

PROTECT AND SERVE



The State Bar of Texas is committed to supporting lawyers who are dedicating their knowledge, time, and resources to this important work.

“It is the oath we take as lawyers and the right to access to justice that we defend every day of our lives that make our profession different from any other.”

IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY, TEXAS LAWYERS HAVE CONSISTENTLY STEPPED UP TO ASSIST PEOPLE WHO LACK ACCESS TO THE LEGAL SERVICES THEY DESPERATELY NEED. For evidence of this, look no further than this summer’s tremendous response by the legal community to the needs created by the arrival of thousands of unaccompanied minors across our southern border.

Lawyers and legal organizations jumped in right away with training and pro bono opportunities to help prepare for the expected influx of cases in our court system. On July 31, I had the honor of welcoming approximately 500 people to a free CLE course titled “The Rights of Unaccompanied Children Crossing the Texas Border and the Duties of Federal, State, and Local Governments.” The event was organized by the Harris County Attorney’s Office and sponsored by groups including the Texas Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association; the Houston Bar Association; the Hispanic Bar Association of Houston; the Mexican American Bar Association of Houston; Houston Volunteer Lawyers; the Texas Access to Justice Commission; the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services; South Texas College of Law; Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law; the University of Houston Law Center; area law firms; congressional representatives; and the Harris County sheriff, district attorney, and constable offices.

Seeing so many attorneys and public servants gathered in Houston was truly inspiring, and I commend them for this effort. Other lawyers, firms, and legal groups have held similar sessions throughout the state, and I am proud of my peers.

It is the oath we take as lawyers and the right to access to justice that we defend every day of our lives that make our profession different from any other. This effort is consistent with our mission of protecting the rule of law and ensuring the effective administration of justice.

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To that end, we have created the Web page texasbar.com/volunteer to provide up-to-date information on training and pro bono opportunities, important websites, and other helpful materials for attorneys who want to get involved or learn more. The State Bar is also coordinating requests from lawyers who want to volunteer, helping to place them where their skills and expertise are most needed.

We also created a separate page, texasbar.com/immigration, to offer the public general resources on immigration law, including Spanish-language videos warning about the problem of notary (*notario*) fraud. We continue to update these online resources regularly, and we will maintain them as long as the need persists.

Similarly, we issued a statewide news release in English and Spanish, advising that people seeking help with immigration matters should be careful not to fall victim to *notarios* or others who falsely represent themselves as lawyers. Unaccompanied minors may be particularly vulnerable to this problem.

We anticipate that there will be a high level of demand for legal assistance for many months. The essential actions involve educating unaccompanied minors about the legal process and their rights within that process. Attorneys will also be needed to help with deportation hearings, assisting qualifying children with special immigrant juvenile status applications, and with asylum cases for adults and minors.

The State Bar of Texas will continue to use its wide array of communication and training resources—and to work side by side with our State Bar sections, local bar associations, and other groups—to engage and inform our 95,000 members on the organizations involved in this effort and the opportunities available to ensure the rule of law is protected.

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