

# 2023 Annual Report

**MASSACHUSETTS  
SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
LAWYER WELL-BEING**

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# Introduction

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being (Standing Committee), established in January of 2020, is charged with leading efforts to cultivate a “healthy workforce” within the legal profession. Its goals include implementing the recommendations in the final report of the original 2019 SJC Steering Committee on Lawyer Well-Being (2019 Report), which was submitted to the SJC in July 2019.



All Steering and Standing Committee reports, including its 2020, 2021, and 2022 Annual Reports are available at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/reports>.

After four years, the Standing Committee’s work has become ubiquitous throughout the Commonwealth and a national model. Members of the Standing Committee are regularly called upon to consult with other state well-being task forces and to speak at events to share the Standing Committee’s resources, initiatives and accomplishments. Standing Committee Director, Heidi Alexander, begins her term as President of the Institute for Well-Being in Law (IWIL) in January 2024, the organization that evolved from the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being which published the seminal Report “The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change.” Standing Committee member Shailini George serves on the IWIL Board of Directors and Gavin Alexander on the IWIL DEI Committee.

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Throughout 2023, the Standing Committee expanded its ongoing programs and projects while also embarking on fresh initiatives, all with a dedicated focus on actualizing the recommendations outlined in the 2019 Report. Importantly, it built upon momentum to increase awareness of the importance of well-being in the profession and reduce stigma to ensure that those who need help get help. To date, the Standing Committee has either implemented or started to implement the vast majority of the recommendations in the 2019 Report, many of which require ongoing work, and all of which require partnerships and collaborations in the profession, including with Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, the Board of Bar Overseers and the Office of Bar Counsel, the Board of Bar Examiners, the many bar associations across the Commonwealth, the Committee for Public Counsel Services, civil legal aid organizations, district attorneys' offices, law schools, and large, mid-size, and small firms.

This Annual Report focuses on the Standing Committee's priorities, highlights, and accomplishments from 2023. If you have any questions about the work of the Standing Committee or how to get involved in its efforts, contact Standing Committee Director Heidi Alexander at [Heidi@lawyerwellbeingma.org](mailto:Heidi@lawyerwellbeingma.org).

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# The Standing Committee

## Committee Leadership

In 2023, the Standing Committee was led by Mala Rafik, Partner at Rosenfeld & Rafik, P.C. and Mary Strother, General Counsel at Northeastern University. Moving into 2024, inaugural member, Christina Turgeon, Attorney at Fitzgerald Law, P.C. will join Mala Rafik as a co-chair. Mary Strother remains on the Committee as a member.

The Standing Committee's work is supported by Heidi Alexander, Director, and Sybil Gelin, Project Manager, who joined the Standing Committee in August 2023. Justice David Lowy was the Standing Committee's liaison to the SJC Justices and due to his retirement from the Court, the Standing Committee will welcome a new liaison to the Court in 2024.

## Farewell to Inaugural Committee Members

Thank you to five inaugural Standing Committee members who concluded their terms at the end of 2023: Ruth Deras (Housing Families, Inc.), Stephen Hall (Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP), Bethany Li (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund), Marc Moccia (Kazarosian Costello LLP), and Dr. Leslie Schwab (Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates). We are forever grateful for their contributions and their continued commitment to well-being in the profession.

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### Welcome to New Members

We welcome five new Standing Committee members who begin their terms January 1, 2024. Those members include, Virginia Benzan (Massachusetts Law Reform Institute), Mark Burak (Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C.), Marianne LeBlanc (Sugarman and Sugarman, P.C.), Nicole Pardo (Proskauer Rose LLP), and Payal Salsburg (Laredo & Smith, LLP). We look forward to working with each new member and benefiting from the perspectives, experiences, and expertise they bring to the Standing Committee.

