

February 27, 2025

***Via LinkedIn***

Ms. Rachel Rippetoe  
Senior Reporter Law360 Pulse

Dear Ms. Rippetoe:

My name is Nicole Howell. I am a human being who practices law. You recently wrote an article on Law360 that referred to me and my firm and the organization I helped to form and continue to serve. If I missed an outreach you made seeking to discuss your article prior to publishing, I regret that we didn't connect. While I co-founded the organization and served on its board for 3+ years, I am no longer on the operating board and do not formally speak on behalf of the organization, only for myself and my firm.

I'll take the opportunity here to share the truth of my experience. Ariel Clark and I have been working in drug policy reform and serving the end of prohibition in the cannabis movement for well over 10 years. Ariel since 2009, myself since 2014. The complexities involved in ending the criminalization of a controlled substance and how that translates to "legalization," -- which is essentially a very expensive regulatory system too-far removed from the people and land that grow, create, and actually utilize those substances -- is tremendous. That has been the case with cannabis and it is even more so the case with plant medicines and psychedelics for myriad reasons, including those that can be found in countless articles and materials discussing the historical and current indigenous stewardship of plant medicines and worldviews that do not objectify and commodify. For my part here, I'll paraphrase Stanislav Grof in his observation that psychedelics are powerful "nonspecific amplifiers of consciousness." Indeed, as we have seen over the past handful of years, psychedelics simply amplify the level of self-awareness in which a person or organization happens to find itself. Psychedelics are not silver bullets that enlighten those they pierce. One must turn toward, and do the hard work of digesting, the personal material that shows up in the liminal, expanded, numinous state; that which stands between our sense of self and the truth of our existence. It takes a lot more than simply showing up for the experience.

The same has been true for the business of providing legal advice and serving the massive cultural, political, and legal shifts involved in ending prohibition, which is, after all, about so much more than drugs. The truth of this is what animated myself and Ismail Ali to seat the founding board - Ariel Clark, Robert (Roman) Haferd, Hadas Alterman, Terry Gross, Kathryn Tucker, Craig Guthery and ourselves - for the Psychedelic Bar Association in 2020, in response to the groundswell of activity that supported the end of psychedelics prohibition. We did not assume to know the answers to the many urgent questions presented by legal services and psychedelics. Instead, we identified some good questions and engaged in a purposeful community process over nearly a year to find out how an organization of lawyers might best be of service. We did not assume, as an organization, to prioritize lawyers' personal interests in earning fees; nor assume, in our individual roles as professionals, that our only function was to

help clients determine the most expedient way of profiting from psychedelics. Rather, we asked ourselves how we could best and practically serve a collective awakening from the failed projects of extraction and domination. I'm being poetic here, but also precise.

When we formed the PBA, we asked ourselves in the first discussions about what the organization would be called -- "Do we want to be the "PsychedelicS Bar Association" and simply be a "big tent" networking organization for lawyers interested in capitalizing on a burgeoning "industry" -- where the word "Psychedelics" could be replaced with any other "widget"? Or did we want to be the "*Psychedelic* Bar Association?" And if so, what would that mean?

Of course, we chose the latter; and what it meant then continues beautifully to unfold as the bar association co-creates the field of "Psychedelic Lawyering"; as it thrives as a beacon to Human Beings Who Practice Law -- that is, humans who hold their role in society with some humility and a self-awareness that the role itself is somewhat paradoxical to systems change. I aspire to something better for the end of prohibition than "this is a business"; for lawyers to aspire to something more alive and more compelling than being auto mechanics for a profit machine. For me, I can say that this aspiration comes from touching the truth of an interconnectedness of my own existence to the reality of all being that is so deep and profound it is (thankfully) beyond comprehension. Indeed, the PBA was founded upon a set of ethical principles informed by consciousness-expansion and asks those who serve the end of prohibition to dig deep and to examine their own motives, maybe even their own sense of purpose in their life's work. Naturally this challenges the status quo, inside and out. Imagination is required. Not knowing is where everything happens. Patience, presence, and a beginner's mind is invited and essential to solving riddles that have vexed us for so long.

Cannabis legalization has not changed the ethics of mainstream culture. Many of us hoped it could and would have an impact, but the "we're just like everyone else, we're a business just like other businesses" approach that was pragmatically pursued (after 20 years of a nonprofit mandate that probably served patients best) has rather lent itself to the commodification of a plant medicine that offers so much more to the world than what it is allowed to provide in the highly-regulated, widgetized system that now exists. And so, yes, resoundingly yes, it's my experience that Psychedelic Lawyers want something better for psychedelics. For the world.

Personally, Ariel and I offered ourselves and our experience with cannabis to the project of "how do we offer an even-slightly-better version of business?" here, including how to use existing ethical business frameworks to put profits in their proper place -- serving the larger "why?" of each organization, rather than being ends in themselves. As a firm, we were among many voices advocating for ethical business and public benefit structures as a sound business practice (indeed, MAPS PBC, was originally a public benefit company.) In any case, this is what we offered through the platform of our law firm that had existed for so much longer and broader than this new moment. When we decided to wind up our firm last year, after 10 years of partnership, learning, and serving a movement we continue to love (and each serve), it was highly personal and the result of the transformation each of us has experienced in our lives and

as professionals. We never aligned ourselves with the cynicism of profiteering from psychedelics, so if psychedelics haven't been profitable it doesn't describe anything about our firm.

The Psychedelic Bar Association is robust as ever in its quest to keep asking life-giving, life-affirming, life-benefitting questions, and to work together to embody the evolving answers. This year I will help the organization launch the pilot of a six-month course and immersion for members into an exploration of kinship worldviews and an examination of the assumptions that underlie traditional legal training called "Inquiring into the Lawyer Lineage." It's my continued hope and my work to offer community and support for those among our licensed ranks who understand that change is an inside job and co-emergent with one's own awakening.

Thanks for your interest in these important topics. I hope you continue to cover PBA and the Psychedelic Lawyering movement.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Howell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicole Howell