



A Message from President Marisa Bellair

My fellow trial lawyers,

I am both honored and humbled to begin my term as President of the Connecticut Trial Lawyers Association.



First, I want to start by congratulating our Immediate-Past President, Tim O'Keefe, on a successful year as President. Over the past year, Tim has provided steady oversight and guidance at the helm of this organization and, as a result, we were able to effectively pursue and implement many important initiatives in this legislative session. Assisted by our incredible Legislative Team at Gaffney, Bennett & Associates, including Jay Malcynsky and Jeffrey Zykeski ("Zeke"), Tim was able to shepherd HB 6570, a bill that eliminates the defense of governmental immunity for damages to a person or property caused by any, even discretionary, negligent operation of a motor vehicle owned by a political subdivision, making a political subdivision liable for these damages. This bill passed legislation last year, under the leadership of past-President Andy Savvaides, but was unfortunately vetoed by the Governor's office. This year, CTLA again pursued the bill as a priority initiative. Through perseverance, the bill passed both houses and will be signed into law by Governor Lamont with the agreement that the bill will not affect the duties and exceptions found in the emergency response vehicles section of the statutes.

Other notable bills awaiting the Governor's signature include: (1) HB 6874 which reinstates an employers liability for damages caused by discipline or discharge, including punitive damages, plus attorney's fees, for their violation of an employee's First Amendment rights; (2) HB 6797 which requires the Workers' Compensation Commission chairperson, in setting standards for approving employer or insurer medical plans, to include whether the plan has an administrative process allowing employees to seek certain information about the medical and health care services recommended by the plan's providers. It also established two working groups that CTLA will have members sit on and closely monitor; (3) HB 6876 which increases staffing and makes other important changes at the Claims Commission, including the appointment of Deputy Commissioners; (4) SB 913 will expand eligibility for workers' compensation benefits for post-traumatic stress injuries to cover all employees

covered by workers' compensation law; (5) SB 1040 allows notary publics to notarize documents remotely under certain specified conditions; and (6) HB 6721 which extends "portal to portal" workers' compensation coverage to telecommunicators in defined situations. I am so very proud of the work that Tim and the Legislative Team accomplished this year and we owe them a debt of gratitude for these many notable accomplishments.

Second, I'd like to welcome the stellar slate of officers with whom I will have the privilege of working along side of in the coming year: President-Elect Alinor Sterling, Vice President Peter Dryer, Treasurer Cindy Robinson, Secretary Patrick Kennedy, and Parliamentarian Brian Flood. We are sure to be in good hands for years to come. I would also like to recognize the exceptional CTLA staff, including our Executive Director Joan Maloney, CLE Director Katie Marino, and Membership Services Coordinator Liz Nolan. Most everyone knows that the Annual Meeting would not be possible but for their efforts, but what you may not know is the phenomenal work they do behind the scenes all year long. I look forward to working more closely with each of them in the year ahead.

As I look forward to the year ahead, I know that I have big shoes to fill. My predecessors are titans of the trial bar and of this organization. I will be the second attorney from my law firm, Lynch, Traub, Keefe & Errante, to serve this organization as President. I will also be the fifth female president in the history of this esteemed organization. To say that this is an honor and a privilege is an understatement. For my part, I pledge to work hard, to listen, and to guide this organization following the example of those that led this organization before me.

My goal in the coming year is to continue to pursue and defend those initiatives that are so important to our organization, our clients, and our society. There is much work to be done and I can't do it alone. You have a voice in this organization and I will call on you to use it in the coming year. I encourage each of you to get involved by attending seminars, joining committees, working on charitable initiatives, proposing legislation for consideration at our Legislative Retreat, lobbying our elected officials on bills we may propose, or increasing your club membership so that we may continue to work hard for you. You are all our future and we are all in this together. Our strength is in our membership and the work we do is critical. I call on those of you who work tirelessly to promote our mission to continue to do so, and for those of you that haven't had the opportunity to participate to get involved and to make a difference. Our organization is premised on the notion that we all need to work together to achieve success. Make no mistake, none of our work is a one-year initiative. Our work is a collective. The stronger our membership is, the stronger we all are.

For our part, the many branches of the CTLA are already hard at work for you. Plans are underway for a Charity Softball Tournament this fall to benefit the Special Olympics. This Spring, the Women's Caucus will hold its first Annual Charitable Fundraiser since pre-COVID. Our many dynamic committees are busy finalizing their calendars and, in

particular, the CLE committee is working hard on planning unparalleled seminars that make us all better practitioners. Our Legislative Team is busy identifying initiatives to propose and to counter in the coming year and, of course, our Board of Governors, Executive Committee, and Officers, are all finalizing their meeting schedules to ensure that this organization remains true to its mission: "Trial Lawyers protecting individual rights through fair laws and access to justice."

If you ever have any questions or concerns about the CTLA, please reach out to me. I look forward with optimism to the year ahead. I am absolutely honored for this opportunity. I firmly believe that if we work together we can build on our foundation and legacy. As Hellen Keller said: "Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much."

Thank you.

Marisa Bellair, CTLA President