



Challenges and Opportunities

A Look at the Year Ahead

BY CHARLIE WILLMAN



This will be a challenging but exciting year for the Colorado Bar Association. The CBA will be tackling issues around membership, technology, the rule of law, legal deserts, and bylaws. We will be engaging members in new ways, providing members with new tools, and looking to members for creative ideas and programming that can help us better meet their diverse needs. And finally, we will be working to determine whether the CBA's governing structure can be modified to help us better achieve our current and future objectives and respond to what may become an existential threat to the CBA's mission and goals.

The CBA's mission, values, and vision statements¹ are central to the work of the CBA and

to my work as its president. Here are a few of the key points:

- The CBA values its diverse membership and is committed to "the eradication of racism, discrimination, and any other form of injustice against underrepresented groups."
- The CBA promotes "diversity, equity, inclusion, and the removal of barriers to success within the CBA and the communities we serve."
- The CBA is dedicated "to promoting attorneys of all backgrounds, identities, and circumstances through the removal of barriers to engagement and leadership."
- The CBA "will be the leader in providing members throughout the state with the tools to be successful, a community within which to build relationships, and the focus to successfully navigate the future."

When I began my CBA leadership service in July 2023, I quickly realized how much I needed to learn about my current and future job duties and responsibilities. I have come to realize how important the CBA is not only to its members but also to the practice of law in Colorado. I firmly believe that the CBA is the most effective tool to assist Colorado lawyers in their practices and to ensure that the legal needs of Colorado's population are properly represented. Having served on the Greater Colorado Task Force several years ago, I began to fully appreciate the extent and needs in many rural areas of Colorado.

The CBA/DBA's new executive director, Nicoal Sperrazza, is bringing fresh and innovative ideas to allow these two organizations to better assist all of our members and to make their legal careers as satisfying and enjoyable as possible.

My presidential goals are to expand on the findings and recommendations of the Greater Colorado Task Force and to begin to address the challenges of Colorado's "legal deserts." I also want to provide support for the rule of law and to task our leadership with examining the CBA bylaws with the goal of implementing a new and more transparent governing structure.

Legal Deserts

CBA Past President Kathleen Hearn Croshal made it a priority during her 2019–20 term to study potential improvements to the CBA's engagement with members who practice across Colorado. This was just one part of the REFOCUS 20/20 plan, which was developed during the CBA's strategic planning effort. The task force met beginning in January 2020 and adopted the following mission statement:

The Greater Colorado Task Force will explore the elimination of barriers to participation and engagement in CBA programs, leadership and communication for CBA members who practice outside of the Denver metropolitan area, thereby mutually improving the value and relevance of CBA membership.

The task force's report, published in June 2021, aptly summarized the issue of legal deserts in the state:

Local bar leaders and local judicial officers in some Greater Colorado locations are concerned about the declining numbers of lawyers who are practicing and living in rural Colorado. Long-time practitioners are retiring and moving away. The absence of new lawyers establishing practices in rural areas is an access to justice issue and affects the pool of judicial applicants in some jurisdictions.²

In light of these findings, there is a clear need for the CBA to support efforts and systems that address these legal deserts. We must work with local bar associations, our two law schools, and the judiciary to foster a climate that encourages law students and recent law school graduates to consider practicing or otherwise assisting clients in Colorado's legal deserts.

Nicoal Sperrazza has begun exploring the idea of reengaging the membership with an annual meeting starting in late 2026. I think this concept, and/or perhaps hosting regular in-person regional membership meetings throughout the state, could be one way to begin to address the legal desert needs in the state. Of course, these types of meetings must be financially supportable, and the CBA would need to address whether they replace the local bar visits by the CBA president or supplement those visits.

Nicoal and I will be traveling throughout the state this year to engage in these local bar meetings. Bradley Koenig is the CBA's staff lead on these visits. Members are encouraged to reach out to Bradley at bkoenig@cobar.org to schedule a presidential visit or to obtain more information about these visits.

The Rule of Law

The American Bar Association defines the rule of law as "a set of principles, or ideals, for ensuring an orderly and just society."³ As attacks on judges, lawyers, and the legal profession intensify, ABA President William R. Bay calls on the profession to "stand with the ABA, join us and support us with your voice, time and resources. Together, we are stronger. The fight to preserve our democracy is too important to stay silent."⁴

The World Justice Project (WJP), a presidential initiative of the ABA, expands on this definition, describing the rule of law as "a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers four universal principles: accountability, just law, open government, and accessible and impartial justice."⁵


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The CBA is committed to ensuring that the rule of law is upheld and has established a Rule of Law Task Force to help guide its efforts. Led by Geoff Anderson, the task force will provide recommendations to the CBA in a nonpartisan manner focusing on the Constitution and the rule of law. The task force is beginning its work, and all members can join in these efforts by filling out the application at <http://bit.ly/3G6moWr>.

CBA Bylaws

In May 2024, the CBA Board of Governors voted to create a special Bylaws Committee comprising members with experience in governance, corporate and nonprofit management, and bylaws matters. The Honorable Eric Johnson was appointed chair, but for a variety of reasons the committee has only met a few times. I have asked this committee to thoroughly examine the CBA's bylaws, and specifically its current operating structure, to determine whether the CBA would be better served with a traditional board of directors that meets on a regular basis with the executive director and CBA sections and committees to review the CBA's operations and to review and approve and make recommendations regarding operations and finances. I have also asked the committee to consider whether reducing the size of the current executive council might help it more effectively manage the CBA operations. If you have ideas or suggestions regarding the CBA Bylaws or restructuring, please feel free to reach out to me.

Transparency

The CBA and its leadership will be more transparent, and Nicoal Sperrazza and I intend to lead this effort over the next year. The CBA needs to engage with members from throughout the state. If you or someone you know would like to become more engaged, please email me at president@cobar.org. I also encourage any and all members to send me your thoughts and ideas on how the CBA can better meet the needs of its members, reduce the legal deserts in Colorado, and improve its operations. 

NOTES

1. CBA Bylaws, Appendix A, <https://www.cobar.org/Portals/COBAR/Repository/cbabylaws/CBA%20Bylaws%20Updated%20October%202024-1.pdf?ver=r3fi84FR5VmlgsW9HKQ30Q%3d%3d>.
2. *CBA Greater Colorado Task Force Report and Recommendations* (June 2021), <https://www.cobar.org/For-Members/Legal-Deserts>.
3. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/resources/rule-of-law.
4. Bay, "The Next Day," *ABA J.* (June-July 2025), <https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/the-next-day>.
5. *Id.*