

MORE THAN LEGAL OUTCOMES

Texas Young Lawyers Association President Alyson A. Martinez aims to promote public service through her signature project.

INTERVIEW BY ERIC QUITUGUA

NO MATTER the hat worn—aspiring journalist, public defender, or corrections director—Alyson A. Martinez’s path has always centered on public service. Direct connection to the people she’s represented has allowed her to help them navigate times of stress and uncertainty, something she does not take for granted.

“Many people enter the system expecting the worst,” she said. “When someone leaves feeling that their story was heard, that they were treated fairly, or that they were connected with resources that can help them move forward, those moments stay with you. Those experiences reinforced for me that public service work is about more than legal outcomes. It is about helping people navigate difficult moments and, when possible, connecting them with the support and resources they need.”

This year, Martinez, the 2025-2026 Texas Young Lawyers Association president, will debut her signature project, *For the Public: Texas Lawyers in Public Service*. The project, slated to launch April 7 on forthepublic.tyla.org, is an online hub featuring interviews with attorneys across Texas who work in public service roles and exploring what that looks like in practice. It will highlight the many ways attorneys serve their communities through public service careers and provide resources for law students and young lawyers wanting to pursue those paths, she said.

What can you tell me about the features of the project?

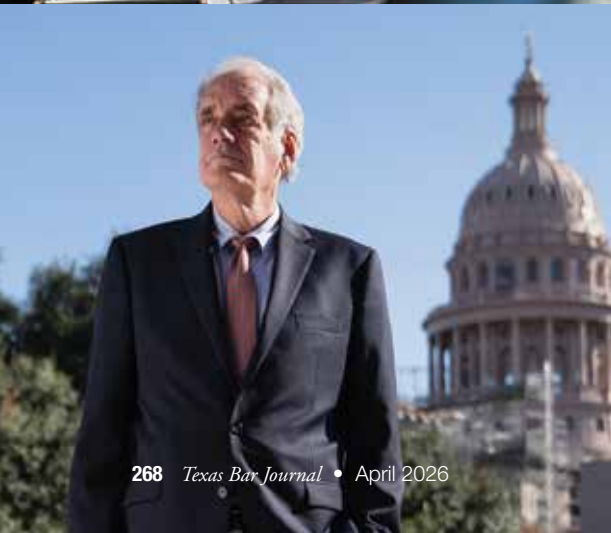
The project includes several components that highlight public service careers across Texas.

The website features video spotlights of attorneys serving as prosecutors, public defenders, legal aid attorneys, and government lawyers. These shorter interviews provide a snapshot of the work these attorneys do and the impact their roles have on their communities.

We also developed a podcast series with video components that includes longer conversations with public service attorneys about their career paths, the challenges of the work, and what continues to motivate them.

In addition, the website will include a recorded “Careers that Serve” panel discussion, as well as several practical resources. These include career road maps for prosecutors, public defenders, legal aid attorneys, and government lawyers; a handout explaining the benefits of public service work; maps of legal aid and public defender offices across Texas; and a guide outlining 10 questions attorneys may encounter in a public service job interview.

LEFT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Alyson A. Martinez, Shelli Egger, Susan Soto, and Tom Stutz. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION



We wanted to create a resource that not only celebrates public service attorneys, but also helps others understand how they can follow a similar path.

Who helped put it together?

This project truly reflects the collaborative spirit of TYLA. For the first time, many of our committees contributed to the development of a single signature project, allowing directors from across the state to play a role in building it.

The project was led by TYLA's Public Service Committee, and I am especially grateful to the committee chairs, Alexandra Lambring-Billmyre, Claire Harbert, and Anthony Franklyn, for the tremendous work they put into bringing it to life.

We are also deeply grateful to the Texas Bar Foundation, which generously funded the project through a grant.

Our website and attorney spotlight videos were produced by WKNDS Media, and the podcast series was developed with the help of Site Remodelers in collaboration with TYLA's Programming Committee.

