



Ohio Association of Civil Trial Attorneys
The Source for Defense Success

THE UPDATE

NEWS & PRACTICE POINTERS FROM OACTA

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President's Message

**By: Daniel Richards
2026 OACTA President**

Thankful is the word that comes to mind as I write my first President's Message. On this snowy Cleveland morning, as we roll into the holiday season, I am thankful for my wife and children and for the many blessings in my life. I am also thankful for OACTA and the people who have made it a such great organization for so many years. I am a second-generation member of OACTA. My father was a member in the early years and it was only natural that I would join shortly after passing the bar. When I was a young associate, in the pre-internet days, the OACTA Quarterly was my starting point to learn about developments in insurance coverage, product liability and appellate practice. OACTA seminars were my classroom where I was privileged to learn trial skills and to stay on top of the issues impacting the defense of civil lawsuits.



OACTA has been a source of opportunity for me. Public speaking at a CLE, publishing articles in the Quarterly, leading the appellate practice committee, authoring amicus briefs are experiences which helped me to grow as an attorney, leader and person.

[READ MORE](#)

Mark Your Calendar

OACTA 2026 Coffee Chat

Hosted by the
Employment Law Committee
January 16, 2026

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Explico and OACTA Webinar

"Biomechanical Analysis of Sideswipe Collisions"
with Paul Snyder of Explico

January 28, 2026
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

[**REGISTER HERE**](#)

2025 OACTA Annual Meeting!

Thank you to all the Exhibitors and Sponsors who helped make the 2025 OACTA Annual Meeting a success!



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The new OACTA officers for 2025 were installed at the Annual Meeting.



Left to right: Elizabeth T. Smith, Immediate Past President; Michael M. Neltner, Vice President; Anthony E. Brown, Secretary; Daniel A. Richards, President; Nicole A. Mitchell, Treasurer.

OACTA Awards and Scholarships

The 2025 OACTA Hilary S. Taylor Inclusion & Equity Scholarship recipients were recognized.

The recipients of the scholarship were: **Isabelle Bazzi** – a student at Case Western Reserve University School of Law; **Edith Nkenganyi** – a student at Capital University Law School; **Olivia Rhodes** – a student at University of Dayton School of Law.



Olivia Rhodes and Elizabeth T. Smith

During the OACTA Annual Business Meeting & Legal Excellence Award Luncheon on Thursday, November 14, the following awards were presented to recognize attorneys for their service to OACTA, the profession and the community:

Excellence in Advocacy Award

John M. Hands, Esq.

Ret. UB Greensfelder LLP

Lifetime Achievement Award

Carolyn A. Taggart, Esq.

Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP

Respected Adversary Award

Daniel R. Mordarski, Esq.

Mordarski Law

Distinguished Contributions to the Community Award

Scott R. Mote, Esq.

Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program

Outstanding Young Lawyer Award

Hannah M. Heinmiller, Esq.

Garvey, Shearer, Nordstrom, PSC

Frank Seth Hurd Member of the Year Award

Natalie M. E. Wais, Esq.

Young & Alexander Co., L.P.A.

OACTA Committee Chair of the Year Award

Karen E. Ross, Esq.

Tucker Ellis LLP



John M. Hands, Esq.



Carolyn A. Taggart, Esq.



Daniel R. Mordarski, Esq.



Scott R. Mote, Esq.



Hannah M. Heinmiller, Esq.



Natalie M. E. Wais, Esq.



Karen E. Ross, Esq.

[View the Complete List of Awards and Past Recipients](#)

Leadership Spotlight

OACTA is fortunate to be led by an exceptional group of dedicated volunteers. In this edition of *The Update*, we are proud to spotlight Phillip Sarnowski—whose steady commitment and leadership have made a meaningful impact on the Association.

Phil was first introduced to OACTA when he was in law school and got involved in the young lawyers committee, ultimately co-chairing the committee from 2021 to 2023.



