

Wyoming State Bar Board of Officers & Commissioners Meeting

June 21, 2024

Via Zoom

In Attendance: Anna M. Reeves Olson, President; Erin E. Weisman, President-Elect; James T. Whiting, Vice President; Kelly M. Neville, Treasurer; Stefanie L. Boster, First Judicial District Commissioner; Dona Playton, Second Judicial District Commissioner; Jason Petri, Third Judicial District Commissioner; Jennifer L. Kirk, Fifth Judicial District Commissioner; Alison O. Gee, Sixth Judicial District Commissioner; P. Craig Silva, Seventh Judicial District Commissioner; Shawn G. Wilde, Eighth Judicial District Commissioner; Clayton M. Melinkovich, Ninth Judicial District Commissioner; Sharon Wilkinson, Executive Director; Mark W. Gifford, Bar Counsel, and Cathy Duncil, Admissions Director

Absent: Christopher H. Hawks, Immediate Past President; Kevin K. Kessner, Fourth Judicial District Commissioner and John P. Fritz, Chair, Young Lawyer Section

President Anna M. Reeves Olson convened the meeting at 12:33 p.m. on Friday, June 21, 2024.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Commissioner Alison Gee made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Vice President James Whiting seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Admissions

Cathy Duncil reported that she has 54 applicants that will sit for the July bar exam, which will take place July 30-31, 2024, in Laramie. She reminded the Board that at the last meeting, she shared that the Character and Fitness Committee had a hearing with an applicant and the staff was awaiting the Committee's decision. She shared that the Committee chose to deny this particular applicant. The applicant had 30 days to appeal to the Supreme Court, but the 30th day was yesterday and the Court did not hear from the applicant. Ms. Duncil reported that there was another hearing before the Committee last month, so she expects the Committee will render its decision next month.

Cathy Duncil shared that the number of exam takers is steadily declining. She reported that in years past, a typical number for July was around 75. Commissioner Craig Silva asked if this was a national trend. Ms. Duncil was not sure.

Office of Bar Counsel Report

Mark Gifford shared that his office has received 74 complaints so far this year, which puts them on pace for more than they typically see in a year. He reported that there is a recommendation for disbarment currently pending at the Supreme Court.

Mr. Gifford reported that in the disciplinary matter pertaining to Andrea Richard, the Review and Oversight Committee has retained two lawyers to take on the matter. He shared that his office is staying as far away from this issue as possible.

Mr. Gifford reported that his office has a matter in formal charge and they anticipate a December hearing. He shared that overall, his office is very busy.

2023-2025 Strategic Plan Progress Report

Executive Director Sharon Wilkinson walked the Board through the progress report. She shared her screen on Zoom to display the Chronus mentorship dashboard and reported that there are currently 33 ongoing mentoring connections. With a total of 51 mentors, she still has plenty of mentors to choose from as more young lawyers join the program.

She asked the Board members who were currently in mentoring connections to share any feedback. Common feedback was that they got a slow start due to the fact that the emails coming from the platform ended up in their spam folders.

Executive Director Wilkinson shared that the staff continues to work with Gannett Peak on the website refresh and the plan is to launch in August.

Treasurer Kelly Neville reported that there was a bit of confusion with the University of Wyoming Foundation about how much of the law school endowment money would be available this summer. She reported that we have matched a law student with a lawyer in Moorcroft. Treasurer Neville touched base with the lawyer recently and learned that it is a great fit and things are going well.

Treasurer Neville reported that she and Professor Alan Romero spoke at the National Center for State Courts Western States Rural Practice Conference last month. She shared that it was a bit disheartening having to report on Wyoming's failed legislative bill while the other states were reporting on the success of theirs.

Treasurer Neville shared that prior to the conference, they gathered data from the participating states to do Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, which also included some census data. She indicated that the results are interesting to review, as they display internet availability around the state as well as some income data. She reported that there is also a group working with Judge Kaste in Uinta County to possibly do a pilot program with some other funding. They recently learned about a federal government grant that is potentially available.

Treasurer Neville reminded the Board that we always hold up South Dakota's rural practice initiative as the gold standard; however, she recently learned that its program had to seek an alternative funding mechanism as its program stopped getting direct funding from the legislature.

