ACBA
Young Lawyers Division

Point of Law

The E-Newsletter of the Young Lawyers Division of the Allegheny County Bar Association

Summer 2026

Preserving the Lawyer Behind the Practice

By Rebeca Himena Sekinger

The legal profession prizes stamina. It asks lawyers to think critically, respond quickly, shoulder responsibility, and maintain composure under pressure. Those demands are familiar to anyone in practice. Less often discussed, however, is the parallel obligation that accompanies them: the obligation to preserve the person behind the practice. A sustainable career in law requires more than technical skill and professional discipline. It requires habits, outlets, and forms of renewal that allow lawyers to remain grounded, engaged, and fully human over time.

That broader understanding of professional well-being has shaped much of this bar year. Under President Amy Coco's emphasis on health and wellness, the Allegheny County Bar Association Young Lawyers Division ("YLD") has been intentional about creating programming that reflects an important reality. That health and wellness are not peripheral to the practice of law. They are central to whether or not a lawyer can sustain a demanding career with steadiness, perspective, and purpose.

For me, that idea begins with music. I first picked up the violin at eight years old, too small for the full instrument, but drawn to the discipline and beauty of its sound. What began as simple scales became years of rehearsals, performances, summer string programs, orchestra work, and eventually solo performances. As a teenager, I played with the Pittsburgh Civic Orchestra and in pit orchestras for theatrical productions. Later, I studied under Richard A. DiAdamo, a longtime violinist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, who impressed upon me

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Young Leaders in the Law:

A Brief Retrospective on the YLD Bar Leadership Initiative and 412 Restaurants to the Rescue

River S. Icenhour

World-famous Czech-American tennis great Martina Navratilova once said: "The difference between involvement and commitment is like ham and eggs. The chicken is involved; the pig is committed." With only slight apologies to my fellow classmates in the 2025-2026 Allegheny County Bar Association Young Lawyers Division ("YLD") Bar Leadership Initiative, the program certainly requires its participants to curl their tails and utter forth a few "oinks".

As with any successful organization, good leadership is an imperative. And while we lawyers may consider ourselves innately ingrained with the qualities of leadership (i.e., a headstrong nature coupled with a penchant for being correct), true, high-quality, and effective organizational governance still requires some training and experience. In steps the YLD's Bar Leadership Initiative. The Bar Leadership Initiative ("BLI") was founded in recognition of a distinct need to prepare good, young leaders to take positions in the Allegheny County Bar Association ("ACBA") – furthering the mission of the YLD as a whole. Each year, a class of up to 15 young lawyer applicants is selected to participate in the program, which runs a full "academic year" from summer to summer of each year – led by the YLD's Chair-Elect. This year's program was led by Chair-Elect Devyn Lisi.

Selected participants are required to complete a host of obligations that involve them in the goings-on of the YLD and the ACBA as a whole. To assist with their integration into the bar leadership structure, each participant is assigned to one of the YLD's committees, where they serve

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2025-2026 BLI Class, from left to right: Katerina Vassil, Moises A. Tonoc Bonilla, Elizabeth Fitch, Luke Torrance, Julia Nista, Sarra Dotts, Devyn Lisi (BLI Class Chair, YLD-Chair Elect), Darious Singleton, Bailee Yeager, Aubrey Milloy, JJ Gismondi, Audrey Fox. Not Pictured: River S. Icenhour.

Pennsylvania's School Funding Reckoning:

How *William Penn School District v. PA Dept. of Education* Reshaped Public Education

By Elizabeth Fitch

Two children grow up twenty miles apart in Pennsylvania. One attends a school with a full-time librarian, updated textbooks, dedicated counselors, and well-maintained classrooms. The other attends a school where teachers share supplies, courses have been cut, and the building itself is in disrepair. Same state. Same constitution. Radically different futures.

This is not a hypothetical. It has been the lived reality for hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvania students for decades, and it is the problem that sat at the heart of one of the most consequential school funding lawsuits in the country. In February 2023, a Pennsylvania court finally put a name to it: unconstitutional.

