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Do You Pro Bono? LET US KNOW!

WE ALL KNOW ABOUT THE JUSTICE GAP IN TEXAS—many of our neighbors can't afford the civil legal services they need. Legal aid organizations and others are working hard to make up the difference, but it's tough going. The State Bar knows that Texas attorneys are doing their part. Lawyers and the legal profession have long led the way in seeking to address the unmet civil legal needs of low-income Texans. Now we need your help to track it.

The 2023 State Bar of Texas Pro Bono Report found that Texas lawyers provided an estimated 3.18 million hours in free legal services to the poor that year, as well as 1.3 million hours of substantially reduced-fee legal services to the poor. And Texas attorneys paid an estimated $21 million in out-of-pocket expenses related to pro bono or legal services to the poor as well.[1]

These numbers are compelling, but they are estimates. You can help improve their accuracy. It's simple: Each time you do some pro bono work, report your hours on your My Bar Page. Just go to texasbar.com and log in to "My Bar Page." On the far right side, halfway down the page, there is a blue button that says "VIEW/REPORT PRO BONO." Click that button, and then on the next page, you can add your hours.[2]

Don't know what counts as pro bono work? The page includes examples of qualifying activities and contact information for the bar's Legal Access Department in case you need more help.

Texas lawyers can be proud of their contributions. You provide legal services fees that fund legal services to indigent Texans—more than $5 million in 2024.[3] But you voluntarily give even more: In 2023, Texas lawyers contributed an estimated $11 million in direct donations to legal aid and pro bono organizations[4] and more than $1.6 million in voluntary access to justice contributions on bar dues statements (September 2022 to August 2023).[5]

Your State Bar also contributes to these efforts in line with its mission to "assure all citizens equal access to justice."[6] Since 1992, the State Bar of Texas Board of Directors has set an aspirational goal that each Texas attorney provide 50 hours of pro bono legal services to the poor each year. The bar's 2024-2025 budget includes nearly $2.2 million for access to justice efforts, including about $700,000 for the Texas Access to Justice Commission[7] and about $1.5 million for the bar's Legal Access Department, which offers support, training, publications, and resource materials to legal services programs and pro bono volunteers. And through the bar's Texas Opportunity & Justice Incubator (TOJI)—one of the largest legal incubators in the world—lawyers saved Texans about $440,000 in legal fees last year by providing about 1,400 modest-means hours and nearly 1,500 pro bono hours.[8]

The total in-kind services by the State Bar benefiting access to justice efforts in 2023-2024 is about $783,000, including advertising of pro bono services on texasbar.com and in the *Texas Bar Journal,* free access to TexasBarCLE services for pro bono attorneys and organizations, and other publications and committees with access to justice purposes.

Together, you and your State Bar are helping to narrow the justice gap. We want to let everybody know about all the great pro bono work you're doing. So when you do pro bono work, log in and let us know!

Sincerely,

TREY APFFEL
Executive Director, State Bar of Texas
Editor in Chief, *Texas Bar Journal*

NOTES

1. 2023 State Bar of Texas Pro Bono Report, available at https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Demographic_and_Economic_Trends&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=66375.
2. If you need assistance reporting your pro bono hours, please contact the Legal Access Department at 800-204-2222, ext. 1855.
3. With some exceptions, attorneys must pay the annual legal services fee of $65 imposed by Government Code Section 81.054. This fee is a legislative mandate and is not imposed by the State Bar. The funds are collected and paid to the clerk of the Supreme Court of Texas and remitted to the State of Texas Comptroller. The legal services fees do not fund any State Bar activities.
4. 2023 State Bar of Texas Pro Bono Report.
5. State Bar of Texas Annual Report, 2023-2024, available at https://www.texasbar.com/Content/NavigationMenu/NewsandPublications/Annual_Report2/2023-2024SBOTAnnualReport.pdf.
6. State Bar of Texas Board of Directors Policy Manual, available at https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Governing_Documents1&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=65937.
7. The Supreme Court of Texas created the Texas Access to Justice Commission in 2001 to develop and implement initiatives designed to expand access to, and enhance the quality of, justice in civil legal matters for low-income Texans. The State Bar is responsible for staffing and providing financial support to the commission, and its financial activities are subject to the bar's annual budgetary process, including approval by the Board of Directors and the Supreme Court. See Misc. Docket No. 01-9065.
8. By the Numbers 2023-2024 (State Bar of Texas Performance Measures), available at https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Past_Issues&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=66288.