EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER



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An Era Ends, but the Mission Remains Unchanged.

As we announced in the previous issue of *Municipal Lawyer*, I will be stepping down as Executive Director of IMLA at the end of 2021 and handing the reins to Amanda Karras, who I know will do an outstanding job.

Leading IMLA for the past 15 years has been a sincere honor, providing some of the most fulfilling experiences in my life. Each day I am able to interact with thoughtful, dedicated, and caring people in our profession--people committed to the Rule of Law, to their communities, and to making life better for all of us. Hopefully, IMLA adds to that commitment and brings value to their communities through our programming and our work on behalf of local governments in the courts.

In my role as Executive Director, I am excited to report that IMLA came through the pandemic bruised but not bowed. While being together at programs and conferences cannot be replicated through a virtual format, the pandemic showed us that we can expand our reach to local government attorneys and make programming more affordable, using technology. We served roughly 1000 attorneys at our virtual Annual Conference last Fall and almost as many this Spring at our virtual Seminar and Section 1983 Defense program. Many who attended asked for more virtual programming and we hope to bring a hybrid format to our upcoming Annual Conference in the Twin Cities, providing engagement and value to in-person and remote attendees alike. We are also working on IMLA's regular programming to expand our webinar offerings and give them the same feel as a Conference session. Over 150 local governments now subscribe to our "Kitchen Sink" annual webinar program, allowing multiple attorneys in one office to participate and receive CLE credit. It may be the most affordable such offering available.

Because we were able to reduce costs, last year IMLA offered a dividend to members that they could apply to purchase virtual programming. We did so as a way of saying thank you for your loyalty to IMLA. I am hoping we will be able to again offer some sort of dividend in the coming year, and we are looking at other ways of benefiting members. We recognize that the pandemic has created challenges for many local governments, and we continue to seek ways to provide excellent value for IMLA members.

One area in which we have significantly expanded our efforts and visibility on behalf of our membership is in legal advocacy. We saw success this year in several of our amicus cases, including a particularly well written and argued brief supporting Austin's petition for certiorari seeking review of its efforts to regulate digital billboards and gain clarification of the *Reed* decision. Our great team of attorneys, Amanda Karras, Erich Eiselt and Deanna Shahnami collaborated to write a very well-articulated brief and days ago, the Supreme Court granted certiorari. That brief, and many others, reflects the value IMLA membership brings to local governments: our policies limit amicus support to members only, barring exceptional circumstances.

We stand with our membership as the legal landscape continues to change. Qualified immunity faces challenges both in the courts and in legislatures. The great political divide that rends our nation also burdens many local governments or pits urban centers against rural interests. Where cities once held non-partisan elections, there seem fewer instances where candidates try to appear unaligned. Contentious national issues crop up on local agendas, putting city and county attorneys at risk of appearing partisan should they issue opinions regarding otherwise unremarkable measures. Local government attorneys must now walk a minefield in advising law enforcement and city leaders on First Amendment issues associated with protest, responding to civil unrest, or the effects of "defunding" police. Divergent and evolving views on religious expression, gender equality, racial justice, homelessness, and the relationship between personal rights and communal responsibilities continue to make municipal lawyering a complex process.

Through all of these challenges, whether instigated by a virus or arising from shifting societal, political, and legal norms, IMLA programming and advocacy spotlight issues to prepare members to serve their clients and communities. Our members uniformly attend our programs not for CLE credit, but to learn and share what they know with others. That is why IMLA and its mission exist – Advancing Excellence in the Practice of Local Government Law.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our Annual Conference in the Twin Cities from September 29 to October 3, 2021. It will be yet another opportunity to spend time with people I greatly respect and who make IMLA's mission a reality. ML