The case, *William Penn School District et al. v. Pennsylvania Department of Education et al.*, began as a challenge to the way Pennsylvania funds its public schools and ended with a landmark ruling that declared the system in violation of both the state's Education Clause and its Equal Protection guarantees. But a court ruling, as significant as it is, is only the beginning.

The Road to *William Penn*

To understand why the *William Penn* case mattered so much, it helps to understand what federal law does not protect. In 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* that education is not a fundamental right under the U.S. Constitution.[1] The case involved Mexican-American families in Texas whose children attended schools in property-poor districts. The Court acknowledged the funding disparities but declined to intervene, reasoning that the Fourteenth Amendment did not require equal school spending and that questions of educational policy were best left to the states.[2]

That holding pushed the fight for educational equity to the state level, where it has remained ever since. In the decades following the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling, several state courts have found a fundamental right to education under their own constitutions, Pennsylvania among them. The Pennsylvania Constitution expressly provides that, "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth."[3] It was this state constitutional recognition of the right to education that made the *William Penn* lawsuit viable.

A System Built on Inequality

Pennsylvania public schools are funded primarily through local property taxes. In practice, this means a school district's resources are almost entirely determined by the property values within its borders. Wealthy districts can generate enormous revenue for their schools even at modest tax rates. Poor districts simply cannot keep up.

The result of this funding method is a staggeringly inequitable outcome. At the time of the *William Penn* trial, over 50 percent of students in the state were unable to pass the mandatory high school exit exam.[4] Per-pupil spending ranged from a low of $9,800 in property-poor districts to as much as $28,400 in high-wealth districts.[5] Nearly 75 percent of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts were spending below what experts determined was necessary for an adequate education.[6]

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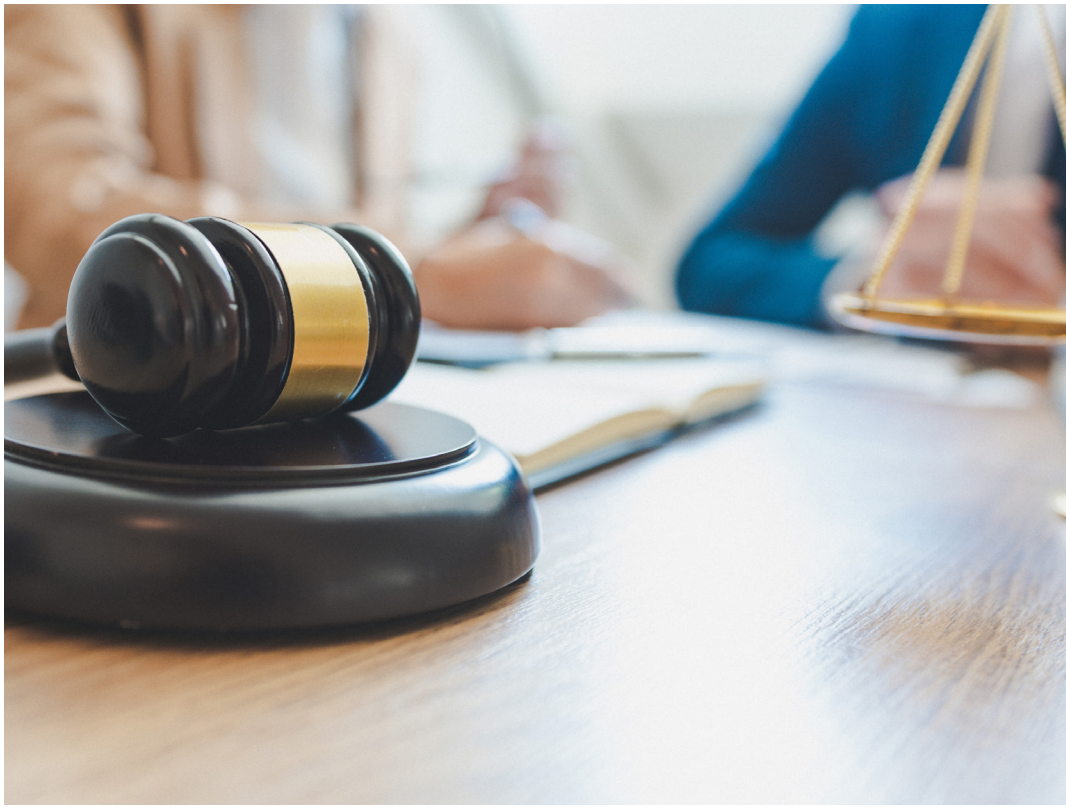
Discovery Depositions in Allegheny County: What Practitioners Need to Know

