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NEWS

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Justice Donohue's Campaign to Get Young Lawyers Into Court Gets Pa. Bar's Backing

 "From the perspective of the younger lawyers that I've spoken to, they are just excited and anxious to have opportunities to get into courtrooms," Justice Christine Donohue said. "It's Just a question of making room for them in the cases."


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Young Professionals



Aleeza Furman
Litigation Reporter

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- The Pennsylvania Bar Association has voted to support Project Litigate, in which firms to pledge to provide their junior attorneys with more time in the courtroom.
- The initiative's leaders said the PBA's vote is a key step in the project's wider circulation.
- The project aims to address dwindling opportunities for young lawyers to get courtroom experience.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association has formally backed an initiative to address dwindling trial opportunities for young lawyers.

The PBA on Friday became the first of Pennsylvania's bar groups to adopt Project Litigate, in which firms pledge to provide their junior attorneys with more time in the courtroom.

"You need lawyers who know how to try cases to a trial," said Supreme Court Justice Christine Donohue, who helped spark the initiative. "We're sort of in a situation where we have to adapt to what's happened in commerce and through legislation that's created fewer and fewer trials by jury."

Donohue, who herself worked as a trial lawyer for nearly 30 years before taking the bench, said that as more and more

cases resolve through arbitration, opportunities for up-and-coming litigators to hone their skills have dropped.

"When it comes to the actual trial, the most experienced lawyers are always trying those cases," she said.

Project Litigate aims to address the issue by asking law firms to sign on to a single-page [pledge](#). The document outlines actionable steps firms can take, such as providing training sessions, inviting associates to observe proceedings, and gradually scaling up associates' responsibilities.

Donohue said the pledge sets the stage for law firms to enact change.

"This is very much a matter of just raising awareness," said John Gismondi, founder of Gismondi & Associates and chair of Project Litigate. "You have to have the senior people in law firms consciously thinking about, you know, 'Hey, I need to get some younger lawyers involved.'"

Gismondi said the dropoff in trial opportunities has long been an issue. Still, remote work has been a particular hindrance, eating away at the spontaneous in-office encounters that organically spawn learning opportunities.

"It wasn't the cause of where we are today, but it's a complicating or exacerbating factor," he said.

Gismondi said securing the support of the PBA—the state's largest bar association—marks a key milestone in the project's development. He said the ultimate goal is for various attorney organizations and local bar associations to do the same.

PBA outgoing president Jay Silberblatt, a partner at Silberblatt Mermelstein, said the association members' vote to adopt the initiative appeared unanimous.

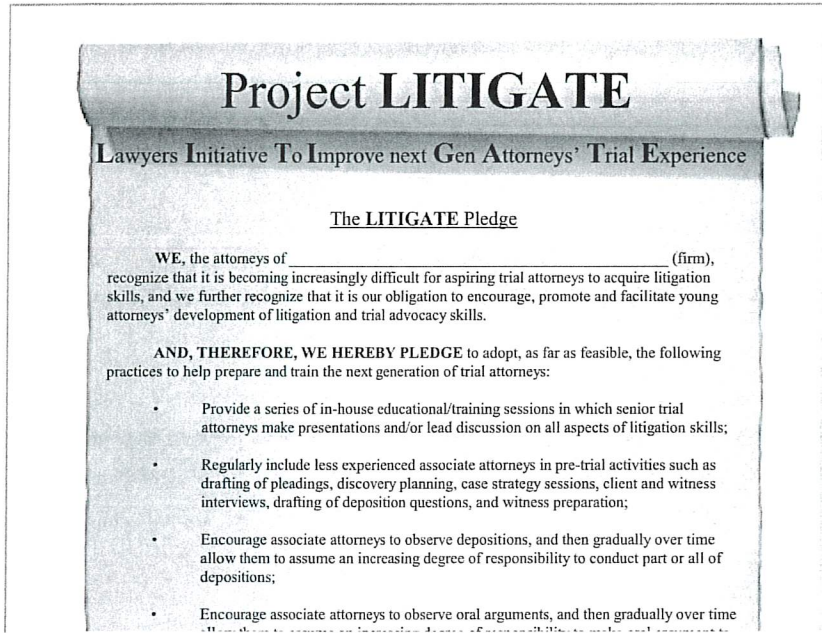
"This pledge is the first step in getting a buy-in from firms and judges across the state to provide these opportunities," he said.

Silberblatt said the PBA is now set to embark on a public relations campaign to spread the word to law firms and judges.

"If trial advocacy is a skill that we want to pass on from generation to generation, we have to provide the opportunities to younger lawyers," he said.

According to Donohue, Project Litigate represents the attorney side of a two-pronged campaign. She said the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges is developing a corresponding set of guidelines outlining how members of the bench can create space for young attorneys to learn.

"From the perspective of the younger lawyers that I've spoken to, they are just excited and anxious to have opportunities to get into courtrooms," Donohue said. "It's Just a question of making room for them in the cases."



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