

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS COMMITTEE WELCOMES NEW LEADERSHIP

Jun 22, 2023 By Patrick R. Fargason Senior Editor



While the names have changed, the goal of the Mental Health and Wellness of Florida Lawyers Committee remains the same as the group met during the Annual Florida Bar Convention in the Boca Raton June 21.

Current Vice-Chair Rich Rivera of Jacksonville takes over as chair from Karl Klein who was recently elected to the Board of Governors representing the 11th Circuit.

Rivera says he's ready for the challenge and looks forward to expanding on the committee's current work.

"I am very excited to start my term as chair of the Mental Health and Wellness Committee," Rivera said. "I want to work on continuing to destigmatize mental health issues and make sure that we, as Florida attorneys, are open to discussing our concerns and the issues we're facing."

L.A. Perkins, who served as the chair of the panel's communications subcommittee will take over as vice chair.

The committee also welcomed five new members for the 2023-24 Bar year including Judge Scott Bernstein, Judge Tarlika Nunez-Navarro, Patrick Brathwaite, Rachel Flanagan, and Max Solomon.

In his last meeting as chair, Klein continued to promote the [Florida Lawyers Helpline](#), telling his colleagues the best way to endorse the program is to know how it works. The helpline is a free and completely confidential service that connects members with professional counselors who work to help them overcome life's challenges, balance priorities, and better handle both personal and professional pressures. Established three years ago, the helpline provides five free mental-health sessions for members of the Bar as well as Florida Registered Paralegals.

“I encourage everyone to call and know how to use it,” Klein said. “If you’re going to sell something, you have to use the product.”

Klein said calls to the helpline in 2022 remained consistent but he’s encouraged about 2023.

“Calls to the helpline are up 60% year to date in 2023,” Klein said. “We are seeing an increase.”

The education subcommittee recapped its most recent CLE titled, **“Harnessing the Power of Stress.”** The course, available online through LegalFuel, discusses how attorneys can use stress to their advantage and provides tips for resilience.

The committee will host another CLE on July 25 regarding secondary trauma presented by Katharine Manning, a lawyer with the United States Department of Justice who advises clients and victims of tragedies, including survivors of the Boston Marathon bombing and the Pulse nightclub shooting.

Education subcommittee Chair Devona Perez says the committee is also working on a program dedicated to lawyer burnout.

“The whole idea is to have examples of attorneys who have dealt with burnout and how they have pivoted,” Perez said. “We’re looking to find ways that people can immediately incorporate activities in their daily routines to destress.”

President-elect Scott Westheimer addressed the committee and renewed his commitment to supporting the mental health and wellness of Florida’s lawyers.

“You’ll hear it in every speech I make this week, [mental health and wellness] is at the core of what we do,” Westheimer said. “It goes across all practice areas and the helpline is a product that helps all members.”

Rivera says the encouragement of Bar leadership means a lot.

“It is incredible to have the type of support that we have historically had from the Board of Governors and the presidents of The Florida Bar,” Rivera said.