Most importantly, we are thankful to the many attorneys across Texas who agreed to participate in the project. Some traveled to Austin to record interviews, while others joined us virtually, generously sharing their time and their stories.

When drawing up your signature project, why did you focus on public service?

Public service has always been deeply personal to me. I grew up in Laredo and always felt a strong desire to give back to the community that raised me. That feeling became even stronger during my time at the Webb County Public Defender's Office, where I saw firsthand how meaningful legal representation can be.

Working in public defense showed me that the law is not just about statutes or courtrooms. It is about people and the real challenges they face. When I began thinking about TYLA's signature project, I wanted to highlight the attorneys across Texas who have committed their careers to serving their communities through public service.

What does public service look like to you?

Public service can take many forms, but at its core it is about using your skills to serve others and strengthen your community.

In the legal profession, that might mean representing someone who cannot afford an attorney, helping families navigate complex legal challenges through legal aid, serving as a prosecutor who seeks justice for victims, or working within government to ensure laws and policies are implemented fairly.

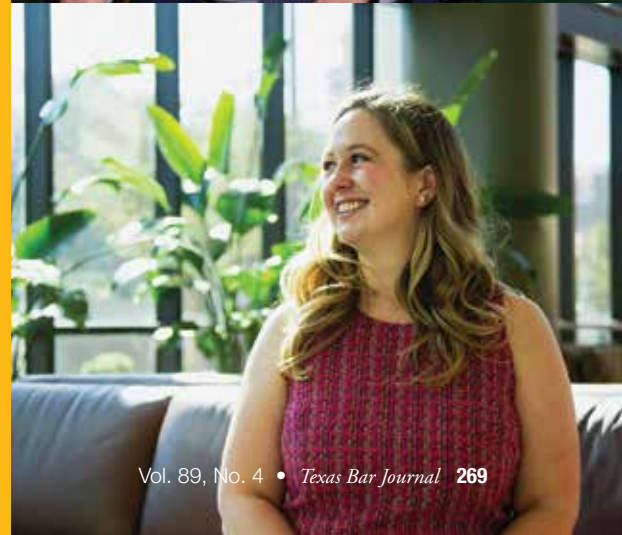
Much of this work happens quietly and often behind the scenes, but it plays a vital role in ensuring that our justice system works the way it is supposed to.

In your profile in the *Texas Bar Journal* in July/August 2025, you spoke about your work as a public defender and loving the direct connection with clients. Can you expand on that?

One of the most meaningful aspects of working as a public defender was the direct connection with the people you represent. You often meet clients during some of the most stressful and uncertain moments of their lives, and they are looking to you for guidance and reassurance.

That connection reminds you that legal work is not abstract. The decisions made in courtrooms affect real people, families, and futures. Being

RIGHT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Brittany Perrigue Gomez, Meghan Kempf, Joe M. Rubio, and Courtney M. White. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION



able to stand beside someone and ensure their voice is heard is one of the most meaningful aspects of public service.

When thinking of Texas attorneys who have committed themselves to public service, who's one who comes to mind and what is it about them that stands out?

One person who immediately comes to mind is Judge Beckie Palomo. She has dedicated her career to public service in several capacities. She began as a prosecutor, later served as the director of adult probation, and now serves as the judge of the 341st Judicial District Court.

Judge Palomo has been both a mentor and a friend to me, and I have been fortunate to learn from her example. Throughout her career, she has approached her work with fairness, compassion, and a deep commitment to the community she serves.

Are there any areas of public service you'd like to see more attorneys lend their time to?

The access to justice gap remains a significant challenge, and many areas of public service would benefit from greater participation. Public defender offices, legal aid organizations, and government agencies all face increasing demand for services.

Public service careers may not always be the most widely promoted path, but they are among the most meaningful. Expanding participation in these areas would strengthen the legal system and improve access to representation for many Texans. **TBJ**

RIGHT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Dena Stroh, Mark Melton and Stuart Campbell, and Judge Beckie Palomo. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION



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