



President's Newsletter

Winter 2017 - Doc. No. 829

Dear Fellow Members:

In the disappointing aftermath of the cancellation of our October meeting in Napa as a result of the wildfires, the Board of the Association met in New York last month to consider some important changes with regard to membership, and unanimously approved a number of measures.

Life Membership

For many years, our By-Laws have provided that members in good standing who have, as of May in any year, maintained membership in the Association for 40 years, are designated as Life Members, and are exempted from payment of dues. Accordingly, once achieving Life Member status, members do not receive dues invoices. The purpose behind establishing Life Membership was to honor the loyalty of 40 year members, and to encourage these members to remain active in the Association in retirement.

However, particularly in today's economic climate, many of us remain active in the practice of law for more than 40 years, and we have received any number of comments over the years from Life Members to the effect that they would be happy to continue to support the work of the MLA financially, but, since they do not receive an invoice, do not have a means of doing so. This is particularly true of members whose firms pay their dues.

Accordingly, the Board has amended the By-Laws to make nonpayment of dues by Life Members optional. Starting next year, all Life Members will receive a dues invoice. That invoice will contain a place to check to inform the Association that the Life Member is opting out of paying dues, and upon returning the invoice with that notation that Life Member will not receive further dues invoices. This option will continue to be available to Life Members with every year's invoice. We would hope that many of our Life Members, particularly those who are continuing to practice, will continue to pay dues. However, I would emphasize that while we would greatly appreciate the financial support of our Life Members, we value even more greatly the continued involvement of our long-time members, including those who for whatever reason decide to exercise their option not to pay dues.

Delinquent Members

Late and non-payment of dues is a problem that has vexed the Association for many years. The vast majority of our members pay their dues relatively soon after receiving their dues invoice. However, far too many members put off payment for months after the initial invoice,

and some delay making payment for years. The Association is dependent upon payment of dues to function, and it is of course unfair for the burden of supporting the work of the MLA to be borne by some rather than all of its members. But the problem of non-payment goes beyond a simple issue of fairness. The By-Laws provide that default in the payment of dues for three years shall automatically terminate membership, and this is the primary reason that the Association loses members. Our dues are very modest compared to other bar associations (for example, our dues are approximately one third of what it costs a lawyer who has been practicing for 10 years to belong to the American Bar Association).. However, once a member gets two or three years in arrears, the expense of remaining a member is obviously more significant.

Accordingly, the Board has adopted two measures to provide an incentive for all our Members to pay their dues in a timely fashion. First, beginning in 2018, a \$50 surcharge will be assessed if dues are not paid by July 1 of that year. Second, the Board has amended the By-Laws to provide that membership will be automatically terminated for any member who is delinquent for two years rather than the current three. This amendment will hopefully encourage delinquent members to become current before this becomes too onerous.

Needless to say, these changes will not affect the vast majority of you who promptly pay your dues. Hopefully these changes will encourage everyone to do so.

Finally, at this time of year I always stop and count my blessings, and high on that list behind my family are the friends I have made in the MLA. I hope each of you has a happy holiday season, and a happy and prosperous 2018.

With best regards,

Hal

Harold K. Watson | *President of the Maritime Law Association of the United States*



801 Travis Street, Suite 1910
Houston, TX 77002
o: 713-343-2952 | m: 832-788-8481 | f: 713-546-9806