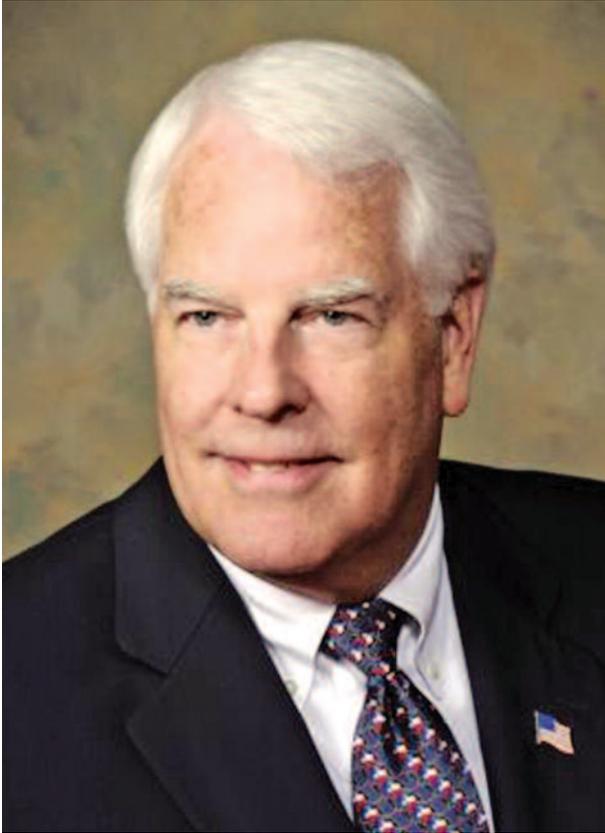


ATJ PRO BONO CHAMPION



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JAY PATTERSON

Dallas

Patterson, a retired judge of the 101st District Court in Dallas and a long-time pro bono advocate, sat down with the *Texas Bar Journal* to discuss his work, his inspiration, and the fight for legal aid funding.



What sort of pro bono work are you involved in?

For years, I was involved in pro bono advocacy as an attorney in Dallas. Once I became a trial judge, [former Dallas County judge] Merrill Hartman really inspired me. He died a few years ago, but he was a real pioneer. He started the South Dallas Legal Clinic with Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas. I'm also chair of the Legal Services to the Poor in Civil Matters Standing Committee of the State Bar and serve on the Committee on Self-Represented Litigants of the Texas Access to Justice Commission. And, I have to say, I found it very satisfying to help with the legal aid funding legislation this last session.

What was the process to secure legal aid funding this session?

It was a long journey this session. We worked hard to secure funding and it was exciting to see funding for legal aid included in the actual budget bill. I spent a lot of time contacting legislators and stressing the importance of access to justice. Thanks should be given, of course, for the terrific work Justice Nathan Hecht, Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson, and the rest of the Texas Supreme Court did to support funding for legal services to the poor. The Court made it its number one priority in this session. We have a long way to go still — there's a tremendous need for more funding. But it was great to see as many people involved as possible regardless of their political opinions.

What is the most rewarding part of your pro bono work?

My faith is a strong motivator for me in my pro bono involvement. The most rewarding part is hard to describe — it's a little like telling people about being grandparents. You don't understand it until it happens to you. To go down to the pro bono clinic as a volunteer judge and hear custody cases or uncontested divorces is to help people start their lives over again and to get a fresh start. It's not unusual to hear people shout "hallelujah!" or ask to give you a hug. I am the primary beneficiary of the energy and joy of making a contribution. ✪