



YOUR DUES AT WORK

What do State Bar of Texas members get in exchange for their dues? That's one of the questions we get most often here in Austin. There are many benefits of membership. In addition to the big one—the ability to practice law in a self-regulated profession with an independent grievance system—you also get everything from insurance options through the Texas Bar Private Insurance Exchange to confidential help with substance abuse, mental health, and overall wellness issues through the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program. But the one I want to highlight here is our unique legal research benefit.

The State Bar of Texas is the first and only bar association to offer its members free access to both Casemaker and Fastcase. This is an estimated combined value of \$2,000 a year, a benefit that far exceeds your annual dues.¹

As State Bar president in June 2014, I was proud to help launch the Fastcase benefit to complement our Casemaker benefit and have enjoyed hearing feedback from members about how the services enhance their practices.

Both offer full-text access to caselaw and statutes, combined with powerful research tools. The services are similar in scope but different in look and feel, so they meet members' needs in different ways.

Both services are also regularly adding new features and improvements. For detailed updates and links to upcoming how-to webinars, go to texasbar.com/legalresearch.

You can find more member benefits and services at texasbar.com/benefits. We are always looking to expand our benefits program and welcome your suggestions.

I'll close with a word about your dues. The State Bar of Texas has not raised dues since 1991, and there are no current plans to increase them. Counting the \$65 legal services fee imposed by the state, the total cost to practice law in Texas for an attorney paying the maximum \$235 dues level is \$300 a year.

If you practiced in another state whose legal profession is set up similar to Texas', where a unified bar performs regulatory functions, chances are you would pay more than you do now. The total cost to practice law is higher in 20 of the 25 other such jurisdictions that responded to the American Bar Association Division for Bar Services' 2017 benchmarks survey. Of the five such jurisdictions that report lower total costs, none is cheaper than \$250 a year, according to the survey.

In Texas, it's true that an expanding membership base has boosted dues revenue in recent years, but that growth has also meant that the State Bar is providing services to more people. Our current and former board members, officers, and executive leadership deserve credit for keeping our dues reasonable and preventing the need for an increase for nearly 27 years and counting. But I would not want us to rest on our laurels.

In one of my first meetings with State Bar staff after taking this job in December, I said we should never be comfortable where we are or complacent in what we do. In my short time here, I have seen how much our staff is committed to that concept of continuous improvement.

We are working hard for you to build a better State Bar of Texas. If you have ideas on things we could do more effectively, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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Have a question for Trey? Email it to trey.apffel@texasbar.com and he may answer it in a future column.

NOTES

1. State Bar of Texas annual membership dues are \$68 for attorneys licensed fewer than three years, \$148 for attorneys licensed three to five years, and \$235 for attorneys licensed more than five years.