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Civility and the Law

Hon. La Zette C. Ringgold-Kirksey, President, Bar Association of Baltimore City



The definition of “civility” is formal politeness and courtesy in behavior or speech. The definition of “practice” is the carrying out or exercise of a profession. The literal noun of “to practice” is defined as the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it. So, when I think of civility and the law, I find it goes hand and hand with proper courtroom decorum. This is a concept that allows the legal system to function smoothly when it is practiced. I say practice because although we are often referred to as lawyers we don’t “lawyer” the law, we “practice” it. And as the saying goes, “practice makes perfect.” Civil treatment of our adversaries is an art to be studied.

The legal profession requires adherence to the various rules laid out in the Maryland Rules. For example, rules of discovery, rules of evidence and procedural rules.

A good practicing attorney should recognize that they should know these rules but go beyond merely knowing them. These rules should be practiced on a realistic level. Are we filing the appropriate motions, meeting discovery deadlines, showing candor, engaging and making an honest effort of good faith to resolve discovery disputes? A large part of civility is how we as attorneys treat and respect one another, despite our differences. Any judge will tell you that they expect litigants to be prepared and competent. However, they would easily also prefer litigants who communicate with one another with an eye toward streamlining any unresolved issues without boastful or self-indulgent behavior. Attorneys should be able to be formidable opponents on opposite sides of the trial table but once the issue is decided, gracefully walk out of the courtroom doors. If a client’s best interest was served with dignity and to an attorney’s best ability there should only be a feeling of satisfaction and never bitterness. Respecting the practice and the process of our legal system is paramount.

The BABC embraces and stands firmly on the idea of mentoring, educating and fostering a better legal quality of life to those who are a part of our community. I hope that you will join us and continue to stay activated as we stay committed to this mission. Still on the horizon for this fall: Mentorship Program, Family Law Committee CLE- Bar Counsel Tips, SLS Senior Estate Planning Clinic, Green Mount Cemetery Tour and National Adoption Day Program at the Circuit Court just to name a few. There is something for everyone and we want you to be a part of it. Whether you are looking to grow professionally, give back through service or simply become more engaged, BABC is here to provide opportunities to learn, lead and make a difference.

A New Year, A Renewed Passion

Jacob Dorfman, Esq., Chair, Young Lawyers' Division, Bar Association of Baltimore City



As summer comes to a close, I find myself thinking about new beginnings. For our bar association, the new year is already off to a wonderful start.

We kicked things off with the Joint Bar Association End of Summer Networking Reception, which was a terrific opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, meet new members of our legal community, and simply enjoy each other's company outside of the courtroom and office.

The Young Lawyers Division followed with its Mix and Mingle event, giving our younger members another chance to build relationships and find their place within our bar community.

And we are just getting started. As we continue planning for the year ahead, more and more programs and events are being added to the calendar. There is a real sense of excitement about what we can accomplish together, and I am particularly looking forward to seeing our members continue to connect, learn, and build relationships throughout the year.

This time of year is especially meaningful to me because it also coincides with the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

The Jewish New Year provides a natural opportunity to pause and reflect on the year that has passed, while looking ahead with hope and renewed purpose.

Rosh Hashanah is a time for reflection and renewal. Yom Kippur asks us to look inward—to acknowledge where we may have fallen short and consider how we can do better. And Sukkot reminds us of the importance of gathering together. We leave the familiarity and comfort of our homes, sit together in the sukkah, welcome others in, and celebrate the relationships that sustain us.

I find those themes particularly fitting as I begin another year with our bar association. One of the things I have come to appreciate most about bar association life is that it can provide a sense of family. The practice of law can be demanding and, at times, isolating. But the people we meet through our profession can become mentors, friends, collaborators, and an important source of support. Events like our recent receptions and Mix and Mingle are valuable not simply because they are social gatherings, but because they give us the opportunity to strengthen those connections.

Family means something different to everyone. For me, this season is a reminder to appreciate the people who have supported me, both personally and professionally, and to think about how I can contribute to those communities in return.

