



## *A Year of Challenges, Service,* **INNOVATION, AND GROWTH**

**AS THE 2020-2021 BAR YEAR COMES TO A CLOSE**, we end it in a vastly different place than when we started, and thankfully so. This time last year, we were just a few months into a shutdown designed to save lives and were preparing for a summer upswing in COVID-19 cases. This year, millions of Americans have been vaccinated, restrictions are loosening, and the future is looking brighter.

I'm proud to report the State Bar of Texas remained fully functional, with most of its departments and employees working remotely throughout the pandemic. When I look back at what the State Bar—its board of directors, volunteers, and employees—have accomplished for the legal profession, it's nothing short of a Herculean effort dedicated to keep the needs of Texas lawyers at the forefront of our efforts during this extremely difficult year.

We are grateful to the Texas Supreme Court, especially our court liaison, Justice Debra Lehrmann, and the Office of Court Administration for their superb leadership and assistance. The court issued 37 emergency orders during the pandemic providing instructions on everything from in-person and virtual court hearings, eviction rights and responsibilities, document service, and a host of other issues facing lawyers.

While 2020-2021 came with incredible challenges, the State Bar not only met them head on, but also continued to innovate and expand services for Texas lawyers in line with the bar's statutory purposes. Here are just some of those accomplishments:

- In light of the pandemic's financial impacts, the membership department worked with the Supreme Court to give lawyers two extra months to pay last year's membership fees, while the MCLE Department continues to extend deadlines to help lawyers comply with MCLE requirements.
- All departments, programs, and committees turned their in-person events virtual. TexasBarCLE increased its free offerings, providing \$5 million in free CLE events to all Texas lawyers, and offered an additional \$148,000 in scholarships to lawyers in financial need.
- The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program continued its around-the-clock assistance to Texas lawyers, judges, and law students struggling with increased stress and anxiety due to the pandemic. The program developed monthly webinars on crucial well-being topics; amassed an online toolbox of resources at [texasbar.com/tlpsupporttoolbox](https://texasbar.com/tlpsupporttoolbox); and created a one-hour free CLE to educate on depression and suicide prevention, which can be found at [tlphelps.org](https://tlphelps.org) and on [texasbarcle.com](https://texasbarcle.com) under "free online classes."
- The Committee on Disciplinary Rules and Referenda, aided by bar staff, successfully brought eight potential rule proposals to the membership for a vote. Texas lawyers overwhelmingly approved all the proposals. The Supreme Court held a hearing on the changes on May 4 and can now either accept or reject the proposals.
- The Law Practice Resources Division launched a new website—[texasbarpractice.com](https://texasbarpractice.com), an umbrella platform where lawyers can find all the State Bar's law practice resources such as Texas Bar Books and the Law Practice Management Program.
- The Texas Opportunity and Justice Incubator transitioned to an entirely virtual format ahead of the pandemic, which allowed it to expand the program and cut costs.

Last, but absolutely not least, the State Bar created a fiscally responsible, balanced 2021-2022 budget that accounts for the pandemic's financial challenges. As a result of management decisions made at every turn during the pandemic and sharp-eyed oversight by the board of directors, the bar is in excellent financial health and well positioned to continue serving Texas lawyers and the public into the new year.

Sincerely,

**TREY APFFEL**

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