



TEXAS

ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

UPDATE

April 2007

Raise the Bar with Access to Justice Contributions

Every year, Texas lawyers have the opportunity to make a voluntary Access to Justice Contribution when paying their State Bar of Texas dues. This donation helps to provide civil legal aid to low-income and poor Texans, a growing population. The suggested contribution is \$100, but more generous contributions would be gratefully accepted.

Each year, voluntary Access to Justice Contributions make it possible for about 1,000 low-income Texans to receive help with their basic civil legal needs each year. For example, the donations help to ensure victims of domestic violence obtain protection from their abusers and that elderly

Texans receive the desperately needed benefits to which they are entitled.

These donations are especially crucial in assisting victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, more than 300,000 people evacuated Louisiana and came to Texas, increasing the state's poverty population significantly. Texas legal aid providers continue to work on hurricane cases and will likely do so through 2008.

Texas lawyers are very generous with their contributions of both time and money to worthy causes. In fact, since the voluntary Access to Justice Contribution was created in 2001, Texas attorneys have donated a total of \$4.4



Voluntary Access to Justice Contributions make it possible for legal aid to help people like the Cadenas who almost lost their home to foreclosure.

million. But if more lawyers contributed, we could help many more people.

Jesse Gaines, chief executive officer of Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas, explains, "Voluntary contributions, along with other funding, have helped us to dramatically increase the number of attorneys serving clients in all of our 14 branch offices.

The voluntary support of the private bar is often the only thing preventing a low-income family from disintegrating because of a legal problem."

When you pay your State Bar of Texas dues, please donate \$100 or more for access to justice. Your help

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Join the Pro Bono College

Pro bono attorneys help many low-income Texans handle their civil legal problems – people like Jacinta Salazar who needed guardianship of her ailing husband. Or Phyllis Shackles who needed a divorce and child support after her husband deserted the family. Pro bono involvement is vital to ensuring access to the justice system for all Texans.

Every lawyer can make a

difference by taking just one case. But some attorneys go above and beyond to help those in need. To recognize these stellar efforts, the State Bar of Texas created the Pro Bono College.

Since 1992, the Pro Bono College has acknowledged those attorneys who surpass aspirational pro bono goals. To qualify, lawyers must provide a minimum of 75 hours per year of pro bono



Mark W. Laney and Gina A. Price

legal services to the poor and be in good standing with the State Bar of Texas. Paralegals, who are now eligible for associate membership, must have

a minimum of 50 hours of pro bono legal work during the past year under the supervision of a licensed attorney.

Meet two attorneys who this year celebrated 10 consecutive years of membership in the Pro Bono College.

Mark W. Laney, Laney & Stokes, L.L.P., Plainview Mark Laney has been handling civil litigation for

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**Did you
KNOW?**

Texas attorneys contributed 1.8 million hours in free legal services to the poor in 2005.

Letter from the Chair

By James B. Sales, Commission Chair



While contemplating this report, I was reminded of the insightful

commentary authored by Sir Winston Churchill. Churchill observed, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." As a principle for a life well lived, there could hardly be more profound words. As members of a privileged profession licensed to pursue a learned art, we have a corresponding ethical and moral responsibility to use our learning, skill and ability in the service of our fellow citizens, including the less fortunate members of our community. Our privileged status as licensed lawyers makes us gatekeepers

for the justice system and, therefore, guarantors of the supremacy of the rule of law.

As chair of the Commission, I have spoken to many groups about the challenges confronting access to the justice system in Texas. Lawyers often inquire about what they can do to help. There are many answers to this complex question. But there is one way that is immediately available and will help immensely. When you pay your annual State Bar dues next month, please consider adding in the Voluntary Access to Justice Contribution. That very simple gesture, when taken collectively, will make a huge difference to low-income and poor Texans. Please consider joining me and many of your colleagues of the Bar in this effort

to increase much needed resources. Last year, lawyers donated more than \$510,000 through this voluntary option on the dues statement. With the efforts of more than 70,000 members joining together, we can significantly increase this critical resource for our access to justice initiatives.

