

Stronger Together

One of the best things about being a part of the State Bar, a longstanding advocate for justice, is knowing that I am participating in something that is much bigger than me, and something that will keep going long after I am gone.

BY RYAN M. BILLINGS

As I approach the final two months of my tenure as president of the State Bar of Wisconsin, I have been thinking a lot about temporariness and permanence. I will soon be completing my one year in office; the State Bar will soon be celebrating its 150th anniversary. There is little question that a whirlwind 12 months as president qualifies as temporary, while 150 years with no end in sight approaches concepts of permanence. Presidents come and go, but the State Bar endures. And that is one source of its power.

A lawyer can seek to promote access to justice during their career; only an institution can do so indefinitely. And the many, many thousands of people who have worked, volunteered, or otherwise served the State Bar in the past 150 years have collectively accomplished things that no single human being could seek to match. Over time, the State Bar outshines us all. Just looking at recent history, the State Bar has successfully lobbied to:

- Increase compensation for state public defenders and private attorneys taking public defender cases.
- Pass legislation to protect judicial security.
- Simplify the process for legal separations and expand opportunities to modify custody and placement agreements.
- Reform and update Wisconsin's business entity laws.
- End the process of indiscriminate juvenile shackling.

And that's just picking five examples from the past few years. Each of these success stories involved years of labor, piled on by many more years of collective efforts to improve the practice of law in Wisconsin. The State Bar might strike out on certain efforts in some years, but it is always back the next year, and the next, and the next after that. A task might seem

impossible to achieve in one year, but over the course of a century and a half nearly anything can be accomplished. You just have to keep trying, and the State Bar offers a vehicle to keep trying forever.

I anticipate with wonder and hope what the State Bar will accomplish in its next 150 years. If we maintain our heading with steadfast resolution, the possibilities are limited only by our collective imagination.

One of the best things about being a part of such a longstanding advocate for justice is knowing that I am participating in something that is much, much bigger than me and something that will keep going long after I am gone. My hand will soon leave the wheel to be replaced by another; this has happened 68 times before in the State Bar's nearly 150-year history. I anticipate with wonder and hope what the State Bar will accomplish in its next 150 years. If we maintain our heading with steadfast resolution, the possibilities are limited only by our collective imagination. **WL**



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