

TEXAS SUPREME COURT ADVISORY

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COURT APPROVES DISTRIBUTION OF BAR'S VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROGRAMS

By [order](#) issued Friday the Texas Supreme Court approved disbursing total contributions Texas lawyers made to access-to-justice programs in the state. For the third time voluntary check-off contributions this year by lawyers on dues statements exceeded \$1 million.

The Court ordered the 2013 donations – \$1,023,967 – to be split among the Texas Bar Foundation (\$50,000 for ProBAR, the American Bar Association's South Texas Pro Bono Representation Project; \$20,000 to stipends for law students in the Access to Justice Summer Internship Program; and \$130,000 to grants for civil legal services for low-income Texas residents) and the balance to the Access to Justice Foundation for operating support among its grant recipients.

“This million-dollar commitment represents a continuing and increasing determination by the Texas bar to provide the poorest among us with vital civil legal services,” Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht said. “But these contributions, above and beyond what lawyers must pay for licensing fees, are only a fraction of what Texas lawyers contribute by giving their time to people who cannot afford to hire counsel.”

Since 1999 Texas lawyers have had the option as they pay their licensing dues to add a contribution to support legal assistance to the poor. This year's lawyer contributions were bolstered by a new fundraising effort the Access to Justice Commission created, the [Champion of Justice Society](#) for contributors who give at specific levels of \$250 or more.

“The Society had 261 inaugural members who contributed more than \$100,000, with another \$31,000 in promised contributions for future years,” said Trish McAllister, executive director of the Access to Justice Commission.

“Enough funds were raised to support the starting salary of two legal aid attorneys.”

“These donations show that State Bar of Texas members and the Texas Access to Justice Commission share a commitment to ensuring all Texans have access to the justice system, and we are thrilled and inspired by their generosity,” State Bar President Lisa M. Tatum said. “We are grateful to the Supreme Court of Texas for its dedication to access to justice and urge our members to continue supporting the important work of filling the gap in funding for civil legal services for the poor.”

Texas lawyers have contributed more than \$9.2 million since the bar-dues check-off option was implemented. Donations totaled more than \$1.1 million in 2003 and hit the million-dollar mark for the first time in 2002.