

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as President of this distinguished organization. The coming year is going to be difficult for the title industry. The Task Force to Study the Title Industry will issue a report soon. It is anticipated that, based on the Task Force review and the Maryland Insurance Administration's previous position, there will be legislative proposals that will significantly affect our organization. I can assure you that the legislative committee, under the chairmanship of James Cosgrove, and our lobbyist, Bill Pitcher, is making every effort to protect our interests and ensure that the legislative program does not negatively impact the industry. It is imperative, however, that we all rally behind Bill Pitcher and his lobbying efforts. If you have any contacts in your local legislature, please contact either Margaret Webb or Bill and let them know that you are willing to help. Furthermore, it may be necessary to send letters to local legislators explaining the services we provide to consumers.

I stated in my acceptance speech in Ocean City that there are three aspects of this organization that I want to focus on this year. The first is professionalism. We are a professional organization serving an industry that provides professional services. We are in the title services industry, and we do not sell title insurance. Title insurance is a component of our business. But given the vast services that we provide our clients, we should not look upon ourselves as insurance salespeople. This should be made clear to the state and federal governments so that they better understand the fee structures and costs associated with our industry's services.

Education is also an important component of our business. Starting in January, the new good-faith estimate HUD-1 revisions will be implemented, which might be troublesome for our industry. We all need to work together to ensure compliance to the best extent possible. I am certain that you all have received materials, either through your underwriters or through other entities, that attempt to advise you on how to proceed. My experience has been that there are more unanswered questions than information available. It is with this in mind that I hope the MLTA will work diligently to educate members on what is needed to fully comply with the new regulations being implemented by HUD.

Third, we need to increase our membership. As our industry faces challenges in the road ahead, it will be important for us to continue building a strong network to ensure that we keep moving forward on our various initiatives. I encourage all of you to get at least one person this year to join our organization. Lastly, I would ask members to notify Margaret or me if you're interested in working on a committee. It is through strong membership and active participation that this industry will survive the years ahead.

We are also going to be working with the American Land Title Association (ALTA) to make certain that Maryland's interests are being well represented at the federal level. I am certain that you are all aware that there is legislation being considered that is going to regulate the financial industry. It is our hope that the impact on our particular industry will be negligible.

However, we must do all that we can to protect our interests in Washington. ALTA has pledged that it is going to do all in its power to keep us apprised of events and to work diligently on behalf of the industry to ensure that we are well represented.

With that in mind, I would encourage you to join ALTA. I am certain that you are aware that there is currently a \$195 fee due to ALTA for the use of their title insurance forms. Given this expense, it seems that it would be well worth paying the additional cost of becoming a member rather than simply being a licensee. There are efforts underway to coordinate with state organizations to develop package memberships for the coming years. We will of course keep you fully informed of any new developments.

I hope that we will all continue to work hard to keep the MLTA a top-rated organization. During the ALTA convention in Florida last October, a member came up to me and said, "I always go to the MLTA conventions. They are the most fun and most informative." It is with this in mind that I hope we can continue providing opportunities for members and the community to connect and educate themselves further about the services our industry offers.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or issues that you want brought to the attention of the Board and the membership. I look forward to working with you and wish you a productive year ahead.

Nathan I. Finkelstein
President
Maryland Land Title Association