By JJ Gismondi



While appellate courts are the primary source of binding precedent on most aspects of civil practice, that is less true with discovery because most discovery rulings are not appealable until the end of the case, at which point the issue is practically moot. Thus, the final word on discovery matters—especially deposition practice—often comes from trial courts, making trial court opinions the *de facto* precedent on these issues. Allegheny County is no different, and for those practicing in this jurisdiction, *Lau v. Allegheny Health Network*, No. GD 18-011924 (C.P. Allegheny County, March 30, 2021) and its progeny[1] are essential reading for anyone participating in discovery depositions. *Lau* involved a defendant doctor's deposition in a birth-injury case where the court had to address whether defense counsel had properly objected to the doctor being asked opinion questions about the standard of care, as well as whether counsel's speaking objections and instructions not to answer various questions were appropriate. The court's extensive analysis ultimately laid the groundwork for deposition practice as we now know it in Allegheny County.

Since *Lau's* tenets were recently reaffirmed in *Toth v. UPMC et al.*, No. GD 22-009192 (C.P. Allegheny County, January 5, 2026), an opinion signed by three Allegheny County judges (including the administrative judge of the Civil Division and the current discovery judge who hears the vast majority of deposition disputes), now is a good time to review the essential rules practitioners must know before taking part in depositions in Allegheny County.

Discovery is broad, and so is the scope of deposition questioning

This idea is the starting point for basically every rule discussed below. As *Lau* recognizes, Pennsylvania has a tradition of broad, liberal discovery so that the parties can learn information from the other side so as to further the truth-determining process, prevent unfair surprise, enhance counsel's ability to advocate for their client, and promote efficiency.[2] In that vein, attorneys at depositions must have broad leeway to explore lines of questioning that perhaps they would not be allowed to pursue in front of a jury at trial.

Objections at depositions are permitted but are limited and frequently unnecessary

While *Lau* does not forbid objections at depositions entirely, it does sharply limit how they should be made and requires that they be (a) concise, (b) non-argumentative, and (c) non-suggestive to the witness.[3] This ensures that the deposition does not get bogged down with spats between the attorneys that delay and derail valid lines of questioning. And as *Lau* notes, many substantive objections are not even necessary to preserve the record in most situations since the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure frequently preserve them by default (one notable exception

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The Rise of Influencer Law for Small Businesses

By Julia Nista

For decades, advertising law primarily focused on large corporations, television commercials, and national marketing campaigns. Today, however, any local business with a social media platform may face many of the same legal obligations as a major brand. Social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have transformed small businesses into constant content creators, and in many cases, business owners themselves become influencers.

This shift has created an emerging area of law often referred to as "influencer law." Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing is designed to appear personal and authentic rather than overtly commercial. Consumers are more likely to trust a product recommendation from a relatable creator than from a traditional advertisement. As a result, small businesses increasingly collaborate with local influencers, offer free products in exchange for reviews, or promote their own products through personal social media accounts.

Influencer Marketing Is No Longer Just for Celebrities

The problem with "influencer law" is that many small businesses do not realize existing advertising regulations apply equally to online content. Multiple small businesses in different industries may all fall under federal advertising regulations. The casual nature of social media often creates the illusion that these posts are informal conversation rather than regulated commercial speech.

This misunderstanding creates significant legal exposure. Social media has effectively eliminated the distinction between advertiser and individual. A small business owner with several thousand followers now operates within a legal environment once reserved for sophisticated corporate marketing departments. Yet most small businesses lack the legal guidance necessary to navigate these obligations properly.