As I look toward the year ahead, I am hoping to bring that same spirit of renewal to our bar association. A new year does not require us to start over. Instead, it gives us the opportunity to build on what we have already accomplished, learn from the past, and approach the future with renewed energy and passion. I am grateful for the great start we have had, and I am excited about what is still to come. I hope that this year brings all of us opportunities to learn, to serve, to make new connections, and—perhaps most importantly—to enjoy being part of a professional community.

May the year ahead be filled with meaningful relationships, renewed passion, and a strong sense of family. Shanah Tovah, and I look forward to seeing all of you throughout the year ahead.

Heirs' Property: Family Equity Frozen in Time

Kyla Bayton, Esq. and Steven Kappen, Esq., Maryland Volunteer Lawyer Services



The Legal Issue of Heirs' Property

Heirs' property is property that has been passed down through generations without completing the legal process necessary to formally transfer title, and it affects thousands of properties in Baltimore City.

Heirs' property is typically created when the record owner dies without a will, the heirs never initiate the probate process, or a new deed is never recorded after the record owner dies. Over years, this leaves the heirs without clear title to the property. Thus, establishing ownership to manage the property is tricky and prohibitive.

At MVLS, we see properties stuck in this legal in-between for decades. Each of these homes is the story of a family, and valuable time spent with loved ones.

Fortunately, there are many ways for attorneys in our city to help these families reclaim their legacies. As members of the bar, we can make a substantial impact by helping clients navigate estate planning and probate.

How Heirs' Property Can Freeze Homeownership

Without a clear title to the property, minute by minute, heirs' property owners become more susceptible to

Heirs' Property: Family Equity Frozen in Time

Kyla Bayton, Esq. and Steven Kappen, Esq., Maryland Volunteer Lawyer Services

foreclosure or losing their home.

While legal homeowners have access to several resources helpful in maintaining their homes, heirs' property owners are often ineligible for tax credits, tax relief programs, home repair programs, homeowner's insurance, and equity loans. Without these resources, property taxes and home maintenance can become unaffordable for individuals with lower incomes. Therefore, these individuals are more likely to accrue property tax debt and defer necessary home repairs, resulting in losing their home to foreclosure or blight. This creates a significant barrier in preserving generational wealth through homeownership.

How Members of the BABC Can Help

There are many ways members of the BABC can prevent and help resolve the legal issue of heirs' property. One way attorneys can prevent heirs' property is by using careful language when drafting wills and deeds, establishing a clear chain of title, and carefully considering whether a tenancy in common would be appropriate.

Additionally, attorneys and judges can educate family, friends, clients, and the public about heirs' property and estate planning. Since many people are unaware of the issue, how it affects them, and how to avoid it, educating others can have a substantial impact on preventing heirs' property. Legal practitioners can also volunteer to help draft estate plans for lower-income families who may not be able to afford an attorney.

To resolve current heirs' properties, attorneys can assist by volunteering to take on probate cases at Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS) or one of our many pro bono partners. MVLS provides pro bono representation for Marylanders by matching clients with volunteer attorneys. MVLS also provides training and mentoring for attorneys who take these cases as a new area of practice.

Heirs' property is a legal issue that leaves family legacies frozen in time. Together, we can meaningfully reduce this issue through our individual practices and pro bono work.

Meet Your New Committee Chairs



*Asha Jefferson,
Workers' Compensation
Committee Co-Chair*

I'm Asha Joseph Jefferson, Chair of the Maryland Workers' Compensation Commission. I've spent the past 14 years practicing exclusively in workers' compensation, after beginning my career through judicial clerkships,

civil legal services, the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office, and Chesapeake Employers' Insurance.

I became involved with BABC because I believe there is an opportunity to close the information gap surrounding workers' compensation. This area of law can confound and mystify injured workers, employers, and even attorneys who are new to the practice. As Chair, I hope to use my experience, listen to the needs of our members, and embrace thoughtful changes as we enter a new era of modernization.

One of my priorities this year is law student outreach and

educating newer practitioners about workers' compensation as a thriving and rewarding area of practice. As experienced attorneys retire, we need to encourage the next generation to consider this field.

