

ABA releases comprehensive survey report revealing key drivers of judicial stress

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CHICAGO, Dec. 23, 2020 — A comprehensive report released today in the [2020 Journal of The Professional Lawyer](#) surveying more than 1,000 judges across the United States suggests job stress has become a serious health concern in the state judicial ranks, with about one-third or more reporting fatigue and low energy, sleep disturbance or disturbed attention and concentration.

In addition to identifying sources of stress, the report also devotes a section to strategies for judges to promote self-care and enhance resiliency and makes recommendations to ease the road to better well-being.

The National Judicial Stress and Resiliency Survey, designed by the American Bar Association [Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs](#) (CoLAP), asked judges to rate their sources of stress, effects of stress, stress management and resiliency, and alcohol use under such categories as workload, safety and security, interpersonal stress, trauma exposure, staffing issues, ethical concerns and court procedures.

CoLAP and its partners, including The National Judicial College and the College of St. Scholastica, initiated the study to identify stressors unique to the judiciary, how they affect individual judges and strategies to employ to mitigate these stressors.

“This groundbreaking national research reveals that the stresses unique to judges can lead to health risks that interfere with their professional and personal lives,” ABA President Patricia Lee Refo said. “The results of this bold and comprehensive research provide the ABA important guidance in its continued efforts to assist judges to protect their well-being and resiliency.”

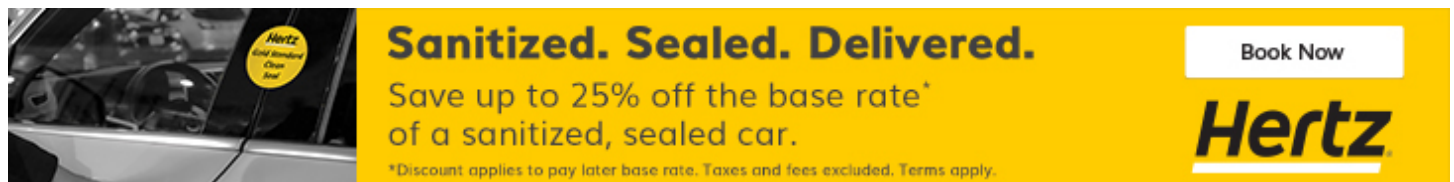
A total of 1,034 of the nation’s 18,000 judges participated in the survey, with about eight of 10 on state courts, with others mostly on the local or state administrative levels. The survey was conducted prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the study notes that judges and the judicial system have “been subjected to stress and tests of their resiliency like never before.”

The report, Stress and Resiliency in the U.S. Judiciary, is considered the most comprehensive review of well-being of its kind for the judicial ranks and builds on an ABA 2016 study of lawyer well-being and a separate law student well-being study that same year.

Specifically, nearly four of 10 judges reported that their chief stressor stemmed from fatigue and low energy. Also, the survey found that one in five judges met at least one criteria for depressive disorder, such as not having initiative, preoccupation with negative thoughts, work is no longer meaningful, can't wait for the day's work to end and depressed mood.

"Judges sit at the pinnacle of the justice system and their own personal needs are often their last concern," CoLAP Chair Tish Vincent said. "This national study of judges' experience of stress and their methods to cope casts light on judicial well-being and outlines methods to bolster resiliency."

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