Jackrabbit Bar Conference Update

President Olson shared that she attended the conference and thought it was wonderful. She really enjoyed getting to know everybody better and she thought the programming was great. She provided an overview of the programs.

Mark Gifford shared that those in attendance from Wyoming received a number of glowing reviews about last year's conference that was hosted in Laramie.

President-Elect Erin Weisman echoed the other's comments about the conference. She shared that she did enjoy the programs and the camaraderie.

University of Wyoming College of Law Relations

President Olson shared that Julie Hill, the new Dean of the University of Wyoming College of Law, has relocated to Wyoming to start her new position soon. She shared that she has been in discussions with Supreme Court Justice Lynne Boomgaarden and former Supreme Court Justice Marilyn Kite regarding how to appropriately welcome Dean Hill to her new position. President Olson wished to brainstorm ideas for welcoming her and strengthening the overall relations with the law school.

Executive Director Wilkinson shared that she received the exhibitor registration form from Brett Befus at the University of Wyoming Foundation and learned that the Foundation and the law school will be sharing that booth during the Bar's Annual Meeting & Judicial Conference, and Dean Hill's name is on the form as an onsite representative.

President Olson also expressed interest in inviting Dean Hill to Casper perhaps when the Supreme Court is having oral argument. Commissioner Silva indicated that Heather Lloyd was taking the lead on those efforts and recommended President Olson contact her.

University of Wyoming College of Law Update

Commissioner Dona Playton shared that Julie Hill has not yet officially started her job, but it sounds like several people have reached out to her to welcome her.

Commissioner Playton shared that applications for the UW College of Law are down by 19% but nationwide, that number is 10-20%. She reported that average LSAT scores are up slightly so they are just waiting to see what size class will be seated for the fall.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Wilkinson reported that she has not received any nominations for President-Elect or Treasurer and reminded the Board that those are due to her by July 1, 2024. She also shared that she has not received any nominations for the Third or the Eighth Judicial Districts. She reported that she is in receipt of two nominations for Emily Madden to serve as the Seventh Judicial District Commissioner.

Executive Director Wilkinson reminded the Board that President-Elect Weisman is on the short list for the Circuit Court vacancy in Teton County. She shared that the Governor must make his

decision by June 29th. She reported that if President-Elect Weisman receives the judicial appointment, she would resign as President-Elect, and according to the Bylaws, this Board would appoint somebody to replace her. She shared that Vice President James Whiting has agreed to step into that role if the Board wished for him to. This would mean that he would step up as President of the Bar on September 13, 2024, which is the conclusion of the Annual Meeting. Executive Director Wilkinson shared that if President-Elect Weisman does not receive the Governor's appointment, she will step up as President on September 13, 2024; however, Vice President Whiting could not seek the President-Elect's seat, as the Bylaws prohibit the President and President-Elect from residing in the same judicial district.

Commissioner Silva shared that he will likely seek the nomination for President-Elect. Commissioner Alison Gee shared that she would also like to move up as an officer as well. Commissioner Silva recommended that everyone be in communication next weekend.

Executive Director Wilkinson shared that she will be traveling out of state on June 29th, but as soon as she sees the email with the announcement, she will notify the Board.

In regard to the section elections, Executive Director Wilkinson reported that some sections are doing better than others in gathering the requisite number of nominations. She is encouraging them all to coordinate efforts, as if they do not get their nominations in, the responsibility falls to the Bar's Executive Committee to appoint section members to serve.

Executive Director Wilkinson shared that she launched registration for the Annual Meeting & Judicial Conference this morning and registrations are coming in already. She shared that she has already made room reservations for the full Board at Little America and will tailor their reservations accordingly as we get closer to the conference. She reminded the Board that if they are interested in attending the conference, they will need to handle registration on their own. Executive Director Wilkinson reminded the Board that there will be a brief Board meeting on the morning of Friday, September 13, 2024, in order to ratify the budget.

