***Better Together***

I am honored to follow in the footsteps of prior leaders of this great Association who have paved the roads of justice we now walk on. We are living in a historically significant era for practicing criminal defense in New York State. Clean Slate, discovery reform, bail reform, a seat at the table for the appointments of Judges to the Court of Appeals, the repeal of Civil rights Law 50-a and so much more. We and our clients are afforded opportunities not enjoyed by those who came before us, those who worked tirelessly for the rights that protect our clients today. But rights are only half the equation in the pursuit of justice. Proportional to those rights are our responsibilities.

Fifty years ago, President John F. Kennedy speaking at Vanderbilt University, said “this Nation was not founded solely on the principle of citizens' rights. Equally important…is the citizen's responsibility. For our privileges can be no greater than our obligations. The protection of our rights can endure no longer than the performance of our responsibilities. Each can be neglected only at the peril of the other.”

**We together,** must remain vigilant to safeguard what has been achieved. This is our responsibility. This is our obligation. We carry that duty into the criminal courts in which we defend our clients. We carry it onto the steps of the legislature where we continue fighting for greater fairness for our clients. And we carry it into the court of public opinion, where our clients are so often and so brutally maligned. **We together** must do all of this and so much more.

This will require great effort. We can accomplish this when we become **better together**. As this year unfolds, I will call on each of you to help. Together we will seek your ideas and listen to them. We will look to be more inclusive as we create pathways for our members to take active roles in our committees and our leadership. Opening these pathways will make us stronger and more diverse.

Who is NYSACDL? We are both public defenders and lawyers in private practice. We may work in different counties, represent different types of clients, focus on different types of charges, and hail from different types of offices. But we have all devoted our professional lives to one simple ideal: we defend the accusedWe draw strength from this common purpose and are unified by it.

There is strength in numbers as well as the clarity of our unified message. Our Association is stronger the larger we are and the louder our voice becomes. It is my goal as President to increase membership and surpass 2000 members.

To accomplish this goal, we must realize we will not get better because we get bigger, we will get bigger because we get better. Better at giving you more. Better at listening to you and identifying what it is you need and want from the Association. This will include the creation of a virtual suggestion box. Free presentations monthly for members on topics such as how to open a private practice and how to deal with the stress of being a public defender. We are building a better and more useful website. We will create an expert witness database. We will continue to provide regular updates on important legal issues through our “Lunch and the Law” and CLE programs. We will create more social opportunities to network with one another and enjoy what we do. We will take a group of fifty of our members to be sworn into practice before the United States Supreme Court on May 30 and enjoy a CLE lecture and reception the night before. We will build and strengthen our future through our young lawyers committee and create a mentorship program so we can be better together. We will of course continue to do all the other things we have done for years including lobbying, filing Amicus Curiae briefs, publishing Atticus, providing for exchanges through the list serve, and so much more.

I am honored to be trusted to lead our Association. It is humbling and exciting. I look forward to both the opportunity and the responsibility.