Disclosure Rules and False Advertising Risks

The primary regulator in the "influencer law" area is the Federal Trade Commission ("FTC"), which prohibits deceptive or misleading advertising practices under Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act (the "FTC Act").[1] The FTC's Endorsement Guides require influencers and businesses to disclose any "material connection" related to a promotion.

The FTC Endorsement Guides touch on payments, free products, discounts, affiliate commissions, or other benefits received in exchange for promotion.[2] However, it is important to keep in mind that the FTC Endorsement Guides are administrative interpretations, not codified statutes. Practices inconsistent with the Guides do not automatically violate a specific regulation. Yet, such inconsistent practices serve as the evidentiary basis for the FTC to bring a corrective enforcement action under Section 5 of the FTC Act on the grounds that the representation is inherently deceptive.

The FTC has repeatedly emphasized that disclosures must be "clear and conspicuous."[3] Therefore, business posts should follow these guidelines when posting. Importantly, businesses themselves may be liable for inadequate disclosures made by influencers promoting their products. Platforms reward content that attracts attention and engagement, which often encourages exaggerated claims. Businesses frequently advertise products as "healthy," "natural," or "guaranteed" without understanding the legal significance attached to those terms. Influencer culture can incentivize dramatic transformations, testimonials, and viral marketing tactics that may cross the line when it comes to advertising correctly.

Intellectual property issues create additional legal risks. Small businesses often use copyrighted music, repost customer photos, or incorporate trending content into advertisements

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that artistry is not simply a matter of technical correctness. It is a matter of interpretation, discipline, patience, and heart.

Those lessons have followed me into the law. Music taught me how to prepare carefully, how to listen closely, how to tolerate slow progress, and how to perform under pressure without losing my center. It taught me that discipline and expression are not opposites. It taught me that confidence is built through repetition, correction, and persistence. Most importantly, it taught me that what sustains us outside our profession invariably shapes how we show up within it. The lawyer and the musician are not separate selves. They inform one another.

That is why creative practice deserves a more prominent place in how we think about lawyer well-being. Too often, creativity is treated as ornamental, as something extra to be pursued only after the "real work" is done. But creative practices are not mere diversions from the pressures of professional life. They are often among the very things that make professional life durable. Music, writing, painting, theater, cooking, photography, and other artistic pursuits all call upon habits of attention that are essential to the best lawyering, including observation, patience, interpretation, discipline, and responsiveness.

Yet creativity should not be defined narrowly. Physical activity, too, can be understood as a form of creative practice. A walk through the city, a yoga class, a run, a bike ride, or any intentional movement that creates mental space and restores equilibrium is not simply exercise in the utilitarian sense. It is an act of recalibration. It creates distance from urgency. It restores rhythm. It invites a lawyer back into the body and out of the constant abstractions of deadlines, conflict, and cognitive overload. In that sense, physical activity is not separate from creativity, but one of its most accessible and necessary forms. It is a way of creating clarity, energy, and perspective.

That understanding informed several YLD programs this year. In October, the Division partnered with Bestie Walk Club for a three-mile wellness walk along the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. The event was simple by design, but meaningful in effect. It created a space for lawyers to connect without performance, to converse without an agenda, and to move without the confines of a formal meeting room. In a profession that often equates productivity with sitting still and pressing forward, there was value in gathering outdoors and remembering that professional community can also be built in motion.

The same principle was at work in Puppy Yoga in November. On one level, the event offered exactly what its name suggests, a joyful and lighthearted experience. On another level, it served a more serious function. Lawyers need opportunities for levity. They need moments that interrupt stress with presence, perfectionism with play, and overextension with simple enjoyment. Wellness programming does not become less meaningful because it is fun. Quite the opposite. In a profession that can reward chronic tension, experiences that invite ease and delight are not frivolous. They are restorative.

