

Well-Being in Law School: Leadership Summary

A follow-up to the Inaugural Symposium on February 9th, 2024

Symposium Summary

As we enter the 2024-2025 academic year, the Attorney Well-Being Subcommittee on Law Education and Early Engagement reflects on its first in-person symposium for law school leaders. This full day event was hosted by Latham & Watkins LLC, bringing representatives from ten of the fifteen New York law schools to collaborate under the shared mission of student wellness. Prior to February 9th, the subcommittee distributed a survey to law school leaders, uniquely tailoring the workshop agenda based on the results. Across the next seven headings from *Starting Slowly* to *Closely Calming*, this brief provides an overview of the of the first Well-Being in Law School: Leadership Symposium. We conclude publication with a thorough review of the leadership survey, including how the Attorney Well-Being Subcommittee intends to actively continue its support for law schools across New York State.

Starting Slowly

With the warm hospitality from Latham & Watkins, we were welcomed with a wide range of breakfast options, freshly presented by their in-house chefs. Details from the symposium, including the menu items, were specifically designed to support a wholistic view of wellness. A larger theme from NYSBA's Attorney Well-Being Program encourages a long-term, strategic approach to support a culture shift in the legal field. The morning began slowly, intending for a comprehension review of the agenda, with time to network across various law schools. This was done with the goal of setting clear expectations for the day and building a sense of common connection among participants.

Morning Motivation

Latham & Watkins opened the day with speakers from their Well-Being and Benefits department. This first program explored the impact of stress on legal professionals, acknowledging the correlation between sustainable careers and well-balanced lifestyles. Again, creating an opportunity for participants to connect through the shared understanding of stress versus success. Programs like this are integral for shifting the culture of law to support more sustainable and successful careers.

The Attorney Well-Being subcommittee on Law Education and Early Engagement is one of six subcommittees dedicated to supporting wellness in the legal field from all perspectives. The Eight Pillars of Attorney Well-Being is a model used by NYSBA to ensure initiatives to mitigate stress are done strategically. The Eight Pillars of Attorney Well-Being include: *Occupational, Physical, Financial, Environmental, Social, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual*. Many pillars are specifically highlighted throughout this report, as they are present in all the work we do.

To learn more:

[Committee on Attorney Well-Being](#) | [Attorney Well-Being Program](#)

School Strategies

Our first panel was moderated by Attorney Well-Being Subcommittee Chair, Dean Rosemary Queenan, Esq. of Albany Law School, welcoming representatives from four of the law schools across New York State. This panel showcased various approaches to law student wellness from the institutional level. Maya FitzGerald, Director of Professionalism at Fordham University School of Law explained the *House System* intended to create a close-knit community, streamline information, and deliver robust wellness and professionalism curriculum for law students. Michele LoFaso, Senior Director of Law Student Affairs shared the *Student Wellness Room* located in the library of the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University. Amanda M. Beltran, Director of Student Affairs at the CUNY School of Law highlighted emergency grants available to students with imminent financial needs. Jenean Taranto, Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Professor of Law Albany Law School, discussed the student food pantry which has worked to provide healthy and accessible options, free to all. The various initiatives shared in this panel exhibit creative options for holistic student wellness services. Additional law school programming can be found in the *Reviewing the Results* portion of this report.

Supporting Students

Recognizing the wide-spread need for confidential, external support, Francesca Acocella, Esq., MSW., Senior Director of Student Life at Cardozo Law School and Social Work intern at the New York City Bar presented on the support services accessible to law students across the state the Lawyer Assistance Programs. Critical takeaways for students to be aware of include the confidentiality of all LAP services and the destigmatization of mental health regarding professional conduct.

These key points highlight the overall effort to encourage help-seeking in legal professionals through all stages. In New York, mental health questions have been removed from the character and fitness exam, allowing support services to be accessed autonomously without fear of negative impacts. Students have free access to all LAP services, which include confidential helplines, one-on-one counseling, resources and referrals.

