

## Encouraging Legal Professionals to Disconnect: ABA's Proposal



The American Bar Association (ABA) is urging legal employers to support their employees in fully disconnecting from work for at least one week each year. This recommendation is part of a broader initiative to combat burnout and enhance the well-being of legal professionals.

### Incentivizing Time Off with Billable Hour Credits

In a proposal submitted by the ABA's Young Lawyers Division, law firms are encouraged to grant lawyers 40 billable hour credits. This incentive aims to encourage attorneys to take a full week off from work, allowing them to leave their duties without worrying about falling behind.

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### Addressing Lawyer Mental Health Concerns

The ABA's proposal responds to growing concerns about mental health within the legal profession. A report accompanying the resolution highlights the long hours lawyers work and the difficulty many face in truly unplugging from their jobs. The ABA, while lacking direct authority over law firms, influences the industry through its policies, and this resolution sends a strong message about the importance of lawyer well-being.

### The Workaholic Culture in Law

According to the ABA's National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, about 25% of lawyers are classified as "workaholics," a figure significantly higher than the 10% of workaholics in the general U.S. adult population. This work addiction is linked to elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and burnout, making it a critical issue for the legal profession.

### The Impact of Burnout: A Case Study

A 2023 survey of 4,450 Massachusetts lawyers revealed alarming statistics: 77% reported feeling burned out, 26% experienced high levels of anxiety, 21% suffered from depression, and 7% had suicidal thoughts. These figures are notably higher than the national averages for U.S. adults, underscoring the need for systemic change within the industry.

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### Law Firms Taking Action

Some law firms have already begun to address these issues. For example, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe implemented a policy in 2021 allowing employees to receive 40 hours of billable hour credits for taking a week off. Siobhan Handley, the firm's chief talent officer, confirmed that the program remains in place, helping top talent maintain their careers by prioritizing self-care.

### Additional Resolutions on the Agenda

The ABA's House of Delegates is set to consider several other resolutions related to law firms and law schools. These proposals include urging law schools to require major firms to disclose pay during on-campus interviews, promoting flexible work policies for legal employers, and ensuring law schools transparently disclose the full cost of attendance, including expenses like bar exam preparation.

**Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.**