### The Standing Committee

As of the end of 2023 and moving forward into 2024, the Standing Committee's members include: Gavin Alexander (Jackson Lewis P.C.), Hon. Margot Botsford (ret.), Darian Butcher (Butcher Law LLC), Jennifer Coliflores (Committee for Public Counsel Services), Shailini George (Suffolk University School of Law), Hon. Jennifer Ginsburg (Worcester District Court), Jane Goldstein (Ropes & Gray LLP), Peggie Krippendorf (Norfolk County District Attorney's Office), Denise Murphy (Rubin & Rudman LLP), Beth Myers (Burns & Levinson LLP), and Mary Strother (Northeastern University).

During 2023, the Standing Committee's work was supported by advisors, including Stacey Best, Executive Director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers Massachusetts; Kandace Kukas, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Board of Bar Examiners; Joseph Berman, General Counsel of the Board of Bar Overseers; and Rodney Dowell, Chief Bar Counsel at the Office of Bar Counsel. Richard Abati, Acting Chief Bar Counsel at the Office of Bar Counsel will transition to advisor beginning in 2024.

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# Highlights from 2023

## Advocating for Public Service Loan Forgiveness

Student debt is a major pressure faced by attorneys throughout the Commonwealth. Attorneys who pursue public service practice and are employed by a non-profit (or otherwise qualifying agency), may be eligible for loan forgiveness through the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. However, a large group of attorneys in Massachusetts, private bar advocates or counsel, who provide representation in cases in which an indigent person has a constitutional or statutory right to representation, are not eligible for loan forgiveness despite their providing the same public services for the same needy populations as attorneys employed by the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS) as well as other public service organizations.

The Standing Committee devised a strategy to pursue loan forgiveness for these attorneys, which began in 2020 with outreach to the U.S. Department of Education. In a letter, the Standing Committee along with supporting signatories requested a negotiated rule making process on PSLF to redefine qualifying public service employment more broadly to allow workers performing a statutory public service function full-time, such as public interest law services, under the direction of a qualified public service employer, such as CPCS, to participate in Public Service Loan Forgiveness. The Standing Committee worked closely with CPCS and collaborated with other local groups, including bar associations and the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, as well as national organizations including AccessLex Institute and the PSLF Coalition.

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### **Advocating for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (cont'd)**

We are thrilled to announce that due to amendments to PSLF regulations as of July 1, 2023, and based on our efforts with multiple stakeholders, CPCS private panel members are now recognized as eligible for PSLF retroactive to October 1, 2007 (the inception date of PSLF). Private panel attorneys must still meet other PSLF criteria for eligibility, including making monthly payments and working a minimum average of 30 hours per week for a public service employer. CPCS reports private attorneys have since received loan forgiveness.

CPCS developed a PSLF FAQ webpage to provide information to panel members, available at <https://www.publiccounsel.net/pc/pslf-school-loan-forgiveness-faqs>.

### **Assessing Well-Being with NORC at the University of Chicago and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers**

In 2023, NORC at the University of Chicago and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers published the results of a study examining lawyer well-being in Massachusetts and how it varied by demographics, employment characteristics, and workplace environmental factors. The impetus for this study was the recommendations in the 2019 Steering Committee Report.



## **Assessing Well-Being with NORC at the University of Chicago and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (cont'd)**

The Standing Committee provided support and input during the development of the survey and drafting of the final publication. The study also sought to understand barriers to mental health and substance use care and offer recommendations for policies and programs to improve lawyer well-being. NORC conducted a literature review, convened focus groups with lawyers in private and public sectors, and fielded a survey to all lawyers registered in Massachusetts.