New York Lawyer Assistance Programs:

New York City	Nassau County	New York State
etravis@nycbar.org	eeckhardt@nassaubar.org	swhiteley@nysba.org
917-488-4890	516-512-6618	518-487-5688

Seeing the Space

After enjoying another healthy, well-balanced meal by Latham & Watkins, symposium attendees were guided on a tour of the intentional wellness features throughout the building. From an employment perspective, it is essential to acknowledge the environmental factors that impact employee wellness. The New York State Bar Association's Attorney Well-Being Program identifies *Environmental Wellness* as one of its Eight Pillars. This opportunity to explore multiple floors of a law firm, specifically designed to support professional wellness, helped highlight the types of environmental conditions students may strive to work within post-graduation.

In-Class Integration

The final panel was moderated by Committee on Attorney Well-Being member, Marta Ricardo, Assistant Dean of Professionalism and Lawyering Skills Program Director at Fordham Law School. This discussion aimed at integrating student wellness into the law school curriculum through mindfulness. Elizabeth Emens, Professor of Law and Faculty Director at the Thomas M. Macioce Mindfulness Program at Columbia Law School discussed how these programs can be infused into learning, meeting students where they are at. Lynn Boepple Su, Dean for Advocacy & Co-Curricular Programs and Professor of Law described the components of the New York Law School's credit bearing course entitled, *Mindful Lawyering*. 2024 J.D. Candidate, Jordan Lazarian, former attendee of this course, highlighted how integrating mindfulness skills into her lawyering education has increase resiliency and optimism through law school.

Closing Calmly

To end the in-person symposium, the group collectively shared a moment of mindfulness facilitated by Attorney Well-Being Committee member, Lynn Su, Esq. Of New York Law School. This opportunity allowed us to wrap up the day similarly to how it began, *Starting Slowly*. Throughout the workshop it was evident that resources to support student wellness are not lacking. Law Schools across New York State offer deliberate support for student wellness at the systemic level, while also working to change the culture through in-class integration. Reflecting on the content shared throughout the day, feedback to be mindful of is the concept of information overload. With such a comprehensive agenda, filled with programming, services, and resources for students, participants were grounded with a brief meditation.

Reviewing the Results

The results of that initial survey showcase ten of the fifteen law schools, contributing unique concepts and identifying barriers to supporting student wellness. Each of the schools offer counseling services, with about half offering on-site counseling employed by the institution and the other half utilizing third party therapeutic services. Brooklyn Law School's comprehensive third-party services include unlimited, on-demand urgent care services for both physical and mental health concerns with additional counseling and resources included. One outlier in the survey was an employed Licensed Mental Health Counselor as an Administrator in the Law School Student Services at St. John's University. Touro University also stood out with mandatory wellness program for all 1L students. Many of the schools identified finances as a common barrier to effective wellness services and programming for law students. Another obstacle currently being faced is active engagement from the students themselves. When reviewing these results as the symposium, time was spent collaborating on ways to increase awareness and participation in wellness programs and services.

Future Follow Through

The Law Education and Early Engagement subcommittee of NYSBA's Committee on Attorney Well-Being is dedicated to supporting both the students and the schools. In the survey we asked how this subcommittee could continue supporting the New York law schools. Common themes from the survey included program development, training opportunities, standardized best practices, and encouraging student participation. Considering this feedback, the subcommittee has thoughtfully strategized a plan for future follow-through, presented below.

- *Program Development*
 - Create wellness programming for law students, including orientation sessions to promote early engagement.
- *Training Opportunities*
 - Offer practical skill building opportunities targeted towards faculty and staff to expand the network of student support.
- *Standardized Best Practices*
 - Develop a guide of universal standards to unify student wellness initiatives across New York State.
- *Student Participation*
 - Encourage student engagement by building authentic community networks and sharing stories of true lived experiences.

The Attorney Well-Being Subcommittee on Law Education and Early Engagement strives to build upon its support for students, law school leaders, and the larger systems. As plans develop for the next symposium, we seek to explore two main objectives:

1. Professional development opportunities for law school instructors to support student wellness through classroom management, feedback models, and effective communication.
2. Include student perspectives to increase communication and bridge the gap between individual needs and institutional offerings.

The 2nd Annual *Well-Being in Law School: Leadership Symposium* will be hosted in early 2025 with the theme, "Structural Components Supporting Student Wellness".

For more information about the Well-Being in Law School Leadership Symposium or the Attorney Well-Being Subcommittee on Law Education and Early Engagement, please reach out to NYSBA's Attorney Well-Being Program Manager:

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