In January, the YLD partnered with the ACBA Health and Wellness Committee to present a CLE addressing second-hand trauma, burnout, mindfulness, and practical strategies for supporting well-being throughout the course of a legal career. That program reinforced a point the profession can no longer afford to treat as secondary, which is that wellness is not merely a personal preference. It is a matter of professional sustainability. A chronically depleted lawyer is not made more effective through endurance alone. Over time, depletion erodes judgment, patience, attentiveness, and empathy. The profession benefits when lawyers are supported not only in developing

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as a quasi-member – either Education, Diversity, Communication, Public Service, or Member Services. In addition to attending and participating in those meetings held by their respective committees and those specific to the BLI program, BLI participants are expected to attend and participate in a number of the other programs hosted by the YLD. Those include the annual YLD Holiday Party, Children's Holiday Toy Drive, and other special events, meetings, and committee functions as the participant is available. Very little persuasion to participate is necessary when the Halloween Boo-ery Tour/ Bar Crawl and rooftop happy hours are included on the calendar.

From time to time, additional participation opportunities arise, including judging local mock trial competitions or preparing articles or social media posts to support the ACBA and YLD. The culmination of the program is a participant-planned and organized class project, typically benefitting a local charitable cause. Previous BLI projects have included a guide for new attorneys graduating school and entering the job market, collecting gently-used luggage for children in the foster system, and last year's project, "Won't You Be My Neighbor" – which included a comprehensive legal referral guide for recent immigrants and refugees. The guide was translated into five languages common among Pittsburgh's immigrant communities.

This year's BLI class consists of 12 young attorneys: Sarra Dotts, Elizabeth Fitch, Audrey Fox, Darious Singleton, Aubrey Milloy, Moises Tonoc Bonilla, Luke Torrance, Katerina Vassil, Julia Nista, Bailee Yeager, J.J. Gismondi, and River S. Icenhour. This year's class project – 412 Restaurants to the Rescue – was a chefs' table-styled event, hosted on March 30th, to benefit 412 Food Rescue, a local Pittsburgh charity. The BLI class divided into three committees to prepare for the event: Events, who were responsible for soliciting restaurants and chefs to prepare dishes; Finance, who organized sponsorships through local firms and organizations, and raffle items from local businesses; and Service, who worked directly with 412 Food Rescue to produce advertising material and direct support for the organization.

412 Food Rescue is a non-profit organization whose mission is to eliminate food waste in the Southwestern Pennsylvania region through the direct reallocation of excess foodstuffs with the help of local sponsors and partner organizations. With that assistance, 412 Food Rescue is able to save food from waste, preparing both fresh meals and general nutritional support to the communities they benefit. To support 412's mission, the BLI helped create a video featuring the "food rescue" process, from the organization collecting foodstuffs donated by partner companies, to the processing and delivery of those foods to folks in need.

The BLI's 412 Restaurants to the Rescue event was hosted at the Hotel Monaco, and featured a tasting of hand-crafted dishes from local chefs including Butterjoint, Emerson's, Evia, Golden Gai, and V & V Scratch Kitchen. Raffles were also hosted at the

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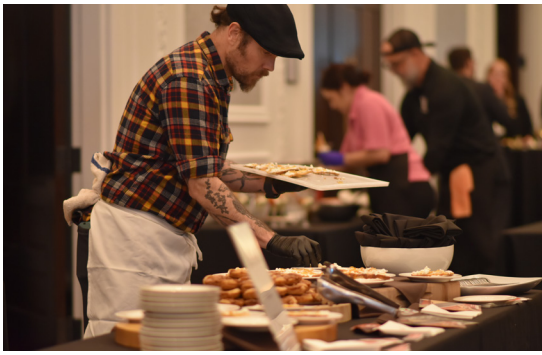
Above: *ACBA Members visit different food stations during "412 Restaurants to Rescue" at Hotel Monaco.*



Right: *Chef Peter Henry of Butterjoint prepares his food as attendees make their rounds during "412 Restaurants to Rescue."*

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So, in 2014, six school districts, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, the NAACP-PA State Conference, and a group of public-school parents filed suit against state legislative leaders, the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the Governor in Commonwealth Court. The plaintiffs' argument was straightforward: the state's funding system was not only inadequate, it was unconstitutional.