I also want our committee to be a place where members can learn, connect, and share ideas. I encourage anyone interested in workers' compensation—whether experienced or new to the field—to get involved.

A fun fact about me? I'm an avid home chef and definitive foodie, and my superpower is finding the best—and often off-the-beaten-path—restaurants wherever I travel!



*Becca Odelius,
Pro Bono & Access to Legal Services
Committee Chair*

My name is Becca Odelius, and I am the Volunteer Manager for the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (PBRC). I am a former middle school English teacher and the author of

several YA novels. I briefly practiced in the area of Trusts and Estates before joining PBRC.

As an attorney who lives and works in Baltimore City, a my goals are to get more involved in my community and connect with attorneys in the area.

I'm passionate about providing access to justice for our most vulnerable communities; I look forward to working with those who share that passion. I have two goals: help others, and each other. I am prioritizing an upcoming collaboration with the

Baltimore City District Courts and creating opportunities to have some fun and support one another.

I encourage members each month to pick one volunteer opportunity, one networking event, and one training. Just imagine what your resume will look like a year from now. It's never too late to do some good in your community. Why not start right now?

I have three beautiful granddaughters: Naomi, Charlotte, and Daphne. They call me "OG." They are the loves of my life.



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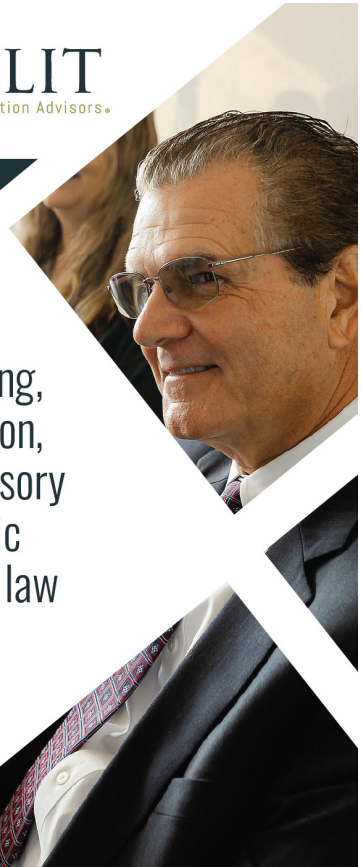
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Meet Your New Committee Chairs



Brittany Dunklow,
*Government & Public Interest Law
Committee Co-Chair*

I am a Senior Assistant State Prosecutor with the Office of the State Prosecutor where I lead our Election Integrity Unit. I am a proud graduate of Indiana University and Howard

University School of law. I joined BABC when I moved to Baltimore in 2015.

I was a member of the Young Lawyers Division and enjoyed volunteering with the Holiday Party for Children. After joining the Office of the State Prosecutor, rejoining the Government and Public Interest Committee was at the top of my list.

I am happy to serve along with my co-chair and create programs for the committee.

I would like to create opportunities for committee members to learn and connect

with each other. I would like to create opportunities for committee members to learn and connect with each other.

Public interest work is important. Building community and networking can help make the work a bit easier to manage. My goal is to build a strong community within the committee, and to hold CLEs and networking events we can all benefit from.

In my spare time, I love baking and cooking!



Joe Vercillo,
*Communications & News Journal
Committee Chair*

I am an attorney with Cipriani & Werner in Columbia, Maryland, where I practice in the firm's general liability group. My practice is wide-ranging and gives me the opportunity to work on matters

involving a variety of industries and legal issues. One of my favorite parts of practicing law is diving into an area where I have little or no prior knowledge and learning enough to effectively understand and defend the case.

I am a relatively new member of the Bar Association of Baltimore City, and I am looking forward to becoming more integrated into the Baltimore legal community through my involvement with the BABC and the Journals and Publications Committee.

One initiative I am particularly excited about is developing a member spotlight featuring some of the many BABC members who

have interesting professional backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that could be valuable to others—especially younger attorneys. I would also like to make the project collaborative by encouraging members to conduct interviews with long-tenured BABC members, creating opportunities for different generations of the Bar to connect and learn from one another.

