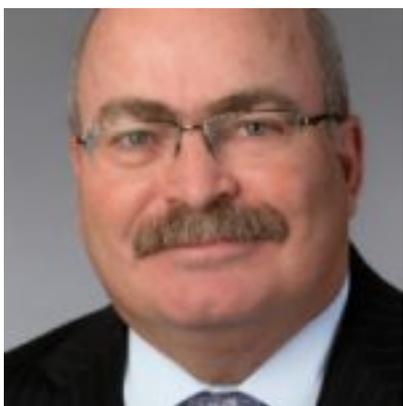


MICHIGAN LAWYERS WEEKLY

A sidebar with ... Brian McKeen

By Thomas Franz
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McKeen

For more than 30 years, Brian J. McKeen has been a member of the Michigan Association for Justice.

He has spent most of those years as a member of the association's executive board, and he was named president June 1.

The MAJ is a group of attorneys who represent people and families who suffered preventable injury and death as the result of negligence. It has about 1,700 members.

McKeen, founder and managing partner of McKeen & Associates PC in Detroit, spoke with Michigan Lawyers Weekly to discuss his practice and goals as president of MAJ.

How did you get into the field of negligence law?

While I was in law school, I had an opportunity to clerk for Judge Robert Anderson at Oakland County Circuit Court. I got to sit in court

and watch trials. I saw a lot of very interesting trials, personal injury and medical malpractice, and I found that area of the law to be very fascinating. No two cases were alike. Each case had unique issues and challenges. I thought this would be a very intellectually stimulating way to spend your career. I thought there was a real opportunity to help people in need.

What is the mission of the MAJ?

We're an organization of trial lawyers who represent individuals and families who have been adversely affected as a consequence of the negligence of others. We have many educational programs on various topics like no-fault, medical malpractice and employment law. We don't just cover negligence, it's also misconduct of others. That would bring in topics like sexual harassment and discrimination.

How has your career been impacted by MAJ?

I do a lot of medical malpractice with special interest in birth injury litigation. We do every aspect of personal injury, and I do auto cases, truck cases, other general personal injury cases and some product liability. I've been a member of MAJ since I began private practice in 1983. It's been a very integral part to my career, and it holds a special place in my heart.

Given your involvement with auto cases, what is your opinion of no-fault law in Michigan today?

I think it's clear that the citizens of Detroit and other urban areas like Flint are being unfairly discriminated against in terms of rates. Unfortunately, this has led to efforts that I think are largely misguided to try and change the no-fault law. The changes that are proposed have a risk of adversely affecting the rights of Michigan citizens, both victims of auto accidents and, in many cases, the providers taking care of it. I think that there ought to be more focus on the abuses by the insurance industry with discriminatory practices and unreasonable profiteering. There should be more transparency about how the insurance industry works.

Now as president of MAJ, what do you hope the association can accomplish under your leadership?

I want to do a better job of making the public aware of the injustices that have been perpetrated on the people of Michigan and their vanishing rights in the civil justice system. It all starts with public awareness. I think there needs to be some outcry from the public.

I also want to boost our membership. I want MAJ to be a strong and vibrant organization. One of my goals is to work towards having Michigan implement mandatory continuing legal education. We're one of a few states in the country that doesn't mandate CLE. I think it's a disservice to the people of the state of Michigan. I think it would be something that would be a tremendous benefit for members to participate in CLE. I think it would be good for the bar and bench, and good for the citizens.

A final goal of mine would be to boost minority participation at MAJ. I think that we're underrepresented in the African-American and Hispanic communities and other minority populations, and I would like MAJ to look more like the population of the city of Detroit, southeast Michigan, and the state as a whole.

What would a mandate for Continuing Legal Education look like?

It would look like the other 48 states that do it. You have to attend so many hours of CLE to maintain your license. People could choose to attend MAJ seminars, or they could attend AAJ seminars or other institutions. There's a variety of places you can go and get CLE credit. I think that a better informed, more up-to-date bar would benefit everyone in our state, from judges to the people we represent.