



## *So where did the* **R.I.D.E. TAKE US?**

**AS THE END OF MY TERM AS STATE BAR PRESIDENT NEARS**, I am reminded of where I began this journey. When I addressed the board of directors and asked for their approval as a nominee for president-elect, I said that I passionately believed the legal community should reflect the society we are called to serve. I shared that I was looking forward to the day when it would no longer be out of the ordinary to see an ethnically diverse individual, a female, a person of color, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, or a differently abled person in a leadership role at the State Bar.

After I was elected, I invited you to take a R.I.D.E. with me so we could examine the topics of Respect, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity and how we, as a profession, could help to advance the vision that many lawyers share of having a legal community more in line with society at large.

My goal, when I used this president's page to invite you to have some of those difficult conversations, was to stimulate respectful dialogue and self-reflection. If the type of responses I received from readers are any indicator, I feel certain there were some lively discussions around the state. I thank you for reading my columns, and I appreciate those of you who sent thoughtful responses, even when we did not see eye to eye. I learned from all of you.

I wanted to do more than just write and talk about these issues, though. I wanted to see progress. So how far down the road did we go?

As president-elect, I asked the State Bar board to create a task force to study and propose actions to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the administration of justice and the practice of law. The 15 members of the task force met regularly for over a year and made a series of recommendations. I am pleased to say their work is bearing fruit. Not only is the State Bar board using the task force report, but I am also told that local bar associations and affinity groups are using it to formulate action plans within their organizations.

Rules have been changed so DEI courses and attorney wellness presentations now qualify as ethics hours for CLE credit. The *Texas Bar Journal* board of editors is considering measures to increase the visibility of lawyers from diverse backgrounds. In April, the State Bar board approved proposed changes to the Texas Lawyer's Creed that would further reflect the bar's commitment to diversity and to align the creed with the State Bar mission statement. The proposed changes have been submitted to the Texas Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals for possible adoption. You can view them at [texasbar.com/creed](https://texasbar.com/creed).

Also, as recommended by the task force, the bar's website now includes more information on prelaw pipeline programs along with a diversity, equity, and inclusion speaker submission form. As soon as we have enough names to populate the list of available speakers, that will be made available as well. These resources can be found at [texasbar.com/minorityaffairs](https://texasbar.com/minorityaffairs).

At the June 8 board meeting, I will ask the board to create a DEI standing committee to continue this important work and to place the bar on equal footing with law firms and major corporations that have already taken steps to recognize the importance of addressing DEI initiatives as part of an organization's culture.

Finally, I will be asking the State Bar to continue the work we have started to take a count of the members of our bar who self-identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Recognition is an important step toward inclusion.

My time as president is ending, but I believe there is momentum to keep moving forward. The new generation of lawyers is speaking loudly and demanding change. The strongest support and encouragement I have received for my initiatives has been from lawyers newer to the profession. I am looking forward to seeing what route they will select. I suspect their lane may be a little faster.

It has been the highest honor of my professional life to serve as president of this State Bar. Thank you for the ride and thank you to my beloved Victor, who not only came along for the ride, but he also provided the encouragement needed when the going got tough.

### **SYLVIA BORUNDA FIRTH**

President, 2021-2022  
State Bar of Texas