A spectacular example of lawyers contributing to the Commission's justice initiative is the upcoming seminar for legal aid lawyers. This seminar is sponsored by the Commission and is conducted by the Texas Fellows of the American College of Trial Lawyers. For the past two years, the Texas Fellows of the ACTL have conducted a week-long Texas Advocacy Academy for legal aid lawyers. This year, in response to requests

from the staff attorneys who work in the trenches day to day helping those in need, the Fellows are conducting a two-day evidence seminar for 60 legal aid lawyers. Dan Bishop of Austin will serve as course director for the program. Other Texas Fellows volunteer their time and their incredible trial skills, as well as pay for their own expenses, to participate in this seminar, which will enhance the trial skills of the attendees. Once again, the University of Texas School of Law has generously agreed to host this important event in May.

Finally, our newly produced video, "Pro Bono: The Difference is You," demonstrates the opportunity for lawyers to help make a

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Pro Bono College

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more than thirty-four years. He says he accepts pro bono clients often, because they simply cannot afford to get the help they need. "I have always been a small-firm lawyer and was impressed by Al Ellis's involvement in the Pro Bono College years ago," Laney said. "He gains satisfaction in helping people who have a need." Laney added that in law school at Texas Tech, he learned "that by obtaining this legal education, I would be able to help others... it is the nature of our practice."

Gina A. Price, Conroe
For Gina Price, a partner with Price and Price in

Conroe, doing pro bono work is her "very small way of giving back to the community and the legal profession." Price, whose practice focuses on probate and estate planning, has earned a reputation as someone who cares and is willing to help people in need. She receives most of her pro bono cases by word of mouth.

The enrollment period for the Pro Bono College is June 1 to December 1 of each calendar year. For more information or to apply for or renew your membership, visit www.texasbar.com.

John Grisham Donates to Internship Program



Bestselling author John Grisham will speak at the State Bar of Texas Annual

Meeting this summer and will donate his speaker's honorarium of \$20,000 to the Texas Access to Justice Commission's Summer Law Student Internship Program. Grisham's contribution will be utilized for stipends for the law-student interns who participate in the ATJ Summer Internship Program.

The internship program, a collaboration between the Commission and all nine Texas law schools, provides law students with the opportunity to participate directly in access-

to-justice efforts and bring much needed civil legal aid to areas of the state that lack a nearby law school. This year, two interns from each of the nine Texas law schools will be placed in academic internships with civil legal services providers in East Texas, South Texas and El Paso. Grisham's generous donation will enable more law students than last year to participate.

Grisham will be the featured speaker at the Thursday lunch of the State Bar Annual Meeting on June 21 in San Antonio. For information about sponsorships or reserved tables, call Holly Wilkerson at 512.427.1515. Annual Meeting sponsorship and registration information is available at www.texasbar.com/annualmeeting.

Texas Access to Justice Foundation – IOLTA News

By Richard L. Tate, Foundation Chair



The Supreme Court of Texas issued a court order to amend the rules

governing the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) Program, requiring attorneys to hold IOLTA accounts at eligible financial institutions. Eligible institutions are those that pay on IOLTA accounts interest rates which are comparable to those paid to similarly situated non-IOLTA accounts. The rule change went into effect March 1.

More than 550 financial institutions in Texas hold IOLTA

accounts. The Texas Access to Justice Foundation, administrator of the IOLTA Program, is communicating with each of these institutions to solidify their eligibility status.

Prime Partners are banks that go above and beyond eligibility requirements to foster the IOLTA Program. These institutions pay a net yield of 70 percent or more of the Federal Funds Target Rate. They are committed to ensuring the success of the IOLTA program and increased funding for legal aid. We are pleased to present the list of Prime Partners as of April 12:

Amegy Bank of Texas (Statewide)

www.amegybank.com

Capital Bank (Houston)
www.capitalbanktx.com/

Citibank (Statewide)
www.citibank.com/private/bank/law_firms_7.htm

Coppermark Bank (Plano)
www.coppermarkbank.com

Dallas City Bank (Dallas)
www.dallascitybank.com

First International Bank (Plano)
www.fibt.com

First Victoria National Bank (Victoria)
www.firstvictoria.com

Liberty Federal Savings Bank (Dallas)

Lindale State Bank (Lindale)
www.lindalestatebank.com

Redstone Bank (Houston)
www.redstonebank.com

Security State Bank (Littlefield)

www.security-state-bank.com

Texas Brand Bank (Garland)
www.txbb.com

Town North Bank (Dallas)
www.tnbonline.com

Eligible institutions are financial institutions that meet the standards of the eligibility requirement as defined by IOLTA Rule 7.