Outside of work, I live in Annapolis with my wife and two daughters. I come from a family of pizza makers and enjoy carrying on the tradition by making homemade pizza dough in my spare time—although, much like the practice of law, the dough remains a constant work in progress.



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Meet Your New Committee Chairs



*Alex Oyston,
YLD Membership Committee Co-Chair*

Howdy! My name is Alexandra Oyston, I am originally from Texas and I go by Alex. I work for Travelers as Counsel in the Maryland Staff Counsel Office. My practice is insurance defense, and currently I mainly handle auto torts at the district court level. Previously I worked as an Assistant State's Attorney for Baltimore City and for a small civil litigation firm in Annapolis.

I got involved with the BABC because I wanted to meet other attorneys and build my legal network. I specifically became more active when I was working in the city and then even more so when I

was looking for a new job. One of the ways I got more involved was through my BABC mentor, Lauren Lake, that I was paired with. She has been so encouraging and supportive and inspired me to get more involved as she already has been. I have really enjoyed getting more involved and wanted to take that a step further but stepping up to serve for a committee. I was specifically interested in the membership committee because I wanted to be able to coordinate with new members who might be in the same shoes I was just in, looking for a network and guidance.

I am looking forward to working with my co-chair, Raelyn Schuh, and coordinating events that connect new young lawyers/bring in more new and young lawyers. I think a lot of young lawyers do not get involved right away with bar associations either because of cost or lack of time. I want the Membership Committee to put on accessible events that foster a

welcoming and supportive environment for young lawyers to meet other lawyers, judges, and really all kinds of legal professionals so that after even one event, a young lawyer can walk away with at least one person they know they can call the next time they need help.

Fun fact about me: I am a sailing instructor! I have actually been teaching for 16 years. I learned to sail as a kid at the program I went on to teach at down on the Potomac, and then sailed for Texas A&M. I have continued to race in addition to teaching when I can!

Getting involved with the BABC is just one of many ways to start to build a network in Maryland.

Between some great mentors, a wonderful clerkship, and access to organizations like the BABC as early as law school up to now, I've been able to build an incredible network that has helped me get to where I am today.



*Nija Bastfield,
Events Committee Co-Chair*

I recently located back to Baltimore, Maryland from Washington, DC and I wanted

to get involved in a professional organization. I believe my social skills and ability to network motivated me to serve as a co-leader specifically regarding events to bring lawyers and law students together.

I am most excited about creating memories and new relationships that can be sustainable for years to come, ensuring that young lawyers are apprised of the events!

I wish to create mentorship opportunities for younger

lawyers as well as volunteer opportunities

My advice for anyone thinking about getting involved is: just do it! Often times you think about money and time, but just join and become involved based upon your own capacity.

The relationships that you will form will become more than transactional.

In my spare time I operate a foodie page @nijaseatz.

Where in the World are BABC Members?

June 2026

The Honorable La Zette Ringgold-Kirksey (BABC President), Valda Ricks (BABC Vice President), and Letam Duson (BABC Co-Chair, Health & Wellness Committee) along with several other women traded the courtroom for Northern Italy this Summer as part of the inaugural Ley's La Dolce Vita Style Escape, Letam's luxury adventure through Torino, Lake Como, and Milano with her personal styling business Ley All Day.

The experience blended Italian culture, style, self-care, and unforgettable experiences—from a private boat ride on Lake Como, chocolate tasting, and wine country to luxury shopping and plenty of la dolce vita along the way.



Where in the World are BABC Members?

July 2026

YLD Chair - Jacob Dorfman - and his family went on a trip to the beach in Long Branch, NJ. They went there specifically because of all of the kosher restaurants and large Jewish community in the area, which made eating out and enjoying time in the sun all the more fun. They spent time on the beach, at the carousel, and even got to go to an aquarium!



Where in the World are BABC Members?

July 2026

In late July, Hon. Michael W. Reed, his wife and daughter visited Iceland for five days. They toured the South Coast and visited the Westman Islands. Iceland was on their bucket list. They saw spectacular waterfalls, volcanic craters, stunning architecture and landscapes.