Treasurer Neville reported that she has been working closely with the staff on the proposed budget for the 2024/2025 fiscal year. She reminded the Board that Executive Director Wilkinson asked for any direction on the proposed budget at the April meeting but she did not receive any. Executive Director Wilkinson reported that the bottom line of the proposed budget is currently in the red. She reminded the Board that the August meeting in Buffalo is the budget meeting where we will have much more discussion. She reminded the Board that the Bylaws require the Executive Committee to have the proposed budget prepared and shared with the full Board by July 30, 2024.

Executive Director Wilkinson reported that she, Mark Gifford and Commissioner Silva attended the investiture of the Honorable Kelly H. Rankin yesterday and it was a very enjoyable ceremony. There was discussion about the various speakers and comments made.

Commissioners' Reports

- ***First Judicial District*** – Commissioner Stefanie Boster shared that she could not attend Judge Rankin's investiture. She shared that Judge Froelicher is currently hearing the school finance case. She reported that the Supreme Court is talking about a fourth Circuit Court judge in Cheyenne; however, it is not in the budget.
- ***Second Judicial District*** – Commissioner Playton had no report.
- ***Third Judicial District*** – Commissioner Jason Petri shared that his judicial district is transitioning quickly to eFiling and people are having considerable problems with it. He shared that the system is not very robust. He shared his frustration with attempting to file something but the website is down. And it is as if the courts are still trying to get up to speed, as he will file electronically, but the court forgets to serve the parties. Because eFiling will soon be mandatory, his district is working to schedule more training, as even the clerks are trying to get used to the system.
- ***Fourth Judicial District*** – Commissioner Kevin Kessner could not attend the meeting.
- ***Fifth Judicial District*** – Commissioner Jennifer Kirk reported that her district hosted a Law Day event last month with some area fifth graders. The kids participated in a mock trial where they were able to see somebody get booked in the local jail followed by a mock arraignment in District Court with Judge Overfield. Commissioner Kirk wrote a very nice article for the local newspaper and they did get nice coverage of the event. She shared that their local legislators were pleased to be included.
- ***Sixth Judicial District*** – Commissioner Gee shared that she has had a similar experience with eFiling. She described her experience with one of her cases and mentioned that the judges are not signing the signature block. She shared that it seems there are all sorts of logistics that need to be worked out. She expressed her frustration that the lawyers are having to facilitate those conversations and wished this would have been better thought through. She shared another frustration that nothing is mailed anymore so they have to pay to have a certified copy sent to them. Commissioner Gee also shared that Mike McGrady will be the new District Court judge in Campbell County.
- ***Seventh Judicial District*** – Commissioner Silva shared that the Natrona County Bar leadership is going to change soon. He shared there are many new lawyers in his county and they have expressed interest in leadership roles. He reported that the District Attorney's office in Casper is fully staffed. Commissioner Silva also shared that St. Anthony School had a mock trial and he was fortunate to watch a bit of that.
- ***Eighth Judicial District*** – Commissioner Shawn Wilde shared that he is not looking forward to eFiling in his district based on everyone else's frustrations and experiences.
- ***Ninth Judicial District*** – Commissioner Clayton Melinkovich wondered if it makes sense to attempt to coordinate with the District Court Clerks' meeting at WACO in September. He reported seeing significant issues with signatures and everything else related to eFiling. He even reported seeing inconsistencies just within one county. Commissioner Melinkovich discussed concern with confidentiality issues with juvenile matters as well. He feels like lawyers need to take a leadership role in this. He reported that the clerks are fit to be tied and are seeking guidance from county attorneys, but each county attorney is giving conflicting guidance.

Boards/Committee Reports

- *Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Committee* – Commissioner Silva reported that Marie Ellis really carries the day on the CLE Committee and even did so through an illness. He shared that the committee received many different proposals with all different perspectives, but the committee members really take their Keller responsibilities seriously.
- *Criminal Pattern Jury Instructions* – Commissioner Silva shared that he has missed a few meetings but reported that Judge Robinson works very hard to maintain the instructions and keep them up to date.

President Anna Olson adjourned the meeting at 2:07 p.m. on Friday, June 21, 2024.

Minutes Submitted by:

Sharon Wilkinson
Executive Director