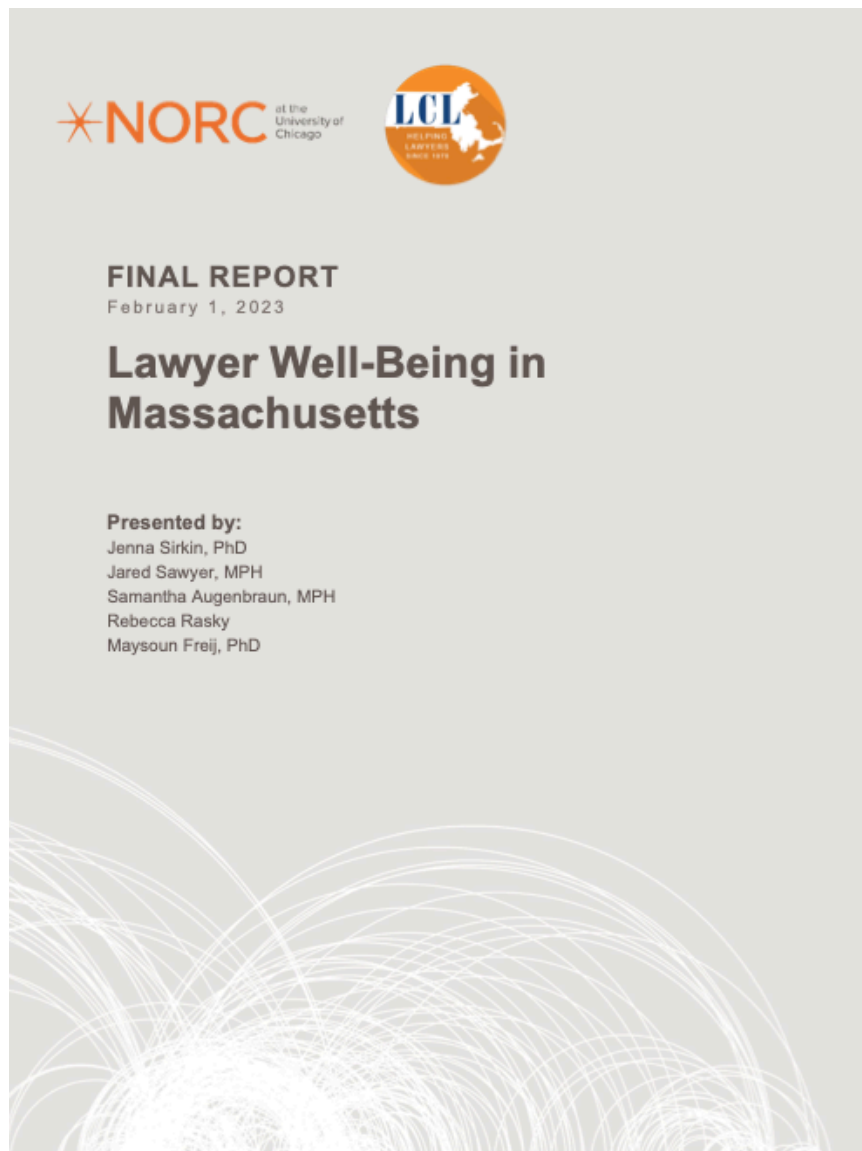
The study found that a majority of Massachusetts lawyers (77%) reported burnout from their work and also identified high rates of anxiety (26%), depression (21%), suicidal ideation (7%), and unhealthy alcohol use (42%). Differences in well-being outcomes varied by demographics; attorneys from marginalized groups had high rates of burnout, anxiety, and depression. However, the survey also identified that a majority of Massachusetts lawyers reported overall satisfaction with their lives (66%).

Analysis of survey findings found an alarming gap between lawyers who reported anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and hazardous or unhealthy alcohol use and those who sought care. In addition, there were strong associations between experiencing bias, harassment, and discrimination in the workplace and experiencing vicarious trauma through legal work with poor well-being outcomes. Lawyers who have supportive work environments benefited from protective factors, such as being treated with kindness and respect by colleagues, positive supervisor relationships, supportive colleagues, schedule flexibility, time to recharge, access to mentorship, and opportunities for promotion.

