



State Bar of Texas Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

Recognizing that historical and continuing discrimination based on race, sex, and sexual orientation can impede the career opportunities of Texas attorneys and their ability to provide quality legal services, the State Bar's Office of Minority Affairs, created in 1991, implements and carries out initiatives to further the bar's commitment to create a fair and equal legal profession for minority, women, and LGBT attorneys. The office works with the State Bar's Diversity in the Profession, Women in the Profession, and Texas Minority Counsel Program Steering committees and hosts a variety of projects and programs. All Texas attorneys may participate in the office's programs.

In 2007, after the hard work of a diversity task force created by former State Bar Presidents Eduardo Rodriguez and Martha Dickie, the State Bar's mission statement was expanded to include: "and promote diversity in the administration of justice and the practice of law."

Taking Action on DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The mission of the State Bar of Texas is to support the administration of the legal system, assure all citizens equal access to justice, foster high standards of ethical conduct for lawyers, enable its members to better serve their clients and the public, educate the public about the rule of law, and promote diversity in the administration of justice and the practice of law.

— State Bar of Texas Mission Statement

THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS IS COMMITTED TO ITS MISSION STATEMENT—EVERY WORD OF IT.

As a former board member, a past president, and the current executive director of this organization, I know that to be true. But even the best mission statement is still just a collection of words. Action must result or the mission rings hollow.

On July 27, the State Bar of Texas Board of Directors held a special meeting by videoconference to discuss and consider action regarding President Larry McDougal's online comments. The board heard from 61 speakers and accepted hundreds of written comments before voting on a series of action items (see "Board Update, page 534"). These actions set the stage for the bar to further demonstrate its decades-long commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I am heartened that so many people cared enough about their State Bar to write letters and even attend the meeting to provide input. Many spoke of facing systemic racism or sexism in the profession, or the stigma surrounding substance use and other mental health issues. These comments were heartfelt, and they were heard. I am also proud of our board for standing up and giving thoughtful discussion and debate to such important issues. Their resolve to protect and improve our profession was evident and should be acknowledged by all.

For people expecting immediate results—namely, the president's removal—I'm sure the meeting was disappointing. The State Bar has no removal or recall provision that applies to this situation, and as of this writing, President McDougal has declined to resign. Instead, he has pledged to advance diversity and inclusion initiatives during the remainder of his term, which ends in June 2021, and many people are going to help hold him to that pledge.

To all members, I invite your engagement as we work together to accomplish the State Bar's mission. Vote in bar elections. Run for a seat on the board. Volunteer to serve on a task force or standing committee. Continue to attend board meetings and hold your elected officials accountable.

I know that trust, once lost, is difficult to regain. It will require a process of recognizing and developing ongoing amends for harm caused in our state, in our system of justice, in our institutions, in our bar. It will require action.

State Bar leaders have pledged to continue to work closely with and support the bar's Office of Minority Affairs and the sections and committees that are committed to advancing the goals of diversity and inclusion and equal justice under the law. The board also approved President-elect Sylvia Borunda Firth's proposal to create a task force to further advance these issues. I look forward to reporting more about these efforts in the months ahead. We must recommit ourselves in this important moment in our profession to carry out the State Bar's mission.

Sincerely,

TREY APFFEL

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