



Statement of Texas Access to Justice Foundation

Regarding Comments by State Bar of Texas President Larry McDougal

The Texas Access to Justice Foundation (TAJF) is committed to the vision that all Texans will have access to justice, regardless of income. Prior to the pandemic, there were more than 5.6 million low-income Texans who qualified for legal aid. In Texas, those who qualify for legal aid are disproportionately people of color. The institutions which serve them and all of us should be responsive to our needs, regardless of the color of skin. The legal system and its leaders should ensure that everyone who enters the legal system is treated equally and fairly.

The State Bar of Texas represents the lawyers who hold the keys to the courthouse doors. The State Bar of Texas, its leadership and membership, need to protect the promise of equal justice under the law. That promise cannot be kept when there is racism in our legal system.

The Texas Access to Justice Foundation applauds the State Bar of Texas, along with many sections and bar entities, for their statements denouncing racism. TAJF joins them in denouncing racism in all forms. TAJF unequivocally believes that Black Lives Matter.

The State Bar of Texas should assure equal access to justice for all; through words and actions. TAJF supports the creation of the *State Bar of Texas Proposed Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* as proposed by President-elect Sylvia Borunda Firth. We look forward to hearing and participating in its action plan to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the administration of justice and practice of law. As a long-standing partner, TAJF commits to supporting the Bar's pledge to advance racial equity efforts.

The Texas Access to Justice Foundation is also engaging in efforts to examine its own racial equity processes to determine how TAJF, its board and staff, can improve internally and support racial equity efforts of the 37 legal aid programs it funds. Some of those programs are the largest poverty law firms in this country. Collectively, last year, they helped approximately 150,000 low-income Texans. TAJF is committed to ensuring that each Texan that seeks help at legal aid doors will be treated with dignity and respect.

Racism, in any form, is a malignant tumor which needs to be removed if there is to be equality in our justice system and if we are to hold true to the pledge of "justice for all".