Message from 2018-19 President Juliette E. Lippman

During my tenure as president, I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with an incredible group of dedicated board members and staff who are driven to constantly improve and enhance the civil legal aid system in Florida.

The Foundation is in the midst of a “strategic reset” which was adopted by the Foundation’s board of directors on June 22, 2017. We have yet to determine whether it is a success, but, I am excited about what has been accomplished thus far. I took the liberty of writing about this change in policy in my article Strategic Reset: The Florida Bar Foundation’s Investment In a Better Future For Access To Justice And the Rule of Law.

During the 2018-19 year, I was particularly proud of the Foundation’s initiative to increase funds by encouraging banks to waive fees and pay basis points over comparable rates on IOTA accounts. The Community Champions program has been wildly successful.

In the first eight months of the program, the Foundation received $4.7 million more than we had projected by having two of our top 10 IOTA banks agree to increase interest rates on their accounts holding more than $100,000. We were able to put this extra money into our grant programs.

We restarted a grant reserve, which will provide greater economic stability to the Foundation by instilling a more consistent and predictable grant process with more transparency. We also increased the amount of money allocated for six grant programs including Children’s Legal Services and Pro Bono grants.

Another huge accomplishment was the launch of the Florida Pro Bono Law School Challenge. This pilot program sought to connect lawyers and law students through a new version of the Florida Pro Bono Matters platform to work on pro bono cases together from local legal aid programs.

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the program, as evidenced by more than 300 cases being taken. As part of the Foundation’s mission is to promote public service among lawyers by making it an integral part of the law school experience, this program effectively did that on a large scale. It also helped lawyers and students fulfill their pro bono requirements and boosted law school pride.

I began my term while the Foundation was in the process of hiring a new executive director. After conducting a nationwide search, I could not have been happier to see a former Foundation president take the reins. Donny MacKenzie, a former partner with Holland and Knight, now leads the Foundation. His skills and abilities are unparalleled, as is his commitment to maximize the availability of legal services to those who need it the most. He inspires me every day to do more for our most vulnerable children and adults.

One of my favorite parts of serving on the Foundation’s board has been hearing from grantees about their programs during our meetings. Their stories are inspiring, and whether they are helping disabled children get the school accommodations to which they are entitled, veterans obtain identification documents, or domestic violence survivors leave their abusers, I am reminded that our work and support is fundamental to ensuring their success.

Thank you for being a part of our thriving community to improve access to civil legal aid. My time on the board of directors is coming to a close, but I look forward to hearing about the great impact I am sure the Foundation will continue to have for many years to come.
In addition to the grants awarded, the Foundation spent $966,583 in program support and other charitable activities that provided direct and indirect support to our grantees. Also, $28,759 in unspent grant funds were returned to the Foundation.

91,117 Floridians served by legal aid programs in 2019.

67 (all!) Florida counties served by Foundation-funded legal aid programs.
The Legacy for Justice

The Legacy for Justice recognizes those who have included the Foundation in their estate planning, made a gift or pledge of more than $10,000, directed a significant cy pres award to the Foundation or facilitated a colleague’s major gift. We offer the members of this prestigious group our sincerest gratitude for their deep and abiding commitment to the Foundation. (Through March 12, 2020)

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