



Manny's Story and **PLANNING FOR DISASTERS**

HOUSTON SOLO EMANUEL J. "MANNY" CAIATI had a busy, profitable practice and thought he was in control. Then, in November 2020, a serious case of COVID-19 struck him, and he nearly lost everything. During his three weeks in a coma, when doctors lost hope and death seemed imminent, there was no one ready to step in who knew how to run his practice or help his clients.

Thankfully, Manny's wife, Jennifer, rallied Manny's lawyer friends who helped through the crisis. Manny recovered from his illness. But not everyone is so fortunate. Too often, lawyers die or become incapacitated without anyone ready to help wind down their practices.

Inspired by stories like Manny's, the State Bar of Texas has assembled tools at texasbar.com/attorneyresources to help lawyers prepare for disasters and recover quickly when they strike. The website includes an electronic form that allows you to easily designate a custodian-attorney who, in the event of your death or incapacity, can contact your clients, encourage them to obtain other counsel, and assist in the physical disposition of client files. This is a vital resource for emergency preparedness and client protection, and volunteering as a custodian-attorney is a tremendous way for lawyers to help each other.

The site also includes information on the State Bar's SOLACE program, which connects lawyers experiencing catastrophic events with other lawyers willing to help them. Other resources on the site include free CLE opportunities, disaster planning guides, emotional and mental health assistance, and a short video highlighting Manny's story.

The disaster resources website predates the pandemic but was revamped to include additional tools under the guidance of the Workgroup on Texas Lawyer Needs Arising from the 2020 Pandemic and 2021 Winter Storm. The State Bar Board of Directors created the workgroup in April to identify areas where we could continue or expand efforts to help lawyers.

Thanks are due to Immediate Past President Larry McDougal and workgroup co-chairs Roger Key and Cindy V. Tisdale for spearheading this effort and to the following workgroup members for their contributions: Manny Caiati, Claire Carter, Mike Heiskell, Andy Kerr, Gary Nickelson, Florentino "Tino" Ramirez, Mariben Ramsey, Tom Riney, and Scott Rothenberg.

If nothing else, the last 18 months have taught us to expect the unexpected. Disasters can happen any time; the best we can do is plan for them and support each other when they come. Or as Manny put it: "Be prepared, take care of your family, take care of your friends, and be safe out there."

Sincerely,

TREY APFFEL

Executive Director, State Bar of Texas
Editor-in-Chief, *Texas Bar Journal*