

DAILY REPORT

A SMART READ FOR SMART READERS



INPRACTICE

Shan Klevens (left) and Alanna Clair point out ways to put your best online bio forward. p. 4
U.S. judge allows parts of coastal Ga. suit alleging discrimination. p. 5
Conservative justices expanded pro-religious stance, scholars say. p. 6

An ALM Publication

Newsreel

COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Set for April 15 at Nathan Deal Judicial Center

The Nathan Deal Judicial Center in Atlanta is set to host a COVID-19 vaccine clinic from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. April 15.

The clinic will be in room 2201, the Judicial Conference Room, and attendees will need to have photo ID and a medical or prescription drug card if they have insurance, although it is not required to get the vaccine.

"We're hoping lawyers and their families will come, but it's open to anybody," said Court of Appeals Judge Ken Hodges. "We really just want to get the word out and get as many people vaccinated as possible."

Normal security measures will be in place at the center, and free street parking is available near the building in addition to two pay lots across the street.

The clinic will be operated under the supervision of a U-Save-it pharmacist, and will be offering the Moderna vaccine; three technicians will assist in administering the vaccine, and there will be an assistant to help with processing any necessary paperwork. Those receiving it will need to return in 28 days for the second dose; anyone who has already been vaccinated within the previous two weeks is not eligible.

Those wishing to participate can sign up online at covidimmunization/signup-sheet, and are urged to sign up early to ensure that an adequate supply of the vaccine is available.

The vaccine is available to anyone 18 or older, on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Nathan Deal Judicial Center, which houses the Georgia Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, is at 330 Capitol Ave., just off Memorial Drive and near the state Capitol.

—Greg Land



DeKalb County Superior Court Judge Shondeana Morris (from left) helped organize the virtual panel, which will include panelists Lynn Garson, Eric Lang who have been affected by suicide.

'We Are in a Crisis': Attorney, Judge Suicide Prevention Takes Center Stage in Georgia

CEDRA MAYFIELD | cmayfield@alm.com

IN THE FIRST year of the coronavirus pandemic, more than 1,500 people ended their own lives during 2020 in Georgia, some of them attorneys.

With lawyers more likely to die by suicide than other professionals, a new suicide awareness and prevention initiative is being rolled out by Supreme Court of Georgia Chief Justice Harold Melton in conjunction with the State Bar of Georgia.

On April 30, the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism will host a virtual Suicide Awareness Program from 2 to 5 p.m. Hosted by former Attorney General Sally Yates, the three-hour event will consist of three panels.

"We are in a crisis with the number of suicides and suicide attempts in the country," said DeKalb County Superior Court Judge Shondeana Morris, who helped plan the virtual event. "Throughout the country, there is about one death every 11 minutes by suicide."

Morris, who chairs the State Bar of Georgia Suicide Awareness and Prevention Committee, said there's a death every 11 minutes by suicide in the United States. The numbers trended higher in the Peach State.

"In Georgia in 2020, there were 1,569 deaths by suicide and that's the rate per 100,000 with the population.

See **SUICIDE**, page 2

Chief Justice Sets Date to Resume Charge or Release Deadlines

KATHERYN HAYES TUCKER | ktucker@alm.com

THE CLOCK will soon start ticking again for people who've been stuck in jail without a trial—presumed innocent yet denied a court date by COVID-19.

Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton set a key date in the latest monthly extension of the Statewide Judicial Emergency Order he signed at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. This order is to be in effect until May 8. Melton authorized the resumption of jury trials last month and grand jury proceedings before that—at the discretion of local judges under safety protocols.

This time Melton said he expects charge or release deadlines to resume on May 14.

"Courts around our state have been working hard to resolve cases with the speed and efficiency

See **DEADLINES**, page 3



Chief Justice Harold Melton said he expects charge or release deadlines to resume in Georgia on May 14.

Merger Talks Between Holland & Knight and Thompson & Knight Advance Growth Strategies

BRENDA SAPINO JEFFREYS
bjeffrey@alm.com



Combined revenue for the firms would exceed \$1.249 billion—a size close to firms within the Am Law 25.

HOLLAND & KNIGHT and Thompson & Knight are in merger talks, a deal that would create a newly 1,600-lawyer firm in 30 offices, the firms said in a Friday statement.

The firms are completing diligence in connection with the deal, and expect to complete it within 90 days. A tentative closing date is set for this summer, the firms said.

The tie-up talks come at a time when interest in merger talks is reportedly heating up across the U.S. For Thompson & Knight, in particular, the merger talks come a year after the firm's revenue and profits dropped by double digits amid an increasingly competitive Texas market. Holland & Knight, meanwhile, has continued to express interest this year in new growth opportunities.

Combined revenue for the firms would exceed \$1.2 billion. That's

See **HOLLAND**, page 2



SUICIDE, from page 1

That's about 14.53%," Morris said. "That's over the national average, which is about 14.21%."

Having suffered the death of her father by suicide, Morris said there's a "perceived stigma attached to suicide attempts," and as such, few people "come forward" seeking support and help.

"I lost my father to suicide several years ago, and it was just a very devastating experience because we missed all of the signs and symptoms," she said.

It's a feeling many in the Georgia legal community can relate to, especially following the August 2019 sudden death of Court of Appeals Judge Stephen Goss. His suicide still weighs heavily on the hearts of many jurists, including State Bar of Georgia Attorney Wellness Committee Member Lynn Garson.

"He was beloved of everyone who knew him. It took everyone just into such a state of shock when he took his life," Garson said.

