

# To the Rescue

The recent State Bar of Texas Bar Leaders Conference focused on spreading the message of service by and for Texas lawyers and also highlighted the work of the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program. In fact, we proudly presented for the first time the State Bar of Texas-produced inspirational video, *TLAP Is There*. It features three lawyers who share their moving personal stories of hope.

Attendees at the conference included leaders of the Texas Young Lawyers Association and local bar associations, who make up a talent pool that would rival any Fortune 500 company. The event emphasized making bar membership relevant and meaningful for more attorneys. Outreach by our leaders and strong participation by our members in bar activities are essential to our coveted self-governance. Each and every attorney can play a role!

Attorneys are uniquely qualified to serve each other and the community.

The image of a lifeguard comes to mind. Lifeguards on duty are charged with protecting swimmers. They are vigilant and responsive, not to hamper the fun but to ensure the safety of all in the water. Similarly, Texas attorneys serve as "lifeguards" for their clients and the profession. We must be vigilant and responsive to fulfill our professional roles by first taking good care of ourselves so that we can take better care of others.

We are often the first responders to crises created by a colleague performing below our ethical standards. Texas Disciplinary Rule of Professional Conduct 8.03, "Reporting Professional Misconduct," requires any attorney with knowledge to inform the appropriate disciplinary authority if another lawyer has committed professional misconduct. But because aberrant behavioral signs often indicate the need for professional help, initial contact can be made to a

peer assistance program like TLAP when substance dependency or mental illness is suspected. According to the Texas Health and Safety Code Section 467.008, any person "who in good faith reports information or takes action in connection with a peer assistance program is immune from civil liability for reporting the information or taking the action." The real message here is that you can prevent a damaged career and even save a life. Substance abuse and depression are both chronic health conditions that progressively worsen and may be fatal if not properly treated.

The State Bar of Texas seeks to empower attorneys to live a better life through positive decision-making, healthy habits, and lifestyle changes. That is why we are now offering a Wellness Program to participants of the Texas Bar Private Insurance Exchange. The program's mission is to encourage members to take control of their health, identify any risks they may have, and improve outcomes. Learn more at [texasbar.memberbenefits.com/wellness-program](http://texasbar.memberbenefits.com/wellness-program).

TLAP relies upon funding from the nonprofit Patrick Sheeran & Michael J. Crowley Memorial Trust. It began small, funded by a volunteer peer group of attorneys in 1995. They realized that 15 to 20 percent of Texas lawyers suffered from mental illness issues such as substance abuse and depression with little or no financial resources.

I am reaching out to you. Watch the video at [texasbar.com/tlapisthere](http://texasbar.com/tlapisthere) and learn firsthand how struggling attorneys overcame despair and received help from the State Bar. Finally, call (800) 343-8527 and please make a donation to the Sheeran-Crowley Trust, recognizing that those resources are being used directly to save careers and often lives. If every Texas attorney gave \$10, the trust could grow by approximately \$1 million. We can ensure that when TLAP answers a call, critical financial help will quickly be part of the solution.

Let's all take our turn on the lifeguard stand!

**ALLAN K. DuBois**

President, State Bar of Texas

