

## APA Division 18 Presidential Address

Esteemed colleagues,

It is my privilege to be with you today at APA's 2024 Convention as your Division President. I continue to be grateful to the guidance and mentorship of the Presidents who came before me, and that I can provide that same support as we welcome Dr. Gayle Iwamasa to the Presidency for the 2024-2025 year. I also am grateful for the support of the Executive Board and each of you as Division members as I have worked to bring our division together and also to elevate our presence within and without APA.

To be honest, I did not fully appreciate the enormity of the task of being President when I was notified that you all elected me to President! When Dr. Ashley Batastini encouraged me to submit my nomination, I am not joking when I thought to myself "How hard can this be?" I say this not to be glib, but to highlight what I perceive (and have heard from others) to be a common refrain from those who are not public sector psychologists, and theme for those of us who first begin work in the public sector: how hard can it be? Y'all already know – it is hard work!

When I started my term as President, I met with Dr. Batastini to better understand the nuances associated with the position. She specifically told me, "You probably have a lot of items on your to-do list that you would like to accomplish for this year. Don't worry if you only get through some of them. Choose a handful of items to focus on." She could not have been more accurate. Again, I see this as a reflection of the challenge of working in the public sector – we all have grand aspirations to better those we serve, to better our profession, and to better ourselves. And simultaneously we all experience challenges, or obstacles from people, agencies or policy, that prevent us from achieving all that we hope to accomplish.

In my year as President-Elect, I had the opportunity to meet with several of our division's leaders in a leadership summit. What started as an opportunity for us to better know each other and learn about how we all were tied together in fortifying and building the Division quickly evolved into a series of deep and meaningful discussions about the challenges of public sector service in a post-pandemic mental health landscape. Feelings of burnout, isolation, lack of support from administrative bodies were prominent in the stories we shared. I also observed in others, and felt myself, feelings of shame and guilt. Feeling like we were doing more than our job description, and our clients' or patients' needs continued to soar. Feeling like we were being asked to do the impossible without adequate recognition, resources, or financial compensation. Feeling like we would never be able to check off all of the items on our to-do list. Like we had no room to pursue other activities

that brought joy to our professional life, like participating in this Division for example. We were (and are) continually being asked to pour from an empty cup, to find solutions to seemingly impossible problems, and all without recognition for our tireless work. Of course, we all know that being a public sector provider is a thankless job and one that often is not as well compensated as the private sector. Yet, simply because we felt called to the public sector, that we volunteered for it, or whatever path brought us here does not rob us of the right to advocate for support and for change from our own division, from APA and from the institutions where we work. As I prepared to transition into this year's Presidency, I knew that these concerns were how I wanted to try to effectuate positive change.

Dr. Batastini was right that I had many grand plans for this year; and she was also right that I would not be able to make all of them come to fruition. At last year's convention and shortly thereafter I did my best to meet with all of the section leadership and others on the Board to ensure that I had a clear sense of what our members needed from the division, and how I could support them in getting those needs met. In turn, I shared my vision for the year: that I wanted to center the concerns about burnout and lack of support within and without the Division; that I wanted to enhance cohesion in our division by ensuring our internal leadership felt connected and accessible to each other; and that I did what I could to elevate our presence and voice to APA. And I must confess that I feel like I have not succeeded, always feeling like I could have done more. Like most of you, I am constantly pulled in many different directions, both in my work and in my personal life. I say all of this to validate what I believe to be an increasingly common phenomenon among each of us, and to encourage us to come together in the next year and work collaboratively to support each other, and advocate for change.

Of course, I am not so naïve as to believe that I have done nothing of consequence this year. I am proud of the work I have accomplished. I wanted to solidify our foundation as a division and enhance connections between members. To that end, I have done my best to be available to discuss issues with members and our internal leadership, to be open to new ideas and dialogue and push those forward. As a result, I have observed increased cohesion within our division, renewed engagement of current and new members, and new initiatives being taken within the various sections and committees. Whenever I have met with our liaison, the wonderful Keith Cooke, as well as other leadership within APA (such as Dr. Fuentes APA President and Mitch Preinstein the Science Director), I have consistently advocated for the relevance and importance of our profession to APA, especially as mental health comes to the fore in current times. In addition, I advocated to make our Executive Board meeting minutes available on our listserv to enhance transparency and encourage ongoing dialogue. I initiated a co-sponsored event with Division 41 that is launching on September 06, 2024 highlighting the intersectionality of public sector work and culturally

responsive practice. I also am co-chairing a special issue package with our flagship journal *Psychological Services* focusing on the impact of professional burnout in our community in a post-pandemic world. As you all will learn at our business meeting, we as a Division have also come together to make important decisions about how to support those we serve, and how to advocate for ourselves to APA. We have voted to support APA Council initiatives gender affirming care, and to support Veterans' safe storage of firearms. In addition, we have an opportunity to take center stage on a New Business Item that is being put to Council, and that is asking APA to take an official stance on reducing seclusion and restraint episodes in secure settings. In addition our journal remains strong in general submissions, a respectable and stable impact factor and ranking 97/180 of journals in the clinical psychology marking. Finally, our website has been updated and we have a webmaster who is dedicated to ensuring that we utilize the Internet to our advantage.

These are tremendous accomplishments, and there are many more that will be highlighted during our business meeting. As I close out my term, I want to acknowledge the excellent, individual efforts of every member here in the public sector and thank you for your service. I also want to thank you for being part of this division, especially when we have so many other activities pulling our time, and especially if you have taken on a leadership role within our Division. When I first joined the division, it was hard for me to know where I could offer up my time and service. If you are feeling similarly, and/or if you are feeling stretched thin, I want to remind you that you can still have a meaningful impact on our division by being involved. Get to know the leadership in your section; I've worked with them for two years now and I can assure you they are all very nice folx. Your section leaders and committee chairs want to get to know you as a member because they are here to serve our interests and those whom we serve. They might try to get you involved in leadership, and that is okay! There are many leadership opportunities within the Division, and with varying levels of effort. If leadership isn't quite where you're ready to put your time and effort then, when our committees or sections send out surveys for member input, please respond! Division leadership craves member responses so we can ensure that our efforts remain aligned with what you see as being important. For example, the Policy and Advocacy Committee just sent out a survey asking for input on what kind of policy and professional advocacy issues we want them to focus on this coming year so that way they can curate content that we will find relevant and meaningful. If you or a colleague publish a manuscript that is relevant to the public sector, let our liaison Jennifer Eno Louden know so she can push it to APA's Science Directorate and maybe get it some publicity. If you or someone you know gets an award or makes a breakthrough, such as Dr. Katy Owen being asked by the BOP to step in and serve as a liaison, please send an email on the listserv! Interact with our website and our social media presence! We constitute a huge body of psychologists across the nation,

and now is the time for us to advocate for ourselves and for those we serve within and without APA.