The Court's Verdict

The Commonwealth Court agreed. On February 7, 2023, the Court issued a 786-page decision, ruling Pennsylvania's school funding system unconstitutional on two grounds.

First, under the Education Clause of the Pennsylvania Constitution, which requires the state to maintain a "thorough and efficient system of public education," the court found that students in low-wealth districts were being denied the essential tools of a meaningful education: sufficient teachers, up-to-date curricula, adequate facilities, and basic technology.[7]

Second, the court found a violation of the Equal Protection of the Pennsylvania Constitution.[8] The disparity in resources was not justified by any compelling government interest, it was simply a product of where a child happened to live.[9] As of July 2023, this ruling was final and binding.

The Legislature Responds (Slowly)

In January 2024, the state's Basic Education Funding Commission reported that Pennsylvania's public schools had a statewide "adequacy gap" of $5.4 billion, the additional funding needed over seven years to bring every district to a constitutionally adequate level, with $5.1 billion identified as the state's responsibility.[10]

In June 2024, the Pennsylvania House passed House Bill 2370, a comprehensive reform bill that would codify the commission's seven-year plan into law and ensure that public education does not discriminate against students in low-wealth communities. The moment felt significant. Public Interest Law Center senior attorney Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg captured the mood: "We are headed towards a before and after moment for the children of Pennsylvania. . . . The most unfair school funding system in the nation will be no more."[11] Since taking office in 2023, Governor Shapiro has reinforced that momentum, increasing K–12 education funding by nearly $3 billion, the largest sustained investment in state history.[12]

The impact is visible locally. Baldwin-Whitehall, Allegheny County's district with the largest adequacy gap at $24.1 million, used nearly two-thirds of its initial $2.6 million allocation to expand mental health services for students.[13] Additional dollars were used to provide teachers with small grants for purchasing classroom materials and maintaining the district's full-day kindergarten program.[14] Other neighboring districts, such as Plum Borough, Butler, and California Area, have used adequacy funds to launch career and technical education programs, update elementary math and reading curricula, and purchase new technology for student use.[15]

But advocates draw a clear distinction between incremental budget increases and systemic constitutional compliance. The court did not simply order more money. It ordered a system that does not discriminate based on local wealth. The full structural reform called for in HB 2370, a binding, multi-year commitment to close the gap, has yet to pass the Senate.

The Ruling is Only the Beginning

The *William Penn* decision was a historic moment. A court finally affirmed what advocates, educators, and parents had argued for decades: a child's constitutional right to a meaningful education cannot be contingent on their address.

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would be objections to the form/phrasing of the question, which must be lodged when the question is asked).[4]

Counsel generally cannot instruct the witness not to answer

Even if counsel objects to a question, they typically must permit the witness to answer. The only real exceptions to this are if the question either (a) seeks privileged information or (b) goes beyond a court-imposed limit on the evidence.[5] "Privilege" is also not whatever the objecting attorney wants it to be; there must be a real basis for the privilege being asserted (e.g., attorney-client; work product; doctor-patient; peer review; etc.).[6] Absent one of those exceptions, the objecting attorney cannot instruct the witness not to answer.

Speaking objections are not permitted

Speaking objections (which not only describe why counsel believes the question is improper but also suggest the answer) are both disruptive and allow the objecting attorney to impermissibly "coach" the witness, subverting discovery's fact-finding goals by potentially tainting the witness's testimony.[7] For example, suppose the plaintiff in a personal injury case is asked whether they ever felt depressed prior to the accident, but before she answers, her attorney objects that the plaintiff is not a mental health professional familiar with the diagnostic criteria for depression. In that situation, the plaintiff's answer will, in all likelihood, regurgitate her attorney's objection rather than a response based on a common-sense understanding of what it means to feel depressed. In other words, the objecting attorney has essentially injected themselves as a witness into the case through their speaking objection, thus preventing the examining attorney from receiving a candid answer.