He continues his involvement today as a member of the OACTA board and the co-chair of the litigation skills committee. Phil has become good friends and colleagues with many of the OACTA members from across the state that have lent their leadership, mentorship, and advice on many occasions. Phil often describes OACTA to others as “an incredible resource and place for community” that he has enjoyed his entire legal career.

Phil is a shareholder at Roetzel and Andress, LPA where he represents clients in the transportation, retail, and insurance industries with a focus on the defense of complex litigation matters involving catastrophic injury, wrongful death, premises liability, product liability, insurance coverage disputes, and toxic torts. He is a member Roetzel’s Emergency Response Team, Phil provides immediate, around-the-clock legal support following trucking accidents and other catastrophic events. Phil regularly leads matters from the initial investigation through resolution, whether that be pre-suit, during litigation, through a dispositive motion, at trial, or on appeal.

Update on House Bill 447

By: Jamey Pregon
OACTA Legislative Affairs Chair

As you know, House Bill 447 was introduced to the Ohio House in October of 2025. The bill proposes various changes to the damages caps statute, including raising the caps. As we reported in November, OACTA has taken the position of opposing House Bill 447, particularly as to the mechanism of the annual increases to the caps. OACTA also would like to suggest additional changes to the bill that would end the uncertainty as to when damages caps would apply by making such a determination a matter of law, rather than a question of fact for a jury to decide.

House Bill 447 was quickly moving through the House, and the bill was close to having a vote in November. However, OACTA’s opposition was joined by several other groups, including the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the American Property Casualty Insurance Association, and the Ohio State Medical Association and Ohio Hospitality Association. In all, twelve groups submitted opposition testimony in the third hearing before the Judiciary Committee on November 5. Before the November 5 committee hearing, a vote on the bill had been discussed for as early as the week before Thanksgiving. After the opposition testimony was heard, no vote on the bill was scheduled, and no further committee meetings have been scheduled.

It is anticipated that the bill eventually will be passed and sent to the Senate. As we wait for further developments, OACTA and the OSBA are meeting to discuss opportunities to voice concerns about the bill, and to propose amendments to the bill. The OSBA was primarily monitoring the bill at first, but it seems likely that the OSBA will soon weigh in on the bill with concerns similar to those raised by OACTA.

We will continue to keep you advised of this matter. Please feel free to reach out to the Legislative Affairs Committee with any thoughts or concerns you may have on this issue. Thank you, and best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season!

OACTA ON-DEMAND CLE CATALOG



DO YOU NEED CLE CREDIT HOURS? IF SO, OACTA IS HERE FOR YOU!

Ohio attorneys whose last name begins with a letter A through L must complete their CLE requirements on or before December 31 of each odd-numbered year.

That means you have until December 31, 2025, to complete a minimum of 24 hours of approved CLE for the two-year compliance period, including 2.5 hours of attorney professional conduct (APC) credit. Visit the Supreme Court of Ohio website, [HERE](#), for more information.

OACTA is here to help! OACTA offers an Online CLE Catalog where attorneys can access on-demand education. OACTA members receive a reduced rate!

Visit the [OACTA Online CLE Catalog](#) for On-Demand CLE courses.

Learn More About OACTA Committees

Click on the names of the committees below to download their current roster as an excel spreadsheet.

OACTA Substantive Law Committees:

- [Appellate Advocacy](#)
- [Business & Commercial Litigation](#)
- [Construction Litigation](#)
- [Employment Law](#)
- [Government Liability](#)
- [Insurance Coverage](#)
- [Litigation & Trial Skills](#)
- [Medical Negligence](#)
- [Personal Injury](#)
- [Product Liability & Toxic Tort](#)
- [Professional Liability](#)

[Click Here to Update your Committee Interest](#)

New OACTA Members since October 2025

Please welcome our new OACTA members!

Megan Bosak, Gordon Rees
Kimberley Doucher, Doucher & Doucher
Charlotte Gross, Gallagher, Gams, Tallan, Barnes, and Littrell

Thank you to the OACTA Annual Sponsors for their Support



Know.

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