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## **Assessing Well-Being with NORC at the University of Chicago and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (cont'd)**

Since the report's release in February 2023, the Standing Committee, NORC, and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers have been disseminating the work to interested , bar associations, firms, government agencies, and well-being committees in Massachusetts through presentations, discussions, and listening sessions. The report findings and these discussions will inform the current needs and future efforts.



### Expanding Mentorship Programs and Resources

In 2021, after conducting a pilot program and evaluating existing mentorship programs, the Standing Committee launched its Statewide Attorney Mentoring Program. Each year, we conduct a program evaluation and make corresponding program enhancements. As a result of enhancements and additional program advertising, the program has grown to over 50 mentors and reached nearly 300 potential mentees.

In 2023, we conducted a full program review and devised a strategic plan to grow the program. We recognize that mentorship is essential in helping lawyers to address challenges and thrive in practice, particularly new lawyers, solo and small firm lawyers, first generation lawyers, lawyers from underrepresented groups, and lawyers in transition. The Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program offers a unique opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of the legal field, gain knowledge and perspective, build confidence, refine skills, and establish meaningful connections.

The strategic plan for the Attorney Mentoring Program addresses communication with mentors and mentees; program expectations, guidelines, and timelines; mentor training; a resource library; ongoing program evaluation; program awareness (including materials at swearing in ceremonies); and staffing.

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### Expanding Mentorship Programs and Resources (cont'd)

Beginning in 2024, mentors must complete an annual training tackling topics including best practices for mentoring, supporting attorney well-being, and understanding identities, provided by experienced mentors, professionals at Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, and leaders of the Massachusetts Affinity Bar Associations.

The newly revised program provides two mentorship options for attorneys in Massachusetts seeking advice, guidance, or support in the legal profession:

#### ***Attorney Connect***

Attorney Connect is a self-matching system enabling mentees to connect with multiple mentors for single meetings, providing a variety of contacts and diverse perspectives and opportunities for learning. Attorneys engage in one-hour meetings with their mentor; formulate short and long-term goals; engage in active listening and conclude with meeting summaries; and devise follow up actions.

#### ***Mentor Connect***

Mentor Connect pairs mentees with a single mentor for six sessions and the opportunity for deeper professional development and personal growth. Attorneys sketch out a plan for the six meetings to meet the mentee's overall and specific goals; aim to go deeper into issues of professional development and personal growth, including well-being, stress management, identity, and bias; summarize goals and progress; and determine any follow up actions.

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Here's what attorneys have said about the program to-date:

*"This mentoring program provided me with meaningful advice, excellent connections, and personal growth."*

*"As a mentor, this program was rewarding to me because I could share what I've learned and offer support in any way I can."*

*"My mentor helped me understand the formalities and customs of being a lawyer in MA."*

*"I learned a lot about networking and setting up a solo practice."*

*"It was great to have someone to talk to from outside my firm."*

The Standing Committee developed a website for the Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program, available at <https://www.attorneymentoringma.org>.

Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program [Home](#) [Resources](#) [Sign Up](#)

## Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program

Administered by the SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being

**2024 Program Registration Now Open for Mentees!**

All attorneys licensed in Massachusetts are eligible to join at no cost.

[Overview](#) [Guidelines](#) [Sign Up](#)

### About the Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program

The Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program provides two mentorship options for attorneys in Massachusetts seeking advice, guidance, or support in the legal profession. Mentors introduce new attorneys to the practice of law in Massachusetts and pair up with peers at any point in their career to address challenges and help them thrive. Our programs offer a unique opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of the legal field, gain knowledge and perspective, build confidence, refine skills, and establish meaningful connections. Mentors attend annual training to enhance their skills and keep current.