"Lack of foundation" objections are also often improper

While it is always good practice for the examining attorney to lay a foundation for their questions, objecting based on lack of foundation is strongly discouraged by the case law because such objections are generally preserved and can be abusively used to disrupt the flow of the deposition. Indeed, as the court put it in *Troiano-Tominello*, lack of foundation objections are typically "overwrought, substantively meaningless, and oft-times obstructive."[8] Of course, failing to lay a foundation may impact whether the responsive testimony is admissible at trial, but the witness must nevertheless answer the question.

Opinion questions directed to parties are permitted

While previous Allegheny County case law generally prohibited asking a party-deponent opinion questions, *Lau* largely rejected those cases and held that a defendant doctor could be compelled to answer opinion questions about the standard of care. *Lau* at 16. One could argue that this rule easily extends any case where a party-deponent has expertise relevant to the issues.

Sanctions may be imposed for violating these rules

If an attorney violates these rules and obstructs a deposition, the court may require the deposition to be reconvened, award attorney's fees and costs caused by the obstruction, and impose an appropriate discovery sanction tailored to the violation.[9] ■

[1] The other two cases are Troiano-Tominello v. Quest Diagnostic, Inc. et al., No. GD 20-002650 (C.P. Allegheny County, November 22, 2022) and Toth v. UPMC et al., No. GD 22-009192 (C.P. Allegheny County, January 5, 2026).
[2] Lau, No. GD 18-011924, at 8.
[3] Id. at 30–31, 33.
[4] Id. at 27–30.
[5] Id. at 27–28.
[6] See Toth at 12–14.
[7] See Troiano-Tominello at 25–26.
[8] Id. at 23–24.
[9] See Troiano-Tominello, 29–30.

***JJ Gismondi** focuses his practice on representing plaintiffs in medical malpractice, motor vehicle collision, and other personal injury cases.*

Submit an article for *Point of Law*

YLD members are encouraged to write about the practice of law or any substantive legal issue of interest. Featured authors will have their article – up to 1,000 words long – published along with a brief bio. Articles and inquiries may be submitted to: ***YLDCommunications@gmail.com.***

The Rise of Influencer Law for Small Businesses

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without proper authorization. This is why Instagram has drastically limited its business usage of songs for posts on business accounts. Because social media culture encourages sharing and reposting, many business owners mistakenly assume online content is free to use commercially. In reality, copyright and trademark laws apply fully in digital spaces.[4]

Further, with the adaptation and development of artificial intelligence ("AI"), consumers may not realize when endorsements are artificially generated or digitally manipulated. Regulators will likely face growing pressure to establish disclosure requirements for AI-generated promotional content on social media. Previously existing advertising regulations were not designed for a world where businesses can instantly produce large volumes of realistic synthetic media.

The Future of Influencer Law for Small Businesses

As influencer marketing becomes increasingly central to commerce, small businesses can no longer treat social media as legally informal territory. What appears online as casual content may still qualify as regulated advertising under federal law. Influencers and businesses alike must pay attention to FTC guidelines, considering the distinction between authentic communication and paid advertising continues to blur.

For small businesses, this transformation creates both opportunity and risk. Social media allows businesses to reach audiences once inaccessible without massive advertising budgets. At the same time, it exposes them to legal obligations many do not yet fully understand. As influencer marketing continues to grow, the law must adapt to balance innovation, consumer protection, and the realities of modern digital commerce. ■

[1] See 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).
[2] See Federal Trade Commission, Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising, 16 C.F.R. Part 255 (2023).
[3] Id., Part 255, Section 3; see also Federal Trade Commission, Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers (Nov. 2019), https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/1001a-influencer-guide-508_1.pdf.
[4] See 17 U.S.C. §§ 101 et seq.

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Preserving the Lawyer Behind the Practice

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substantive excellence, but in developing the practices that allow that excellence to endure.

This is where creative practice matters most. Lawyers are better advocates when they are multifaceted people. The strongest lawyers are not simply those who know the most law or work the longest hours. They are those who can listen deeply, adapt thoughtfully, connect authentically, and respond imaginatively when a matter requires something more than a predictable answer. Creative and restorative practices strengthen those capacities. They preserve the interior life from which good judgment, empathy, and resilience are drawn.

