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By Kathy B. Weinman

The BBA Public Interest Leadership Program: Cultivating the Next Generation of Lawyer Citizens



In January 2002, Judge Mark L. Wolf of the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts wrote to then-Boston Bar Association President Michael Keating with a powerful idea: Why not create a BBA program for new lawyers to meet regularly, among other things, to plan and work on public interest projects together? Judge Wolf's suggestion addressed two concerns they had discussed: First, the long tradition of lawyers working together

as leaders in their communities appeared to be diminishing. Second, former law clerks in private practice regularly told Judge Wolf they were unhappy with careers focused solely on legal work.

Later that year, René Landers, a professor at Suffolk Law School, and John Nadas, co-managing partner of Choate, Hall & Stewart, led a special Task Force on Young Lawyers and Public Interest Opportunities, which culminated in the creation of the Public Interest Leadership Program, or PILP, a signature program of the BBA. In announcing PILP in 2003, then-BBA President Joseph Kociubes stated, "[t]his Program is based upon the premise that there is no incompatibility between the leadership role of a lawyer in his or her community and a commitment to an active practice." As described by Landers, "[i]n addition to strengthening their leadership skills, the Public Interest Leaders will also develop the type of relationships uniquely associated with collaborative endeavors for the benefit of the profession and the larger community."

Now in its sixth year, PILP is one of the BBA's most successful and significant programs. New PILP leaders with ten years or less in practice are selected each year among those nominated by their law firms and other legal organizations. With the full support of their employers, they serve for one year, committing up to 25 hours a month to roundtable discussions with state and local public officials, leaders of legal services organizations, federal and state judges, and others; pro bono and public interest activities in housing and probate courts, Boston public schools and other settings; and programs organized by them to educate other lawyers about public interest opportunities such as "All Politics Is Local: How Lawyers Serve Their Communities Through Political Engagement."

Leiha Macauley, a trusts and estates lawyer at Day Pitney LLP, was nominated by the partners at her firm to join the very first PILP class in 2003-2004. She calls PILP "the best thing for a young lawyer." Macauley learned about the public interest landscape in Boston and was supported by other PILP leaders and the BBA in her desire to give back to the community. Particularly important to Macauley was the relationship the PILP 1 group developed with the Family Advocacy Program

(now the Medical-Legal Partnership for Children) at the Boston Medical Center, which addresses the legal problems of patients that undermine their good health and well-being. After her year in PILP, Macauley developed and now co-directs the Children Health Advocacy Partnership, a venture of Day Pitney and the East Boston Community Health Center. Under Macauley's leadership, Day Pitney lawyers conduct legal clinics at the health center, where they advise and advocate on behalf of low-income patients who face legal obstacles to meeting their basic needs.

PILP leaders successfully integrate public service with their legal careers. A few examples:

- Essence McGill Arzu, a business lawyer at Foley Hoag LLP, was new to the City of Boston when she joined PILP. She now volunteers for the Citizens Schools' 8th Grade Academy at her firm and serves on the boards of the Big Sister Organization of Greater Boston, the Boston Dance Alliance, the Celebrity Series, and the Harvard Club of Boston.
- Christopher Strang, a litigator at Corwin & Corwin LLP, a member of PILP 5, is establishing a pro bono mentoring program at Boston University, which pairs law school alumni with law students to work on pro bono cases, has recruited subsequent PILP leaders, and contributes actively to the BBA's New Lawyer Section.
- Susan Abbott, now a partner at Goodwin Procter LLP, often counsels non-profit organizations without charge. During her year in PILP, she organized a popular program for lawyers called "Charitable Board Service: What You Need To Know and How To Get Started," which now takes place annually and features a Board Matching Fair.
- Assistant Attorney General Randall Ravitz drew on his PILP experience in prominent leadership positions at the BBA – as co-chair of the successful Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Section and co-chair of the Litigation Section's Public Policy Committee.

PILP works. The program cultivates the next generation of civic leaders committed to tackling the problems of our community. It helps new lawyers combine idealism with legal practice for satisfying professional careers. It teaches leadership skills, which are essential to lawyering of all kinds. And it has created a network of like-minded attorneys across firms and legal organizations for professional and personal development and support. This year, organizations such as Wilmer-Hale, Greater Boston Legal Services, the City of Boston, Mintz Levin, Skadden, Health Law Advocates, Dwyer & Collora, and McDermott Will & Emery are sponsoring Public Interest Leaders. Next year what about yours? ■