



TIME TO SAY THANK YOU

This might be a good time to remind members of the State Bar of Texas how fortunate they are to be licensed in Texas. We are one of 33 states in which lawyers govern themselves through a unified, or integrated, bar. But like everything in Texas, we tend to do it bigger and better. Membership totals more than 103,000 lawyers, primarily in Texas, but also scattered throughout the world. It is also time to say thank you to those who serve the bar and Texas citizens every day.

In 1939, the Texas Legislature created the State Bar as an administrative agency of the judicial branch of the state through the State Bar Act in aid of its powers under the constitution to regulate the practice of law. Since then it has grown into one of our country's premier legal associations whose mission is to:

"... support the administration of the legal system, assure all citizens equal access to justice, foster high standards of ethical conduct for lawyers, enable its members to better serve their clients and the public, educate the public about the rule of law, and promote diversity in the administration of justice and the practice of law."

Our annual dues have not been raised since 1991. We get to practice in an efficient self-regulated profession with an independent grievance system for a maximum of \$300, including a \$65 legal service fee imposed by the state—that's a pretty good deal.

Most importantly, the bar has proved that the Texas Legislature's and Supreme Court's continued confidence are well placed. Over these past 80 years, our staff has been dedicated and responsive to annually changing presidents and boards, as well as the desires and needs of the membership. Our Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program provides confidential help with substance abuse, mental health, and overall wellness issues. Our Texas Opportunity & Justice Incubator helps narrow the justice gap by providing training and office space to new attorneys who want to build their own practices serving low- and modest-income clients. Our bar serves as a clearinghouse for legal information and resources during natural disasters. Our Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans program—modeled after an initiative started by the Houston Bar Association in 2008—is renowned and replicated throughout the United States, and we have long had the finest continuing legal education department in the nation. We are indeed fortunate and should be grateful.

It is also a good time to say thank you to the Texas Young Lawyers Association, or TYLA. A department of the State Bar composed of lawyers 36 years of age and under and those licensed for five years or less, TYLA is commonly referred to as the bar's "public service arm." The Legislature wisely recognized that TYLA is an integral part of the State Bar by making its president, president-elect, and immediate past president voting members of the bar's board of directors and the TYLA's president a member of the bar's executive committee. After all, they are the state's future advocates, legislators, judges, bar leaders, role models, and mentors for the next generation of young lawyers. The need for their perspective is critical. Again, TYLA has done it bigger and better, having been repeatedly recognized by the American Bar Association as the top state young lawyer association.

TYLA programs provide legal educational services to the general public, help lawyers develop and maintain their practices, and aid underserved members of the community. Recent projects include *Free From Violence*, a web resource for survivors of domestic and elder abuse; *Safeguard Our Seniors*, an informational video designed to heighten awareness of the signs and symptoms of elder abuse; and a website containing videos and printable files to educate the public on human trafficking and related legal issues.

And finally, while we are at it, we should also thank our impressive membership, among the most highly regarded lawyers in the world. Our many fine law schools educate them well, including instilling their graduates with the value of public service and pro bono representation, and our bar continues it. Our firms can always do better, especially in gender and minority diversity, but they and our bar continue to make it a priority. Our Supreme Court justices are not just silent partners with the bar in the provision of legal services to the poor, but active leaders in the state and national access to justice effort. And we have always been blessed with competent and dedicated legal aid lawyers who have chosen a career serving the indigent.

Time has shown our unified bar has served the lawyers of Texas well. More importantly, it has served the citizens of Texas well. The result is a highly qualified, continually educated, and ethically policed legal profession with a culturally instilled dedication to pro bono, access to justice, and public service. A thank you to all who make it work is long overdue.

BILL WHITEHURST

Past President, State Bar and TYLA

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