Institutions have until June 1 to become eligible. If any financial institutions choose not to pursue eligibility, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation will contact attorneys who will be required to move their IOLTA accounts.

For more information, visit www.teajf.org.

Did you KNOW?

The interest generated by IOLTA accounts is utilized to provide free civil legal aid to poor Texans. The funds make it possible for legal aid programs to help victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities and the elderly with their civil legal needs.

IOLTA Compliance Online: Quick and Easy!

The Supreme Court of Texas requires that every licensed Texas attorney submit IOLTA compliance information each year to the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, regardless of whether the attorney handles IOLTA funds. Texas attorneys can submit their mandatory IOLTA compliance information online at www.teajf.org beginning May 1.

Last year, the Foundation for the first time offered attorneys the option to comply online. More than 26,000 attorneys, or 36 percent of licensed Texas attorneys, submitted their 2006 IOLTA compliance statements online, exceeding the Foundation's expectations.

Numbers are expected to increase this year, thereby reducing the expenditures outlaid on paper compliance. The more attorneys who comply online, the fewer funds the Foundation will expend on the compliance process. Thus, more funds can be allocated to helping low-income Texans attain justice in civil matters.

Attorneys can easily fill out compliance information online with the touch of a few computer keys. It's quick, convenient and secure. The IOLTA online compliance period begins May 1, 2007. Visit www.teajf.org to access your IOLTA compliance information.

Texas Lawyers Care Celebrates 25 Years of Service

The Texas Access to Justice Commission is hosting a Celebration on October 4 to recognize the silver anniversary of Texas Lawyers Care (TLC), the pro bono/legal services support department of the State Bar of Texas. TLC also staffs the Commission. TLC is celebrating 25 years of work to increase legal services for poor Texans. The celebration will feature a reception, as well as dinner and dancing with live music from Austin's own Rotel and the Hot Tomatoes.

TLC Silver Anniversary Celebration

October 4, 2007; 7:00 p.m.

Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum

1800 Congress Ave.

Austin, Texas 78701

To sponsor the Texas Lawyers Care Celebration, call **800.204.2222, ext. 1855**. Proceeds from the fundraiser will benefit the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, the largest state-based funder of legal aid in Texas. We hope you will join us for this exciting event!

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Contributions

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can make access to the justice system a reality for more low-income Texans. You also can help your local bar association or young lawyer association win the prestigious Hankinson Award, named for former Supreme Court of Texas Justice Deborah Hankinson. The awards go to associations with the highest percentage of contributors via the bar

dues statement.

Pay your dues and make your contribution at www.texasbar.com beginning May 1. For more information about legal aid, visit the Texas Access to Justice Commission Web site at www.texasatj.org and the Texas Access to Justice Foundation site at www.teajf.org.

Letter from the Chair

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difference in the access-to-justice system for the less fortunate of our state. This video, narrated by Dan Rather, features pro bono lawyers and their clients from across the state.

Thanks to the generous support of the State Bar of Texas, the video will be shown at all Texas Bar CLE seminars. The Family Law Section of the State Bar provided partial funding

for the video. Please take the opportunity to see your fellow Texas lawyers in this video. The work that they, and countless other Texas lawyers, do for low-income and poor Texans is truly inspiring and reflects great credit on our profession. These lawyers, to paraphrase Churchill, "are making a life by what they give."

Dates to Remember

May 1: Pay State Bar dues and make voluntary Access to Justice Contribution (www.texasbar.com)

May 1: IOLTA compliance available online (www.teajf.org)

June 1: Application period opens for Pro Bono College (www.texasbar.com)

October 4: Texas Lawyers Care 25th Anniversary Celebration