



The Supreme Court of Texas

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201 West 14th Street Post Office Box 12248 Austin TX 78711
Telephone: 512/463-1312 Facsimile: 512/463-1365

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CLERK
BLAKE A. HAWTHORNE

GENERAL COUNSEL
JENNIFER L. CAFFERTY

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
NADINE SCHNEIDER

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
OSLER McCARTHY

Mr. Bob Black
President, State Bar of Texas
P.O. Box 12487
Austin, TX 78711

Dear President Black:

The Court met yesterday to consider comments we have received about how best to provide our poorest citizens access to the rule of law. We greatly appreciate and accept the State Bar's offer to assist with this shared mission. No Court can accomplish this goal alone; the profession must help. The Court and the profession cannot do it alone; the State must help. No easy solution exists. Yet we must try.

Six million Texans qualify for legal aid. Even with the strong support of the Texas Legislature, economic conditions continue to force funding levels downward. Legal aid providers are cutting back as funding dissipates. They can provide help to fewer than one in five who apply. Texas lawyers have generously contributed both money and time toward legal services, yet each year tens of thousands of Texans are compelled to seek justice in our courts without legal representation. They need legal services they cannot afford.

For that reason, after consulting with the State Bar, we announced last year that "developing pleading and order forms approved by the Court for statewide use would increase access to justice and reduce the strain on courts posed by pro se litigants." Order in Misc. Docket No. 11-9046. Such forms have been officially sanctioned by courts in most states. The Court created the Supreme Court Uniform Forms Task Force with broad representation to develop similar forms and to provide counsel on their most effective use. The Task Force delivered its first report earlier this month.

In accordance with its usual practice, the Court has decided to refer the Task Force report to the Supreme Court Advisory Committee. We expect the Advisory Committee members to engage in the careful critique they have always given on matters of profound importance to the administration of justice. We instruct the Committee to consider input from all sectors, including the judiciary, the legal profession, representatives of the Legislature, and the public. I anticipate that the Court will receive the Committee's recommendations in April and will begin to review them in May. Considering the importance of this enterprise, we encourage the State Bar to present recommendations to the Advisory Committee and to the Court. This should allow all who wish to participate to be heard.


Mr. Bob Black

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We will approve forms only if they are substantively correct and are reasonably calculated to accomplish the goal of greater access to the courts. Uniform forms are but one means of addressing the problems presented by pro se litigation. The State Bar may develop other recommendations.

The Constitution requires the Court to administer justice. This occurs not only by deciding cases, but also by establishing a judicial climate in which people who lack money to hire a lawyer have a reasonable chance to vindicate their rights in a court of law. We are pleased to have the Bar's full participation toward that end.

Sincerely,


Wallace B. Jefferson
Chief Justice