



**ABOVE FROM LEFT:** Supreme Court of Texas Senior Justice Debra Lehrmann administers the oath of office to State Bar of Texas President-elect Steve Benesh and Board Chair Kennon Lily Wooten on June 22 in Austin. PHOTOS BY LOWELL BROWN

## *Workgroup to Study* **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USES, PITFALLS**

WRITTEN BY LOWELL BROWN

**A NEW STATE BAR OF TEXAS WORKGROUP WILL STUDY THE USE OF A.I. in the legal profession, including ethical considerations. The board of directors voted June 21 to approve 2023-2024 President Cindy Tisdale's request to create the Artificial Intelligence Workgroup.**

"The use of artificial intelligence, as you know, is increasingly common, especially with ChatGPT," Tisdale told the board. "While it has potential benefits for our profession, there's also some pitfalls. To help the State Bar address these issues, I am proposing the creation of this Artificial Intelligence Workgroup."

The board approved the workgroup and an initial roster of seven members, although Tisdale said additional members could be added as needed. The workgroup's term will end in June 2024 unless extended by the board. Any recommendations from the workgroup would be submitted to the board for consideration.

### **Succession Planning Initiatives**

2022-2023 State Bar President Laura Gibson announced the bar designated June 21, 2023, as "Designate Your Custodian Day" to encourage lawyers to designate a custodian attorney through the online portal at [texasbar.com/succession](https://texasbar.com/succession). Gibson also announced the completion of the Succession Planning Toolkit, which is available through the bar's Law Practice Management Program at [texasbarpractice.com](https://texasbarpractice.com). Succession planning was one of Gibson's presidential initiatives, along with promoting lawyer well-being and educating members about the attorney discipline system.

### **Access to Justice Initiatives**

Supreme Court of Texas Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht and Texas Access to Justice Commission Chair Harriet Miers offered

updates on efforts to expand legal services for low-income Texans. In fall 2022, the court asked the commission to study existing rules and possible modifications that could:

- Allow qualified non-attorney paraprofessionals to provide limited legal services directly to low-income Texans; and
- Allow non-attorneys to have economic interests in entities that provide legal services to low-income Texans while preserving professional independence.

In response, the commission formed a working group, and Hecht said he believes a report will be coming soon. The public will have a chance to provide input before the court adopts any rule changes, he said. The commission is accepting feedback on the study by email at [suggestions@texasatj.com](mailto:suggestions@texasatj.com).

Other states, including Arizona, allow licensed paraprofessionals to provide legal services in "very restricted, limited, supervised ways" to help address the unmet legal needs of the poor, Hecht said. "We owe it to the profession, we owe it to the public, we owe it to the integrity of the justice system to do everything we can to make sure that people are not precluded from recognizing the full promise of justice simply because of limited means," he said.

In other action, the board:

- Continued the Building Planning Special Committee, which advises the State Bar on decisions related to remodeling, repairs, and uses of the bar's building and property at 1415 Lavaca St. in Austin.

- Approved the Legal Services to the Poor in Criminal Matters Committee’s “Ability to Pay Guidance for Texas Courts and Practitioners,” which explains changes to the law governing fines and fees in Texas and provides best practices for implementing those changes.
- Agreed to refer the Court Rules Committee’s proposed amendments to Texas Rules of Civil Procedure 21(d), 21a(e), and 21(e) and Texas Rules of Appellate Procedure 9.5 and 49.3 to the Supreme Court for consideration.
- Approved proposed amendments to Rule 1.08(e) of the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, relating to conflicts of interest regarding prohibited transactions, to be included in a future referendum of the bar membership.
- Adopted updated performance measures reflecting the board’s latest revisions to the bar’s strategic plan.
- Approved a policy providing expense stipends for officers of the Texas Young Lawyers Association.

### Leadership Changes

Austin attorney Steve Benesh was sworn in as the State Bar’s 2023-2024 president-elect during the board’s June 22 meeting. Austin attorney Kennon Lily Wooten succeeded Chad Baruch as chair of the board. Supreme Court Senior Justice Debra

Lehrmann administered the oath of office to new officers, directors, section representatives, and board liaisons.

### Awards and Recognitions

Gibson presented a resolution in honor of 1988-1989 State Bar President James B. Sales, who died on February 11 at the age of 88. Gibson also presented presidential citations to attorneys Shana Faulhaber, of Athens, Josué Galván, of San Antonio, and Greg Sampson, of Dallas, for their work on issues related to her initiatives; State Bar directors David Calvillo and Lucy Forbes, both of Houston, for exceptional service to the board; and the following State Bar staff members for contributing to Gibson’s initiatives: Paul Burks, Caren Cheavens, Macey Erhardt, Michelle Fontenot, Alicia Freeman, Erica Grigg, Paul Jacobs, Sarah Rich, and Penni Wood.

Baruch, the outgoing board chair, presented the Public Member Award to director Luis Cavazos, of Brownsville, and the Outstanding Third-Year Director Award to Mary L. Scott, of Dallas.

State Bar Executive Director Trey Apffel presented a Staff Excellence Award to Customer Service Specialist Frank Huerta.

Watch the meetings at [texasbar.com/board](https://texasbar.com/board) under “Board Meeting Videos.” Meeting materials are available at [texasbar.com/bodmaterials](https://texasbar.com/bodmaterials). **TBJ**



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