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Contact Information

Jean Branscum
Montana Medical Association
(406) 443-4000
jean@mmaoffice.org
www.mmaoffice.org

Coalition Work Recognized by the Montana Medical Association

A recipient cohort of the 2025 MMA Award of Merit

Helena, MT, October 2, 2025 – The Montana Medical Association (MMA) recognized Sarah Morgan, M.D., of Bozeman, Justin Cole, Esq of Missoula and Jean Branscum, CEO of Helena as recipients of *The Award of Merit* during the 147th MMA Annual Meeting on September 12th. Recipients were honored for their leadership within a coalition organized to safeguard access to healthcare in rural communities, preserve specialty and high-risk medical services, and stabilize the medical liability insurance landscape in Montana.

“Their work unified coalition members around a balanced approach—ensuring fair patient compensation for non-economic damages while protecting access to care and controlling healthcare costs,” stated MMA President Ernest Gray, MD.

The risk of medical malpractice litigation remains one of the most significant challenges facing physicians, and the growing trend of high-value liability verdicts and settlements across the nation directly influences where and how physicians choose to practice. To safeguard the availability and affordability of health care, interested stakeholders came together around the common interest to maintain and modernize Montana’s policy. Ultimately, the Medical Liability Coalition was successful in passing legislation which has created enduring benefits for Montana’s healthcare system, including improved access to care statewide, greater stability in the medical liability environment, and enhanced physician recruitment, retention, and institutional viability.

The Montana Medical Association led the effort to form the coalition and was represented by three coalition members:

- **Sarah Morgan, M.D.** – Immediate Past President of the MMA Board of Trustees and emergency medicine specialist at Bozeman Health Deaconess Regional Medical Center. Dr. Morgan played a key role in representing physicians’ perspectives in shaping policy.
- **Justin Cole, ESQ** – MMA legal counsel and lead Medical Liability Coalition member, Mr. Cole is a managing partner at Garlington | Lohn | Robinson in Missoula. He brought extensive expertise in health law, guiding strategies and legislative priorities.

- **Jean Branscum** – CEO of the MMA and facilitator of the Medical Liability Coalition. With 14 years of leadership at MMA, Ms. Branscum coordinated the coalition’s work, ensuring collaboration among diverse stakeholders and offering strategic legislative guidance.

The Award of Merit established in 1975, recognizes individuals associated with MMA whose actions have led to the betterment of health care in Montana. This award recognizes individuals and teams who demonstrate exceptional dedication to advancing the health of Montanans and supporting physicians through visionary leadership, collaboration, and advocacy.

About the Montana Medical Association

The Montana Medical Association is a membership organization comprised of Montana physicians dedicated to improving patient care. Our mission is to serve our members as an advocate for the medical profession, quality patient care, and the health of all Montana citizens. The MMA is the largest physician-led organization in Montana, with nearly 1,300 members.