[Attorney Connect](#) ▼

[Mentor Connect](#) ▼

### **Improving the Well-Being of Lawyers from Underrepresented and Historically Excluded Population**

The Standing Committee continues to prioritize improving the well-being of lawyers from underrepresented, historically excluded, and systemically oppressed populations, as it provides in its DEI Statement. The Standing Committee collaborated with the Affinity Bar Associations and over 50 volunteer attorneys to develop a robust set of proposals to address the harmful experiences highlighted in the 2021 Report Summarizing Affinity Bar Town Hall Meetings. The proposals, set to be released by the Massachusetts Affinity Bar Associations, will provide specific ideas for Small and Medium-Sized Law Firms; Large Law Firms; Private In-House Legal Departments; and Public Agency and Non-Profit Legal Services Organizations. The Standing Committee provides up-to-date DEI resources on its website at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/dei-resources>.

### **Integrating Well-Being and Wellness into Judicial Conferences and Educational Programs**

The Standing Committee continues to address specific recommendations in the 2019 Steering Committee Report to support judges. In 2023, its Judicial Well-Being Subcommittee, composed of judges from the Appeals Court, Superior Court, District Court, Housing Court, Juvenile Court, Land Court, Probate and Family Court, Boston Municipal Court, and a retired member of the Supreme Judicial Court, focused on integrating well-being and wellness programming and content into judicial conferences and trainings.

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### **Integrating Well-Being and Wellness into Judicial Conferences and Educational Programs (cont'd)**

As a result, multiple programs in numerous courts were conducted across the Commonwealth, as well as weaving well-being into new judge training, mentor judge training, and programs and resources with the Flaschner Institute. The Standing Committee also encouraged and supported bench-bar discussions by collaborating with courts and bar associations to improve the culture of the courtroom and ease stress on judges, court staff, and attorneys.

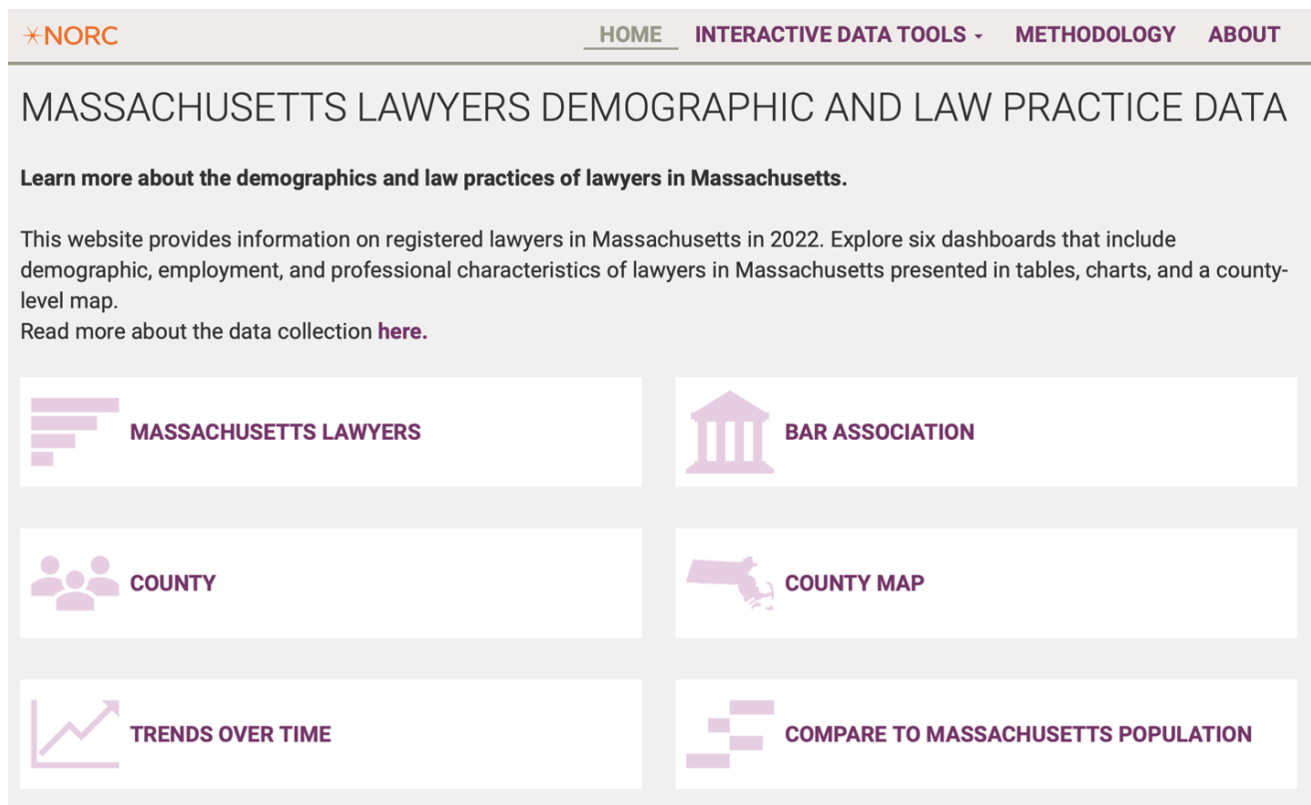
### **Launching an Interactive Demographic Data Tool**

