



**Anjanette Hamilton** (third from left), the high scorer on the February 2010 bar examination, is pictured with Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson (far left), Justice Dale Wainwright (far right), her husband and parents. Hamilton graduated from American University Washington College of Law in Washington, D.C., and is a staff attorney with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc., in El Paso.

# Making a Difference

BY ANJANETTE HAMILTON

**T**hank you, Chief Justice Jefferson, justices and judges, members of the bar, family members, and friends, for being with us today. I have to admit I was a little nervous when I found out I would have to give a speech. But I told my mother, “Well, it’s only five minutes.” And my mother — very helpfully — told me, “Anji, five minutes can feel like a lifetime when you’re giving a speech!” Right now, I’m sure that many of you are thinking it can also feel like a lifetime when you’re listening to a speech, so I’ll try to be brief.

First, I want to thank my family, especially my parents and my husband who all flew out to be here with me today. I am also fortunate to work at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, an organization that not only gave me time off to study for the bar, but also covered the expenses for my study course and bar application fees and overall was unbelievably generous and supportive.

And this gives me another reason to say “Thank you” to the many justices, judges, members of the bar, and other advocates here who have done so much to support the Texas Access to Justice Foundation. The Foundation provides crucial funding for TRLA and is the largest Texas funder for legal services to the poor.

I feel very proud to be joining a State Bar with such a strong commitment to promoting equal access to justice through support for legal services, dedication to pro bono work, and many, many other efforts.

But, even still, there are many people in Texas facing legal problems who don't have access to a lawyer. In the 68 counties where TRLA works, there are more than 2.6 million people considered eligible for legal aid services. This means that there is only one TRLA lawyer for every 21,000 people without the resources to hire a lawyer. And this means that it seems like almost every day I have to get on the phone and tell someone who has applied for legal assistance that I'm very sorry but we won't be able to represent them. I hate making these phone calls. People always say, “But don't you understand that I might lose custody of my kids?” “That I'm being evicted

## FEBRUARY 2010 BAR EXAM PASS RATE INFORMATION

The table below shows the number of graduates from each Texas law school that took the bar exam for the first time in February, the number that passed the exam, and the percentage that passed.

LAW SCHOOL	TESTED	PASSED	PASS RATE
Baylor	46	43	93%
St. Mary's	32	26	81%
South Texas	109	89	82%
S.M.U.	31	25	81%
Texas Tech	22	21	95%
Texas Southern	29	18	62%
Texas Wesleyan	61	42	69%
U. of Houston	36	30	83%
U. of Texas	24	20	83%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>81%</b>

*So as new Texas attorneys, I urge you to reach out to the State Bar, to the Texas Young Lawyers Association, to TRLA or a legal aid organization in your area, and to your local bar associations. Get involved in some of the fantastic pro bono opportunities that are out there. Whatever time you can contribute will, I promise, make a tremendous difference in someone's life.*

from my home and I have no place to go?” “That I'm losing the government benefits that I need to get by?” Then they ask me, “How can I represent myself when the other side has a lawyer?”

And I have to say, “I know. I know your case is very important. We just don't have enough lawyers. We don't have enough lawyers to be able to send someone to represent you.”

As a relatively new attorney, and a brand-new Texas attorney, I often feel frustrated by my lack of experience — at all the things I know I don't know. I forget that everyday there are hundreds of people who have to go into a courtroom alone and represent themselves. These are people who may not have had the chance to finish high school, let alone law school; people who not only don't understand legal terms, but may not understand English. They are people who have been victims of family violence; people who are homeless; people with disabilities. And just as I'm inspired by the tremendous achievements of the people sitting in this room, I'm also inspired by all the people who stand up alone in a courtroom to fight for their legal rights because they have no other choice.

So, as new Texas attorneys, I urge you to reach out to the State Bar, to the Texas Young Lawyers Association, to TRLA or a legal aid organization in your area, and to your local bar associations. Get involved in some of the fantastic pro bono opportunities that are out there. Whatever time you can contribute will, I promise, make a tremendous difference in someone's life.

Congratulations to everyone and thank you very much. ✪