

On Rescinding an Award

In April, Attorney General Brad Schimel called on the State Bar to rescind its WisLAP volunteer of the year award to an attorney who was previously convicted in a case that involved alleged sexual assault. The State Bar later rescinded the award and has received numerous communications in response, both supporting and criticizing that decision.

Dear Editor: Stephan Addison wasn't getting a lifetime achievement award, he was getting an award for much of the good he had done since a criminal conviction in 2005. The Wisconsin legal profession thought it was so serious he got a 60-day suspension – 13 years ago. This year he was awarded the Jack DeWitt WisLAP Volunteer Award for all the good he has done recently to help troubled lawyers. A much higher standard of ethical and professional conduct must be demonstrated to become a member of the State Bar than to get an award from WisLAP.

The Wisconsin legal profession and the members of the Wisconsin bar who complained and the members of the WisLAP Committee who voted to rescind his award should be embarrassed for allowing pressure from Attorney General Brad Schimel and other members of the Wisconsin bar who have nothing to do with WisLAP to cause them to vote to rescind the award. It was inappropriate for the members of the WisLAP Committee who voted to rescind the award to back down in the face of meaningless pressure and criticism from Brad Schimel and other members of the legal profession. In the interest of full disclosure, I advised Attorney General Schimel in a phone conversation that although I am one of his supporters I would publicly criticize his position.

Some members of the committee felt threatened that the State Bar would stop funding this important program. Really? Rescinding this award will discourage others from joining the program as volunteers and lawyers who need help from getting help. Does the Wisconsin bar really want to discourage this important program?

As a member of the Illinois and Chicago Bar Associations, I receive the *CBA Record*, a publication of the Chicago Bar Association. The February/March 2018 issue contained an article entitled "Cultivating Wellness in the Legal Profession" and talked about why it's important for lawyers to become involved in the Illinois Lawyers Assistance Program. The article provided statistics showing that lawyers outpace the general population in stress, anxiety, depression, and alcoholism.

Imagine the outcry if someone worked a 40-hour week and received his paycheck on Friday only to be told on Monday that, because he was in legal trouble 13 years ago, we're going to take away the paycheck you earned last week. I hope no more than a handful of lawyers are either deterred from volunteering to help WisLAP or take advantage of the program because of this inappropriate criticism.

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