

# LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW COULD SAVE YOU!

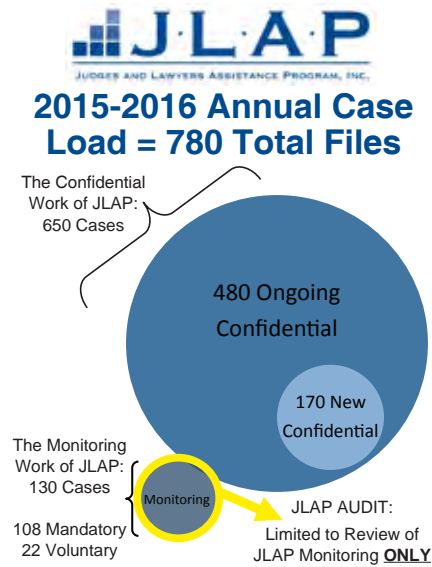
In the June/July 2017 *Louisiana Bar Journal*, Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc.'s (JLAP) Board President Mark C. Surprenant published an article highlighting the positive results of JLAP's 2015 Independent Performance Audit. The Audit specifically examined JLAP's protocols and clinical standards in its formal monitoring cases referred to JLAP by outside entities, including the Office of the Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) and the Louisiana Supreme Court's Committee on Bar Admissions (COBA).

As certified by the Audit Report, JLAP's formal monitoring services utilize appropriate clinical standards to reliably increase the individual's probability of recovery without recidivism while also helping to protect the public from the harm that impaired professionals can cause. The Audit was a valuable step in confirming JLAP's standards in cases involving formal monitoring due to referrals from the ODC and COBA and wherein there is need to prove one's fitness to practice by clear and convincing evidence.

But the Audit only tells a part of JLAP's story and reflects only a portion of JLAP's services to the profession. Even though JLAP's formal monitoring services draw a lot of attention in some quarters, those services are actually the very smallest segment of JLAP's case load in terms of actual client numbers.

By far, JLAP's predominant caseload today is comprised of absolutely confidential matters that do not involve the ODC, COBA or formal monitoring in order to prove fitness to practice. Instead, most of JLAP's cases include people who have reached out discretely for help proactively and *before* there was any incident or allegation of misconduct or harm to the public or the profession.

In its fiscal year 2015-16, JLAP serviced 780 open files, with 650 of them absolutely confidential cases having nothing whatsoever to do with the ODC, COBA or licensure issues. As such, JLAP has reached



new milestones wherein it rendered totally confidential assistance at a rate that is *five times* the number of referrals from the ODC or COBA. (See chart.)

The substantial expansion in JLAP's confidential services and caseload has evolved over the last five years due to a combination of JLAP's active promotion of its services and expansion of its professional clinical staff and expertise to provide comprehensive mental health services.

Whether the issue is depression, anxiety, alcoholism, addiction, burnout or any other form(s) or combinations of mental health distress, JLAP offers its discrete professional assistance to lawyers, judges and law students. JLAP also offers its assistance to any family member of someone licensed to practice in Louisiana. We are very grateful for the progress made and for the strong support JLAP received from different segments of the profession, without which none of these advances would have been possible.

There is still more work to be done. JLAP's ongoing challenge, above all others, is a need to increase the entire profession's understanding and recognition that JLAP offers much more in life-saving services than just formal monitoring in cases referred by the ODC and COBA. JLAP encourag-

es a grassroots effort by individuals in the profession to spread the word that JLAP's primary services are rendered in total confidence and acknowledge that JLAP is currently helping hundreds of people behind the scenes — all totally out of the profession's view.

The truth is that no matter how effective JLAP's confidential services are, JLAP can't help a person in need unless that person knows that JLAP is a safe place to call and reaches out. To that end, you can personally help increase the wellness of the profession and your peers. Whenever a mental health concern appears, spread the word: 1) JLAP's primary mission is providing *totally confidential help*; 2) hundreds of people reach out to JLAP each year and receive professional clinical help in absolute privacy; and 3) reaching out early for help is in everyone's best interest.

When a lawyer or judge reaches out early and discretely to JLAP and receives help and support before private health issues become public disciplinary issues, every single human being and entity wins — the person, their family, their law firm or district, the greater profession and, ultimately, the public that our profession serves.

It does not matter who you are or why you call JLAP. All calls are absolutely confidential and privileged pursuant to La. R.S. 37:221 and LASC Rule XIX Sec. 16 (J). As such, don't wait for problems to get worse. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health or substance use issues and may need help, make the confidential call to JLAP at (985)778-0571; email JLAP@louisianajlap.com; or visit us on the web at [www.louisianajlap.com](http://www.louisianajlap.com).

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