

LOOKING BACK ON A YEAR OF IMPROVEMENTS



This month's *Texas Bar Journal* highlights major developments in the law in 2019. We asked a variety of attorneys to recap significant trends and court decisions from the past year that affected their practice areas. Their reports are informative for all Texas lawyers, and we are happy to publish them in our "Year in Review" starting on page 29.

The past year also brought a number of improvements at the State Bar of Texas to better serve our members and the public. I've summarized some of them below, but for a more comprehensive look at State Bar operations, I encourage you to read our 2018-2019 annual report at texasbar.com/annualreport.

Lawyer well-being

Lawyer wellness is a top priority for the State Bar, and we redoubled our efforts to promote well-being and suicide prevention in 2019. The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program, or TLAP, released *It's Good to Get Help*, a video that aims to end the stigma lawyers may face when seeking help for substance use and other mental health issues. I encourage you to watch the video at youtube.com/statebaroftexas and help us share the message. TLAP also produced an excellent free ethics CLE webcast titled "What Lawyers Need to Know About Depression and Suicide," which is available at texasbarcle.com.

GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

The State Bar of Texas Board of Directors will hold its quarterly meeting at 9 a.m. CST January 24, 2020, at the Four Seasons Hotel Houston, 1300 Lamar St. All are welcome to attend. The agenda and background materials will be available at texasbar.com/board at least seven days before the meeting.

Member benefits and services

The State Bar launched or enhanced a number of member benefits and services. Among other initiatives, the bar:

- added staff to the toll-free Ethics Helpline (800-532-3947) to help ensure members receive prompt answers to questions;
- launched TexasBarCLE's Flash CLE Silver program to help lawyers 70 and older meet their MCLE requirements at a discounted rate; and
- opened the Texas Opportunity & Justice Incubator (txoji.com) to attorneys across the state via online learning.

We also expanded our member discount program (texasbar.com/benefits) with new vendors, including MetLife, Credible, Smith.ai, and four new practice management providers. Four complimentary benefits are now provided through the Texas Bar Private Insurance Exchange when obtaining health insurance, and the exchange's new Health Advocate benefit helps you with claims and with coordinating care.

Fiscal responsibility

Under the leadership of President Randy Sorrels and Immediate Past President Joe K. Longley, the bar has continued its efforts to control spending while increasing its reserves in line with sound financial practices. Also, as featured in my October column, the bar shifted to 100% online membership fee payments, which resulted in cost savings, increased security, and other efficiencies. The bar's most recent financial audit opinion remains unmodified, or "clean," which is the best opinion available.

Transparency

The State Bar continued its commitment to open government by working to implement 10 recommendations from an independent transparency review (texasbar.com/weaverreport). When federal litigation was filed in March challenging the mandatory bar structure in Texas, we created a webpage (texasbar.com/mcdonaldvsorrels) to keep our members and the public up to date on the case. Also, in June the State Bar launched an online portal to hundreds of archived documents and photos, making 80 years of bar history easily available to all. Go to texasbar.com/digitalarchives to browse these records.

More to come

We're also working hard on initiatives you'll hear more about in 2020. A board work group on succession planning is developing recommendations for programs to help attorneys protect their businesses, families, and clients in the event of their death or inability to practice law.

Also, the State Bar Committee on Disciplinary Rules and Referenda continues to consider potential rule changes that could proceed to a vote by members in 2020. You can review the committee's work and provide comments at texasbar.com/CDRR.

I look forward to updating you on these and other State Bar initiatives throughout the new year.

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.