Beginning in 2020, the SJC amended Rule 4:02 to include a requirement that attorneys complete a demographic and law practice survey, the results of which are used solely for the purpose of developing services and programs to aid lawyers. As a result, we now have a better understanding of the current diversity of attorneys and legal professionals in the Commonwealth with respect to race, origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, employment status, location, practice area, bar association affiliation, and other important factors. In 2023, the Standing Committee developed and launched an interactive data tool for the public to explore the demographic and professional characteristics of the Massachusetts legal community.

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## **Launching an Interactive Demographic Data Tool (cont'd)**

The interactive data tool allows users to explore data for groups of interest using drop-down menus and filter lists. Sorting criteria includes personal characteristics, employment characteristics, and practice area, and further by bar association, county, trends over time, and comparison to the Massachusetts population. In addition to this data tool, the Standing Committee plans to produce a report every five years to provide a current snapshot of demographics as well as insights and analyses of changes in demographics over time. The data tool as well as an explanation of the purpose of Rule 4:02 and history of data collection is available at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/lawyer-census>.



**NORC**      [HOME](#)   [INTERACTIVE DATA TOOLS](#) -   [METHODOLOGY](#)   [ABOUT](#)

## MASSACHUSETTS LAWYERS DEMOGRAPHIC AND LAW PRACTICE DATA

Learn more about the demographics and law practices of lawyers in Massachusetts.

This website provides information on registered lawyers in Massachusetts in 2022. Explore six dashboards that include demographic, employment, and professional characteristics of lawyers in Massachusetts presented in tables, charts, and a county-level map. Read more about the data collection [here](#).

- MASSACHUSETTS LAWYERS
- BAR ASSOCIATION
- COUNTY
- COUNTY MAP
- TRENDS OVER TIME
- COMPARE TO MASSACHUSETTS POPULATION



### Supporting Law Student Well-Being

In 2023, the Standing Committee's Legal Education Subcommittee was chaired by Suffolk University Law Professor Shailini George (a Standing Committee member) and Attorney Hannah Jellinek Black. This Subcommittee, whose members represent each of the nine Massachusetts law schools and include staff, faculty, and administrators as well as law students, works with the Standing Committee to improve well-being for law students and help prepare students to thrive in the profession.

With amendments to ABA law school accreditation standards that now require incorporation of well-being as part of professional identity formation, as well as education on bias, cross-cultural competency, and racism, we had a great opportunity to expand our work in law schools and focus on well-being. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Bar Association and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, we led 1L orientation programs in nearly all the Massachusetts law schools. These programs introduce new law students to important resources, provide perspective and encouragement from practicing lawyers, and demonstrate the commitment from the SJC and leaders in the legal community to supporting law students and their development to thriving lawyers.

