

Prepared Text for Professionalism Remarks, Professionalism Context for Program and Program Overview

By Terrica Redfield Ganzy, Deputy Director, Southern Center for Human Rights

Thank you, Molly, for that introduction and for facilitating today's discussion. Good morning to all of you here with us today for this important CLE. As Molly mentioned, I am Terrica Redfield Ganzy, Deputy Director of the Southern Center for Human Rights, a nonprofit law firm dedicated to working towards equality, dignity, and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal system in the Deep South.

I also have the honor of serving as Vice-Chair of the State Bar of Georgia's Professionalism Committee, under the leadership of Chair, Joshua Bosin, and with invaluable advice and assistance from Karlise Grier. The Professionalism Committee's sole purpose is to advance professionalism in the practice of law, and this CLE sponsored by the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism does just that.

I look at today's topic in a whole new light because in May of this year the Southern Center unexpectedly lost our dear friend and colleague, Marissa McCall Dodson. Those of you who knew Marissa know that she was a formidable lawyer and advocate. She was also a fiercely loyal and trusted friend. We are still not healed. And the truth of the matter is that we failed in preparing for the unexpected loss of one of our team members or other sudden tragedies that would make it nearly impossible for us to continue operating in the immediate term at full capacity. I look back and ask several questions. Did we have some safeguards, processes, and procedures in place? Yes. Did we always follow them? No. Were they sufficient to meet our needs when the need arose? No.

We often live each day like we'll have many more tomorrows, like sudden illness couldn't strike us or people in our care, like natural disasters happen to other people, as if each day is going to be sunshine and blue skies. But failing to think about and prepare for rainy days does not prevent them from occurring. And rainy days happen to organizations, too.

The Lawyer's Creed encourages us to prioritize fidelity to our clients and to preserve the dignity and integrity of our profession. An important way to adhere to these ideals is to engage in succession planning for your practice. The State Bar of Georgia asks each Bar member to name a designated attorney when they complete their Bar dues statement, in case the Bar member becomes an "absent attorney." The purpose of the designation is to ensure that our clients, opposing counsel, and the courts are not harmed by our incapacitation due to illness, death, a sudden move, or other circumstances that would limit our ability to competently represent our clients and constructively engage with opposing counsel and the courts. Designated attorneys, thus, stand in the gap, acting as "first-responders" who triage emergency situations and help all involved parties feel

supported and protected. However, while some of us fail to make the designation at all, others of us make the designation and never speak to our designated attorney again.

It can be easy to dismiss the importance of designating an attorney, and this CLE is designed to demonstrate why doing so could be damaging not only to your practice and loved ones but also to the practice of law. The CLE will also demonstrate why developing a meaningful designated attorney relationship can bring YOU peace of mind. You will hear from people who have been impacted by the sudden incapacitation of an attorney. You will learn the ethical principles that undergird the necessity for the designated attorney. You will also receive tools and tips for ensuring that your designated attorney relationship is effective if your designated attorney needs to step in on your behalf or if you are ever called upon to step in on behalf of an attorney who has designated you. Finally, Chief Justice Nahmias will grace us with closing remarks.

We hope you enjoy this educational opportunity and gain knowledge that will serve you, your clients, your loved ones, and our legal profession well.