars, like the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Colorado, which provided different things. You need several mentors to fill different needs. I had several through APABA Colorado and the CBA.”

Her involvement in legal organizations wasn’t just about networking—it was about building meaningful relationships and creating opportunities for others. Over time, she became the person others turned to for guidance, much like her own mentors had once done for her.

Engagement with multiple bar associations helped her find community and guidance. Sperrazza is a past president of APABA Colorado and has served on the executive councils of the CBA and the CBA Young Lawyers Division.

“I created fantastic connections with people, both personally and professionally, through the bar associations,” she said. “By the time I was a 13-year practicing attorney, many of the connections and investments other attorneys made in me were through these associations.”

Her passion for mentorship and fostering community remains strong. “It’s always been important to me. Outside of running my law practice and being a single mom, I dedicated my volunteer time to these bar associations because they gave me so much throughout my professional life.”

Most important, Sperrazza is committed to leading authentically. “I applied for this position because the bar associations have always meant a lot to me. I want to ensure all attorneys, including attorneys like me—a

first-generation Korean American—have access to those same resources.”

### Dispelling Myths

Sperrazza sees misconceptions about bar associations from both new and established members. Newer attorneys may feel unwelcome among older members, while seasoned attorneys may question their place in an evolving organization.

“I say, ‘Yes, of course there’s room for you at the bar associations. You’ve dedicated significant time, resources, and volunteer leadership.’ But I also want to ask, ‘What are you doing to welcome newer attorneys?’ because our older members are an invaluable resource,” she said.

Experienced attorneys have an opportunity to help the next generation thrive, while new members can benefit from the wealth of knowledge older members offer. “It’s a two-way street,” Sperrazza added. “We all need to work together to build something stronger.”

### A Vision for Growth and Engagement

In her new role, Sperrazza is focused on expanding opportunities for members and creating a more engaged and supportive professional community.

“I want to make sure we’re providing real value,” she emphasized. “That means looking beyond traditional structures and creating more ways for people to connect, learn, and grow.”

She also plans to increase nontraditional events and programs, which have been popular with newer members. “I believe in meeting people where they are,” she said. “Not everyone engages in the same way. We need to offer a variety of events—whether it’s networking, mentorship, or community involvement.”

### Beyond Policy Statements

For Sperrazza, diversity, equity, and inclusion values aren’t stand-alone initiatives—they’re integral to every aspect of the organization’s strategy.

The CBA’s vision is to equip members with tools for professional success, a strong community, and the ability to navigate the future. The DBA is committed to advancing



1 The CBA YLD Executive Council at its annual retreat in Keystone in 2012.

2 APABA Colorado’s racing team at the 2024 Dragon Boat Festival.

equity in the legal profession and recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Sperrazza acknowledges that change isn’t easy, but authentic leadership means moving forward despite resistance.

### Professional Journey

Sperrazza began her legal career in civil litigation before expanding into family law. She has volunteered extensively with organizations like Metro Volunteer Lawyers and served in leadership roles with the CBA and DBA. Years of volunteer leadership, professional development, and dedication positioned her as the most qualified candidate for her current role.

Reflecting on her journey, she acknowledged the sacrifices that come with leadership. “What looks like success in one area often comes at a cost in another,” she shared. Balancing high-stakes trials and motherhood

wasn’t easy. Without her family’s support, it would have been nearly impossible.

Instead of shrinking to meet societal expectations, Sperrazza has learned to embrace her natural drive—a quality that has propelled her success.

### Final Thoughts

The legal profession is at a turning point. Leadership must reflect the diverse perspectives shaping today’s legal landscape. By mentoring future leaders, fostering connections, and embracing authenticity, the associations can help foster a legal community that’s stronger, more inclusive, and better prepared for the future.

As Sperrazza settles into her role, she remains focused on creating meaningful opportunities for members, expanding engagement, and ensuring the profession continues to evolve in a way that serves everyone. 