

Making a **Difference** in Our Community

Merri A. Baldwin

We are nearing the end of an eventful year. Collectively, we at The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) and the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC) have done so much, but there is no end in sight. In my last column of the year, I want to celebrate our successes and the great work we have done, and encourage us all to stay the course as we move forward. We are making a tangible difference in our community.



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Thanks to all those who contributed time (and money) to JDC and its clients. The numbers give an indication of the impact: 1,683 attorneys, paralegals and law students volunteered this past year, donating more than 45,000 hours of their time. In addition, the legal community donated more than \$6 million to JDC last year. Altogether, the value of legal services provided to the community through JDC exceeded \$20 million.

But more than the numbers, our success is about providing access to justice for real people with very real problems, who have very few options and even fewer resources to find or retain an attorney. Thanks to the dedicated and talented JDC staff attorneys and paralegals, and to all the lawyers, and law firm and in-house staff who assisted our JDC clients. I am personally looking forward to having more time next year to devote to JDC client representation, and I welcome all new and returning volunteers to join me in providing pro bono services.

In 2017, BASF and JDC helped mobilize significant resources to address immigration issues including the representation and defense of detained persons, who face deportation under very difficult circumstances. Thanks too to the members of the Immigration Task Force, formed this year, to help provide expert resources and input to help shape JDC's immigration work, as well as provide community resources and assist in preparing the organizations' public statements and policy development. These members include Khaldoun Baghdadi, Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Schoenberger; Christine Brigagliano, Van der Hout, Brigagliano & Nightingale; Doris Cheng, Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Schoenberger; Alicia Gámez, Law Office of Alicia M. Gámez; Bill Ong Hing, University of San Francisco School of Law; Sebastian Kaplan, Gerard Fox Law; Chris Kearney, Keeker Van Nest & Peters; Vid

Prabhakaran, Davis Wright Tremaine; Tony Schoenberg, Farella Braun + Martel; and Jayashri Srikantiah, Stanford Law School. Along with me as task force chair, the following BASF/JDC staff complete the group: Yolanda Jackson, BASF/JDC executive director; Carole Conn, public service programs director; and Avantika Shastri, legal director, San Francisco Immigrant Legal Defense Collaborative.

Further thanks are due to the staff, volunteers and donors who make our diversity pipeline programs thrive. This year, we provided four impressive young people with new law school scholarships; provided high school students with assistance in learning about and applying to college through our School-To-College program; and opened doors of opportunity with Mock Trial and Law Academy. I personally thank all who participated in our inaugural debate-training program at the Juvenile Justice Center, and I am committed to seeing us continue that program in collaboration with Bay Area Urban Debate League.

We have a deep bench at BASF and JDC. There are so many other ways that our members and volunteers contribute. The

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

boards of directors of BASF, JDC, and the Barristers Club are made up of talented and committed professionals who are working to improve our profession and community. I appreciate all of the hard work of my fellow officers: Malcolm Heinicke, Munger, Tolles & Olson; Doris Cheng, Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Schoenberger; and Stuart Plunkett, Baker Botts. I look forward to supporting the great work they will do as we move forward. BASF's sections and committees create a vibrant legal community and foster meaningful relationships among our members and the larger legal and judicial communities.

So there is much to celebrate and recognize. But we cannot lose sight of the challenges ahead for all these programs and efforts, especially those that serve the vulnerable members of our community. I want to highlight one issue in particular. The San Francisco Superior Court experienced a \$5.3 million budget gap this year, and the shortfall is projected to be even higher next year. Court staff was furloughed and judges voluntarily gave up salary. These sacrifices are not sustainable, and we will almost certainly see a decrease

in court services and programs. These cuts affect the very ability of the courts to effect justice and will impact all litigants. BASF will work with the court as well as other organizations to both try to leverage more funding as well as do what we can to minimize the impact of the cuts. But this issue won't go away.

I have been honored to serve as president of BASF and JDC this year. The experience has only magnified the respect I have for this great institution, and I am not going away. See you out there.

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