The Benefits of Section Membership
By John Cantwell, Esq.

Administrative law. Body of law created by administrative agencies in the form of rules, regulations, orders, and decisions to carry out regulatory powers and duties of such agencies. Black’s Law Dictionary, 46 (6th ed. 1996).

This definition came from my 22-year-old edition of Black’s Law that my uncle gave me the summer before I started law school. Unlike other types of law (i.e. criminal, corporate, environmental, etc.), defining what constitutes the practice of administrative law is not easily done. In fact, I had never given it much thought until I attended my first Administrative Law Section (ALS) meeting during PBA’s Committee/Section day a few years ago. This was also the first of many benefits that I have received since becoming an active ALS member.

I had been previously informed that a guest speaker would be providing a review and analysis of the “Walker Rule” during this particular ALS meeting. Initially, I believed that I would only be attending this one meeting because I had no intention of joining or becoming more involved with the section. However, as the meeting progressed through both the agenda items and presentation, I found the discussion focused on many of the legal issues that I had encountered since I had begun practicing law within the Commonwealth. It was at that point that I began to think of myself as an administrative lawyer. I also decided to become an active ALS member.

Since becoming a member, I now realize that administrative law broadly encompasses and intersects with many practice areas that I have encountered as an attorney. These areas include ethical, documentary and transactional matters involving the Procurement Code, the Right to Know Law and the State Ethics Act. It also includes litigation in administrative hearings involving diverse legal matters including environmental, labor and employment, and professional license issues. It further includes the drafting, review and application of individual agency regulations.

Additionally, I have greatly benefited from engaging and interacting with an experienced group of attorneys dedicated to enhancing and promoting the practice of administrative law. Their knowledge and enthusiasm have led me to begin participating in the section’s committees and to become a Council member. The opportunity to help contribute and shape the direction of this section has been a very rewarding experience. I have found that the benefits I have received from my participation have been well worth the efforts that I put into the section.

As I said earlier, I did not realize that I practiced administrative law until I attended my first ALS meeting. I even had to look up the term in Black’s Law to make sure. For those section members with a similar legal experience, I strongly encourage that you consider becoming a more involved ALS member. If you are like me, you will find that the benefits of membership will be commensurate with the amount of time and energy you put into it. This can be as simple as attending one of the section’s scheduled meetings or events. It is a great way to meet and engage with experienced and friendly colleagues. Who knows, after this first step, you may eventually find yourself writing an article for the ALS newsletter.