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### Supporting Law Student Well-Being (cont'd)

During the year, we were called upon numerous times to guest lecture in law school classes and also presented to law school faculty members. The Subcommittee continues to update and disseminate the Law School Well-Being Guides – one for students and one for faculty, staff, and administrators – first produced in 2021. At the end of 2023, the Subcommittee began making plans for the first annual Law School Well-Being Summit, which will take place on April 26th at Suffolk University Law School and will draw educators from across New England to address the critical importance and impact of legal education in helping prepare future lawyers to thrive in the profession.



More information about the Summit and Subcommittee projects is available at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/law-student-wellbeing>.



Friday, April 26, 2024, from 8:30AM to 12:30PM

Hosted by Suffolk University Law School

## JOIN US FOR:

- Fireside chat with Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers
- Conversations about critical well-being topics in law school
- Networking among colleagues and members of the

Massachusetts bar

## SAVE THE DATE!

For more information, visit:



Organized by the SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being's Legal Education Subcommittee  
<https://lawyerwellbeingma.org>

# Additional and Ongoing Projects, Collaborations, and Resources

The Standing Committee continues to prioritize increasing awareness of well-being research, resources, training and support and to reducing stigma around mental health, well-being, and utilization of resources and support. Additional resources, programs, and efforts are listed below:

## **Online Resources:**

Website: [www.lawyerwellbeingma.org](http://www.lawyerwellbeingma.org)

DEI Resources: <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/dei-resources>

Monthly eNewsletter: <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/newsletter-archives>

News, Reports, Research: <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/research-reports-news>

Social Media: Instagram @lawyerwellbeing

## **Bar Association, Community, and Organization Collaboration:**

- Host quarterly bar leader meetings
  - Support existing bar association well-being committees and efforts, help form new bar association and organizational well-being committees, assist efforts to expand bench-bar communications
  - Participate on the Massachusetts Trial Court Trauma Response Task Force; projects include developing a crisis response system to respond to traumatic incidents impacting Trial Court staff and related individuals, including the general public using the court, defendants/litigants, and lawyers; and disseminating information and training to build, strengthen and sustain capacity of Trial Court staff to understand, recognize and effectively respond to trauma, and prevent retraumatization
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# Additional and Ongoing Projects, Collaborations, and Resources

## **Financial Well-Being & Health Insurance:**

- Address financial pressures affecting lawyer well-being, particularly among solo and small firms (the organizational structure in which the majority of practicing attorneys in the Commonwealth practice law)
- Provide financial education and coaching resources in partnership with AccessLex, available at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/financial-well-being>
- Provide a customized resource to simplify and customize access to health and dental insurance, including potential rebates and credits, in partnership with the Massachusetts Health Connector, available at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/health-insurance>

## **Legal Well-Being Network:**

- Host regular meetings with legal professionals in Massachusetts to share best practices, ideas, challenges, and vision to improve lawyer well-being.
- Recordings of past meetings and resources are available at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/legal-wellbeing-network>

## **Management Training:**

- Conclude and report on pilot management and supervisor training programs with attorneys at Greater Boston Legal Services focused on basic management skills to equip supervisors with tools to create a supportive and effective work environment for themselves and the people they supervise
  - Expected program expansion to additional legal aid providers in Massachusetts in 2024
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# Additional and Ongoing Projects, Collaborations, and Resources

## National Connections:

- Participate in regular State Task Force Meetings with representatives across the country through the national Institute for Well-Being in Law (IWIL)
- Collaborate with national organizations including IWIL, the American Bar Association, AccessLex and PSLF Coalition on relevant policy initiatives and resources

## Well-Being Week in Law:

- Celebrate Well-Being Week in Law, May 1-5, 2023, in collaboration with nearly all bar associations in Massachusetts as well as Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, the Institute for Well-Being in Law, Mindfulness in Law Society, and legal employers across the state
- Lead efforts to expand awareness of Well-Being Week in Law, including organizing community connection breakfasts throughout the Commonwealth in partnership with local organizations, as well as other programs



[www.lawyerwellbeingma.org](http://www.lawyerwellbeingma.org)