



A MISSION-FOCUSED BAR

Many people think of the State Bar of Texas as the group that handles MCLE and grievances. Granted, MCLE compliance and attorney discipline are two of the State Bar's major responsibilities, but they are not the whole story.

The complete story becomes clearer when you read our mission statement, which appears below. Everything the State Bar of Texas does—every action taken or not taken—goes back to our mission, which is based on the bar's governing documents.¹ In short, the State Bar exists to protect the public, to serve Texas lawyers, and to help lawyers better serve their clients.

The State Bar of Texas is not an association or trade group—designed simply to benefit a profession—although serving lawyers is one of our core commitments. By statute, the bar is an administrative agency of the Texas Supreme Court with mandatory membership and seven defined purposes related to improving the administration of justice, advancing the quality of legal services to the public, maintaining high standards of conduct in the profession, and providing services to attorneys.²

Many people have a role in overseeing the State Bar—from the Supreme Court, which approves the bar budget and exercises administrative control; to the Legislature, which reviews bar operations under the Texas Sunset Act; to the 60-member State Bar of Texas Board of Directors, which develops and implements bar policy and hires an executive director to manage day-to-day operations.

State Bar board members volunteer their time. Other volunteers include the Commission for Lawyer Discipline, a 12-person standing committee (with an equal number of public and attorney members) that provides oversight to the chief disciplinary counsel, which administers the attorney discipline system with help from volunteer grievance panels located across the state.

More than 44,400 Texas lawyers belong to voluntary State Bar sections. Nearly 600 volunteers serve the State Bar through standing committees, where they work on a variety of issues affecting our profession. More than 260 lawyers from across the state volunteer through our SOLACE program to assist attorneys or their families when catastrophic events or health situations take place. And another 930 lawyers support peers in crisis as volunteers for the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program.

The 26,311-member Texas Young Lawyers Association acts as the bar's public service arm, under the leadership of its 48-member, all-volunteer board of directors. And nearly 10,000 lawyers donated a total of \$1.4 million in voluntary access to justice contributions on their dues statements in fiscal year 2018-2019.

Have you noticed a key word here is "volunteer"?

Yes, the State Bar has a professional staff, and I am proud to work with them every day. But what makes attorneys unique among professionals in Texas is our system of self-governance, which gives all bar members the right to vote on the people who represent us, the rules that regulate us, and the dues we pay for the right and privilege to practice law. The State Bar of Texas is all of us, and this system doesn't work without volunteers.

If you are one of those volunteers, I extend a sincere thank you. If you're not, I encourage you to get involved.

Join a section of lawyers who practice in your specialty area. Volunteer for a standing committee or a pro bono program. Become a mentor to new lawyers. Seek election to the bar board or appointment to a local grievance panel. If you're not sure how to get involved, please reach out and I'll help you get connected.

There are 105,125 active members of the State Bar of Texas. My hope is that all of us can work together in pursuit of the State Bar's mission.

Sincerely,

TREY APFFEL

Executive Director, State Bar of Texas
Editor-in-Chief, *Texas Bar Journal*
512-427-1500, trey.apffel@texasbar.com
@ApffelT on Twitter

NOTES

1. Go to texasbar.com/governingdocuments to read the State Bar Act (Tex. Gov't Code § 81), State Bar Rules, State Bar Board Policy Manual, and other documents that guide bar operations.
2. Tex. Gov't Code § 81.012.

The mission of the State Bar of Texas 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.
—State Bar of Texas Mission Statement