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Law School Activity Fairs

YLD Council members took a walk down memory lane visiting their own Alma Maters - University of Baltimore and University of Maryland to recruit students to join BABC. Student members shape the future of BABC and its legacy!

University of Baltimore School of Law August 27, 2026



University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law September 2, 2026



Joint Bar Welcome Back Happy Hour

September 10, 2026

The Maryland Club hosted all the local specialty Bar Associations to reconnect after a summer apart! Members from all over the Baltimore legal community caught up over cocktails and light bites while looking forward to the year ahead.

A huge thanks to Minnesota Lawyers Mutual, Planet Depos and Synergy for sponsoring!



YLD Mix & Mingle

September 17, 2026

The Polish Home Club welcomed YLD members—both students and young professionals—for the first time, creating a great opportunity to connect, build relationships, and unwind!

New members had the chance to gain valuable insight from young professionals while taking a well-deserved break from their studies.

A huge thank you to Veritext and Rosenberg Martin Greenberg for sponsoring the food and drinks and helping make the evening a success!



Mentorship Program Kickoff Breakfast

September 18, 2026

The 2026-2027 mentors and mentees met their matches for the first time! Immediate Past President Hon. Evelyn Lombardo Cusson shared the benefits of having a sturdy support system throughout a legal career. She explained that both mentees and mentors never stop growing as legal professionals when they keep a strong network.

Special thanks to our host, Gallagher LLP!



Annual Memorial Service

September 23, 2026

BABC's Annual Memorial Service is always a deeply meaningful and moving event, providing an opportunity to honor and remember members of the local legal community we have lost in recent years.

Our Memorial Service Committee worked diligently to celebrate their lives and legacies while providing a meaningful space for their loved ones, colleagues, and friends to come together in remembrance.

We are grateful to everyone who helped make this year's service a heartfelt tribute to those who made a lasting impact on our legal community.



Annual Crab Feast

September 30, 2026

Sixty-two BABC members and friends gathered at the Baltimore Rowing & Water Resource Center to bid farewell to the warm months and enjoy a wonderful evening together. Our new venue offered beautiful views of the city skyline and the Patapsco River, while Conrad's Crabs served up a delicious spread of Maryland favorites.

A special thank-you to our sponsor, Maronick Law, for helping make the evening a success!

We look forward to making more memories together next year!



Blast From the Past - BABC Honors

Judge George L. Russell, Jr.



His judicial service was only one of many firsts. In 1968, Judge Russell left the bench to become Baltimore's first African American City Solicitor, serving as the City's chief legal officer until 1974. In 1971, he was the first African American candidate for Mayor of Baltimore City. Although finishing second in the Democratic primary to William Donald Schaefer, Judge Russell demonstrated the growing political influence of Baltimore's Black electorate. In 1973, Judge Russell became the first African American president of the Bar Association of Baltimore City. Finally, Judge Russell also served as the first African American to chair a Judicial Nominating Commission.

This past year, the Baltimore City bench and bar lost one of the giants of its legal community with the passing of the Honorable George L. Russell Jr., who died on April 12, 2025, at the age of 96. Over a career spanning more than half a century, Judge Russell repeatedly broke barriers in Maryland's legal profession as a lawyer, judge, Baltimore City Solicitor, bar leader, and civic advocate.

Born in Baltimore on March 19, 1929, Judge Russell attended Baltimore City public schools and graduated from Frederick Douglass High School before earning an economics degree from Lincoln University in 1950. He graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1954 and, after serving as an Army lawyer, returned home to practice law in Baltimore City. Early in his career, he joined Brown, Allen, Watts & Murphy, one of the pioneering Black law firms in the city.

Not long into his career, in 1966, Judge Russell was appointed to the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City, now the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, becoming the first African American circuit court judge in Maryland. Judge Russell also sat as a special judge on Maryland's newly created Court of Special Appeals, making him the first African American to sit on a Maryland appellate court.

