

A HEARING ON CAPITOL HILL

ABA Day Offers the Profession a Chance to Make its Case Before Congress

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AS THE NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE of the legal profession, the American Bar Association is actively involved in public policy discussion and advocacy before Congress, the executive branch and other governmental bodies on issues and legislation that directly affect lawyers and the administration of justice. Spearheading this activity is the ABA Governmental Affairs Office based in Washington, D.C.

The ABA lobbies on more than 100 issues in each session of Congress, and these efforts have been highly successful. We have consistently achieved an 85 percent or higher success rate each year in our legislative advocacy, despite the fact that the ABA is a nonpartisan organization, does not endorse candidates and does not make political campaign contributions. An essential part of the association's legislative program is our annual ABA Day in Washington.

ABA Day—co-sponsored this year by the Section Officers Conference and the Young Lawyers Division along with the National Conference of Bar Presidents and the National Association of Bar Executives—provides an opportunity for organized-bar representatives to meet with members of Congress and address issues vital to the justice system. This year's hugely successful ninth annual program, chaired by ABA President-elect nominee Karen J. Mathis, saw a record number of more than 250 bar leaders converge on Capitol Hill in late April.

Attendees participated in more than 250 meetings with members of Congress and their staffs. Awards were presented to Reps. Frank R. Wolf, R-Va., and José E. Serrano, D-N.Y., for their efforts to improve the American justice system as chairman and ranking minority member, respectively, of the House Appropriations subcommittee that provides funding for programs such as

the Legal Services Corp., as well as the federal judiciary and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

This year's ABA Day targeted three primary issues: funding for the LSC, federal pre-emption of state medical malpractice laws, and student loan forgiveness for public interest attorneys. In addition, the GAO offered consultation on several other issues, including bankruptcy reform, immigration, the Lawsuit Abuse Reduction Act and funding for the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program.

ABA Day provides important support for the association's lobbying efforts by encouraging bar leaders to be direct advocates for the profession and the justice system before members of Congress. Hearing from lawyers—who implement and work with enacted laws and regulations every day—enables elected officials to more clearly appreciate the impact of their decisions.

AN IMPRESSIVE LINEUP

TO PROMOTE THE MOST EFFECTIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN participants and members of Congress, ABA Day offers a superb lineup of activities. These include an interactive lobbying session for legislative newcomers on current issues and how to most successfully present them; an in-depth analysis of three key focus issues for the session; assistance for participants in arranging visits with as many members of their congressional delegations as time permits; advice on developing and maintaining relationships with elected officials; and an opportunity for participants, on a first-come, first-served basis, to be admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court. Attendees also receive briefings from congressional leaders on their legislative agendas for the upcoming Congress and on the issues they see as key for the organized bar.

To ensure broad nationwide participation, the GAO conducts targeted outreach to state and local bar associations in advance of the meeting. On-site, the GAO assists participants in setting specific issue-oriented meetings in such areas as criminal justice, patent law and family law. This year, for example, meetings were arranged for 11 members of the Intellectual Property Law Section with the chairman and ranking

member of the House subcommittee on intellectual property and with key House and Senate staff members.

Participating in ABA Day is one of the best ways to keep the channels of communication open with members of Congress, executive branch officials and their staffs, and to learn how to effect change in the legislative arena. Save the dates—May 3-4, 2006—and plan to participate in the next ABA Day in Washington.

For more information, contact Julie M. Strandlie, the outstanding staff director of ABA Day, at 202-662-1764 or via e-mail at strandlj@staff.abanet.org. ■

*The
ABA is
actively
engaged in the
national debate
on public policy.*

