



## *2024 in Review:* **AI REPORT, NEW DISCIPLINARY RULES, AND OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**EACH DECEMBER, THE TEXAS BAR JOURNAL LOOKS BACK AT SOME OF THE YEAR'S TOP LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS IN TEXAS.** This year is no different, and our volunteer authors, board of editors, and staff have worked hard to deliver informative updates from a range of areas, from antitrust litigation to Texas access to justice.

In that spirit, I'm devoting this month's Executive Director's Page to some of the top developments at the State Bar of Texas in 2024. Under the leadership of our officers and board of directors, the bar addressed issues including artificial intelligence, disciplinary rule changes, attorney vacation letters, new member benefits, and more—all with the goal of supporting lawyers as they serve their clients.

### **Responsible AI**

In February, our Taskforce for Responsible AI in the Law (TRAIL) published a thoughtful report on issues surrounding AI and its ethical use in legal practice, providing a strong foundation as the bar continues to study these issues.

### **New Disciplinary Rules**

Texas lawyers exercised their right of self-regulation in April by voting in the 2024 rules referendum. Voters overwhelmingly approved 12 new and amended disciplinary rules designed to protect the public while also making the rules clearer for lawyers to follow. The Supreme Court of Texas adopted nine of those rule changes and made them effective October 1.

### **Attorney Vacation Letters**

Under the leadership of 2023-2024 State Bar President Cindy Tisdale, the bar worked to help find a way to make the filing of attorney vacation letters more efficient for lawyers and for the courts. The Law Practice Management Committee contributed extensive work and provided its report to the Office of Court Administration (OCA). We are happy to report that vacation letters will soon be added to the OCA's system.

### **Paraprofessional Licensure Proposal**

In August, the Supreme Court of Texas issued preliminary rules that would allow licensed legal paraprofessionals and court-access assistants to provide limited legal services for low-income individuals in certain practice areas. As part of the public comment period, the State Bar Board of Directors proposed revisions to the rules aimed at more efficient regulation and enhanced public protection. As of this writing, the court has not yet issued its final rules.

### **New and Enhanced Member Benefits**

In May, the bar launched a benefit with BetterHelp offering members one free month of online mental health therapy, along with discounted therapy for members who continue after the first month. A priority of President Tisdale's, the therapy benefit provides our members with additional tools to improve their performance and deal with the grief, anxiety, depression, and other common mental health difficulties that may impact their ability to serve clients. In June, we further expanded our member benefits program by offering all Texas lawyers access to free billing and trust accounting software through Smokeball Bill. And we ended the year by launching vLex Fastcase, a significant upgrade to the free legal research tool available to all members.

### **Disaster Response**

Although Texas suffered its own natural disasters in 2024, including Hurricane Beryl, Texas lawyers still found time to help others. After Hurricane Helene caused significant damage across the southeastern U.S. in September, Texas lawyers responded to a call for out-of-state volunteers to provide pro bono assistance in North Carolina. This is just one example of how our members consistently step up to serve those in need.

As you can see, the State Bar of Texas remains committed to innovation, supporting lawyers, and maintaining high professional standards. I am grateful to all of the volunteer leaders, State Bar members, and professional staff who contributed to this year's successes.

Sincerely,

### **TREY APFFEL**

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