Garson, who will be serving on the April 30 panel, said the panel provides an oppor-

tunity to shed more light on an often closed issue. She, too, will tell her story.

Garson said, "The reason that I'm participating is that I was close to suicide in 2008. And if I had not had the help of my family to get into a facility, I wouldn't be here talking to you."

She's just one of several panelists plan-

“People on these panels are going to be speaking very frankly about their own life experiences. Because of the unique makeup of these panels, this program will go beyond basic level mental health and wellness advice.”

—Eric Lang, panelist

ning to share personal experiences surrounding suicide, including overcoming suicide thoughts and attempts. Eric Lang, who survived a suicide attempt, also will speak on the panel.

"This program brings to the forefront the importance of self-awareness. We can all get inside our own head and not know that our thoughts have the potential to lead to self-harm," Lang said.

He noted increased isolation imposed by the pandemic could not only intensify considerations of suicide among lawyers but also limit opportunities to identify the need for help.

"It's possible that people can recognize in each other the potential for self-harm," Lang said. "It also becomes less common when we're alone."

Morris agreed.

"What we are finding, and particularly with COVID over this last year, was the numbers have increased," Morris said. "There are a number of people that suffer in silence with depression, anxiety and a whole host of issues."

With the diverse panel set to include lawyers, judges and clinicians, organizers urged both those in the legal community and the public that support them to sign up to virtually attend.

Lang said the experience would stand out from other prevention panels.

"People on these panels are going to be speaking very frankly about their own life experiences," Lang said. "Because of the unique makeup of these panels, this program will go beyond basic level mental health and wellness advice."

The program, which offers legal attendants a three-hour continuing legal education credit, is yet another effort to provide mental and physical wellness assistance to Georgia jurists.

Organizers urged the legal community to learn about "Use Your 6" and "Lawyers Helping Lawyers" counseling and support programs.

State Bar of Georgia Resources for attorneys:

Lawyers Assistance Program Hotline: 800-327-9631

Lawyers Helping Lawyers Peer Program: Online Program Sign-Up & Podcast

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: by phone 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or via chat ☺

HOLLAND, from page 1

a size close to firms within the Am Law 25, according to last year's Am Law 100 ranking. In 2020, revenue at Thompson & Knight, with 252 lawyers, was \$195.1 million, while Holland & Knight brought in \$1.044 billion, with 1,159 lawyers.

Mark Sloan, the managing partner of Texas-based Thompson & Knight, and Steven Sonberg, managing partner of Florida-based Holland & Knight, said in a written statement that the proposed

combination would "expand significantly" each firm's presence in important markets and improve the depth and breadth of services offered to clients in key industries.

"More importantly, the combination would bring together two firms who share similar cultures, and who are focused on providing excellent client service in a collaborative and diverse," the firm leaders said in a statement.

Holland & Knight, ranked No. 38 in last year's Am Law 200, and Thompson

& Knight, No. 141, have far different financial models. Holland's revenue per lawyer last year, at about \$900,001, is 16% higher than its partner's RPL at \$773,000. Meanwhile, Holland's \$1.7 million in profits per equity partner exceeds Thompson & Knight's at \$906,000.

However, both firms share some similarities—besides both having a "Knight" in their law firm letterhead. The firms have long aimed to grow outside their home regions and gain market share in other high billing rate regions.

million PPP loan last year, posted record financials in 2018.

Zimmermann said Thompson & Knight, like some other firms in Texas, was impacted in 2020 by a soft oil and gas industry, the COVID-19 pandemic, and continuing competition for talent waged by the growing number of Big Law firms moving into the Texas market.

"Thompson & Knight would benefit from additional scale," he said.

Culturally, Zimmermann said, the firms are a good fit, noting that combinations between Texas firms and firms in the Southeast or Midwest have been common.

It's a good deal for Holland & Knight, he said, "because it helps them overnight have one of the preeminent Texas practices in one of the best and fastest-growing economies in the U.S."

Also, the combination allows Holland & Knight to grow its corporate practice, which is a goal of most firms, because it commands higher rates on average and tends to provide work across the firm.

Combining with Thompson & Knight also provides Holland & Knight the benefit of scale. "Both firms will be stronger together rather than separately, provide more value to their partners and clients, have higher profits [and] a stronger brand," he said.

Holland & Knight has 27 offices and Thompson & Knight has nine. The firms each have offices in Austin, Dallas, Houston, New York, London and Mexico City.

The merger talks are the latest indication of growing optimism that law firm combinations will bounce back this year after the pandemic slowed combinations last year. Two new reports in the last week about law firm mergers in the first quarter of 2021 suggest there is "tremendous interest" in growth among firms of all shapes and sizes and that the year after COVID-19 halted life in the United States could look more like the years before. ☺

Senior reporter Brenda Saptno Jeffreys (@BrendaSJJeffreys) covers the business of law for *The American Lawyer* and other ALM affiliates of the *Daily Report*. This article was first published by *The American Lawyer*.

ALM REPRINTS & LICENSING

Have you been featured in an ALM product?

Increase your recognition and maximize your credibility with ALM Reprints & Licensing. We offer various licensing products to highlight your accomplishments, including: plaques, logo licensing, glossy article reprints, and more, to showcase your industry acknowledgements.

All content featured in ALM products is copyright protected. Before you display your acknowledgments, make sure to contact us to ensure you are copyright compliant!



Enhance your brand's recognition today!
Contact: 877-257-3382 | reprints@alm.com
almreprints.com



Use code REPRINT10 for 10% off

© 2021 ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved.