A lawyer who plays an instrument, trains for a race, paints, writes, gardens, hikes, teaches yoga, or pursues any number of meaningful practices outside the office is not stepping away from professional development. That lawyer may, in fact, be cultivating the very qualities the profession most needs: steadiness under pressure, comfort with ambiguity, patience with process, discipline in repetition, and the humility to keep learning. These pursuits do not distract from the law. They enrich the lawyer. ■

***Rebeca Himena Sekinger** is the current Chair of the YLD. She is an Intellectual Property Attorney with Leech Tishman Fuscaldo & Lampl.*

Young Leaders in the Law

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event, featuring baskets and gift cards donated by local businesses. Between tickets sold for the event and for the raffle items, the Bar Leadership Initiative was able to raise almost $5,500, which went directly to 412 Food Rescue to support their ongoing work.

The purpose of the BLI is not just to train up future leaders of the ACBA, or to prove that young lawyers are capable of organizing a charitable benefit event. The true purpose is to integrate and familiarize young lawyers with the affairs of the YLD and the ACBA as a whole, and to give back to the community, legal and beyond. BLI participants join committees, take part in meetings, and develop a depth of knowledge about these organizations that a casual attendee simply does not. It seems all too often that bar associations generally are considered completely polar: there is the fun function of social events and gatherings, and then there is the colder, more business-oriented function of professional regulation and continued educational programming. The YLD's BLI program blends work and fun to create a comprehensive and collaborative experience for its young lawyers.

If the YLD itself isn't enough of an example, a bar association can be (and in the case of the ACBA, is) so much more than that. The BLI shows that lawyers – especially young lawyers – can be leaders in more than just the law. We can benefit the organizations and causes that we care about in ways beyond legal representation. We are empowered to make a positive impact in our communities in ways that don't strictly require a law degree. And while attorneys have a natural inclination towards governance and taking charge, we should be reminded that these things are more likely reasons that we are lawyers, and not by reason of being a lawyer. The BLI provides the opportunity to hone those strengths and learn how they can be exercised for the benefit of the ACBA and Allegheny County as a whole. ■

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Pennsylvania's School Funding Reckoning

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But a ruling is only as powerful as the political will to implement it. Pennsylvania has made genuine strides since 2023, and the budget investments of the past two years represent the most significant commitment to education equity the state has seen in a generation. Still, children waiting in underfunded schools cannot afford for their state to settle for progress that falls short of what the constitution demands. ■

[1]*San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).*
[2]*Id.*
[3]*Pa. Const. art. III, § 14.*
[4]*Julie Vakoc, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Youth Advocacy & Policy Lab (December 18, 2025), https://ylab.law.harvard.edu.*
[5]*Id.*
[6]*FundOurSchoolsPA.org, How HB 2370, the Long-Term Plan for Constitutional Public School Funding, Works for Pa. Communities, Fund Our Schools PA (June 26, 2024), https://www.fundourschoolspa.org.*
[7]*William Penn Sch. Dist. et al. v. Pa. Dep't of Educ. et al., 294 A.3d 537 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2023).*
[8]*Id.*
[9]*Id.*
[10]*Public Interest Law Center, Breakthrough! PA House Approves Comprehensive School Funding Plan in Bipartisan Vote, Public Interest Law Center (June 10, 2024), pubintlaw.org.*
[11]*Id.*
[12]*Office of Governor Josh Shapiro, Governor Shapiro, Secretary Rowe, Legislators, Educators, Advocates, and Students Celebrate Historic K-12 Education Funding from 2025-26 Budget, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (December 10, 2025), https://www.pa.gov.*
[13]*Jillian Forstadt, Pa. Schools Use New State Dollars to Expand Full-Day Kindergarten and Reduce Class Sizes, WESA (Mar. 5, 2026), https://www.wesa.fm/education.*
[14]*Id.*
[15]*Id.*

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