Returning to private practice, Judge Russell joined Kenneth Thompson in founding Russell and Thompson, P.A., a prominent Black-owned Baltimore law firm. In 1986, the firm merged with Piper & Marbury, now part of DLA Piper, in what became an important milestone in the integration of Baltimore's legal community.

Judge Russell continued to shape Baltimore after returning to private practice, and his influence extended well beyond the practice of law. He helped establish Harbor Bank of Maryland and later played a central role in creating the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture. Appointed in 1994 to chair the commission charged with developing the museum, Judge Russell spent years advocating and raising funds for a new, first-class institution devoted to telling the story of Black Marylanders. The museum opened in 2005.

Judge Russell's career is difficult to capture through any single title. He was a trial lawyer, judge, City Solicitor, bar president, civic leader, mentor, and a builder of institutions. But perhaps the common thread was his determination to demonstrate what was possible for those who followed him.



12TH ANNUAL

CABARET & CABERNET

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Legal
Services**

The Bar Association of Baltimore City | Baltimore Bar Foundation Inc.



OCTOBER 14, 2026

6-8PM

OLD ST. PAUL'S CHURCH

233 N CHARLES ST,

BALTIMORE, MD 21201



FOOD & BEVERAGES WILL BE SERVED THROUGHOUT THE EVENING

FEATURING:

PAUL BALLARD	JEANNE HARRIS-COVINGTON	SAMUEL PULVER
DONNA BERNSTEIN	ALISON KOHLER	RAFAEL REGALES
SCARLETT M. CORSO	GARY NORMAN	GEORGE RITCHIE

STAGE DIRECTOR: SCARLETT M. CORSO

MUSICAL DIRECTOR: DON WOLCOTT

PARKING INFO:

FOR ONLY \$1, THERE IS VALIDATED PARKING AVAILABLE AT THE ST. PAUL PLACE GARAGE, LOCATED AT 210 ST PAUL ST., BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202

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Bench/Bar Conference



A MORE PERFECT UNION: ***The Bench and Bar at 250***

Friday, October 16, 2026

10:00am – 4:00pm

CCBC Catonsville

800 S Rolling Rd, Catonsville, MD 21228

**“Meet the Judges” Happy Hour
to follow 4:00pm – 5:30pm**

**Hosted by Baltimore County Bar Association and
Bar Association of Baltimore City**

**Presenters & Moderators include:
District Court, Circuit Court & Appellate Court Judges
Attorneys
Industry Experts**

\$65 Members

\$75 Non-Members

\$55 Law Students & 1st Year Barred Members

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BABC & YLD PRESENT

YAPPY HOUR



Bring your pup dressed in costume for a chance to win prizes, sip on craft brews, and enjoy a howling good time with fellow dog lovers! Bring an item to donate to BARCS!

OCTOBER 20
6-7:30PM

M8 BEER
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BALTIMORE, MD 21230

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Thank you to our sponsor!





YLD CLE & Ethics Committees Present:

Things They Don't Teach You in Law School: The Ethics of Managing a Law Practice - CLE

Law school prepares you to practice law, not to run a practice. This CLE seminar bridges that gap, giving young lawyers the practical management skills that don't come with a J.D.

Instructors Craig Brodsky and Bar Counsel Thomas DeGonia will discuss engagement letters, case management, IOLTA compliance, internal policies and procedures, and client confidentiality – along with strategies for implementing policies that keep a practice running smoothly. We'll also tackle technology's growing role in practice management, including the ethical use of artificial intelligence.

Whether you're a few years in or just starting out, you'll leave with practical tools to manage your practice with confidence and stay on the right side of your ethical obligations while doing it.

Food and drinks will be served.



CRAIG BRODSKY,
LEGAL ETHICS ESQ.



THOMAS DEGONIA,
MD BAR COUNSEL



WEDNESDAY

October 21, 2026



TIME

Doors open at 5:30, program will run 6-7pm



LOCATION

GOODELL DEVRIES LEECH & DANN
1 SOUTH ST. #2000
BALTIMORE, MD 21202

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!



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www.baltimorebar.org/ecalendar

Members - Free

Nonmembers - \$40



SAVE THE DATE!

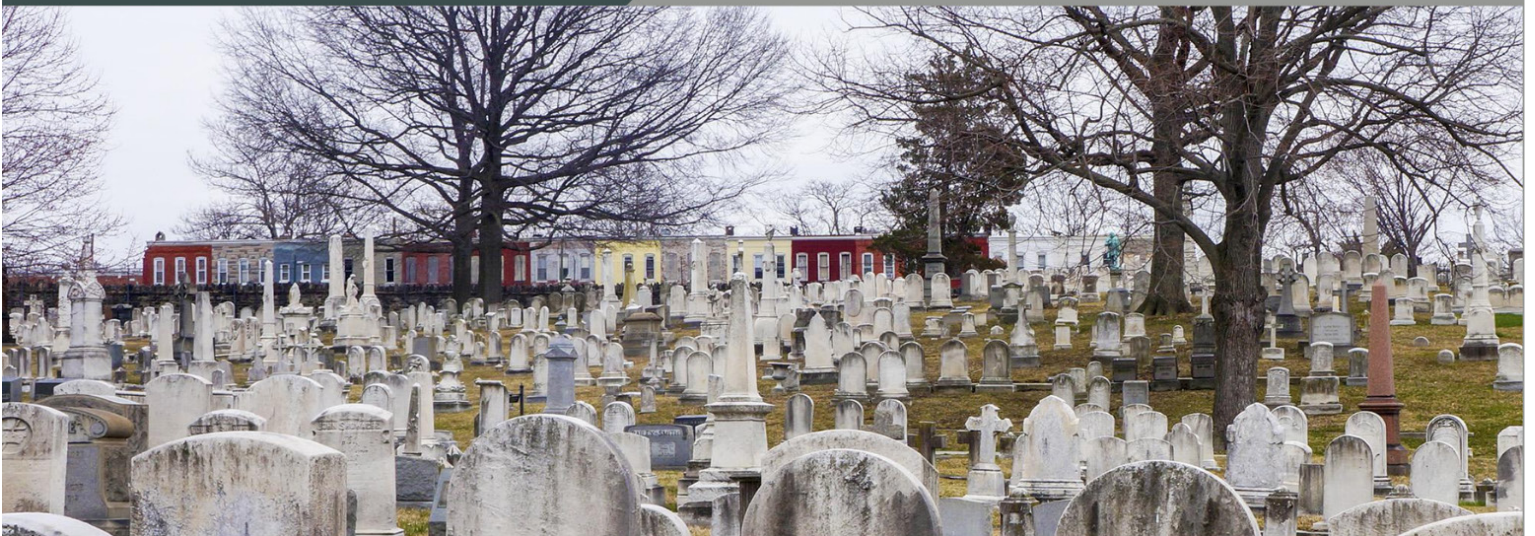
SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 24



GREEN MOUNT CEMETERY TOUR

1501 GREENMOUNT AVENUE
BALTIMORE, MD 21202

LED BY DEREK VAN DE WALLE,
BABC HISTORICAL COMMITTEE CHAIR





Registration and nomination forms open!

Presidential Holiday Honors

Celebrate the Season. Honor Leadership.

Join us for a festive evening celebrating the holiday season while recognizing the exceptional leadership and service of the Bar Association of Baltimore City's Past Presidents, award recipients, and committee chairs.

DECEMBER **2** 5:30 PM-8PM

Lord Baltimore Hotel

**20 West Baltimore Street,
Baltimore, MD 21201**

Early bird pricing (through November 11):

YLD Members - \$90

Regular Members - \$100

Nonmembers & Guests - \$110

Regular pricing:

YLD Members - \$100

Regular Members - \$110

Nonmembers & Guests - \$120

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\$70 BABC Member
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calendar](http://www.baltimorebar.org/calendar) or use QR Code



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5TH

Departs White Marsh Park & Ride
@ 7am Arrives NYC @ 8th Ave. & 49th St.

Departs NYC @ 6:30pm

Transportation on a Luxurious Coach Bus
Includes refreshments, entertainment and prizes



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