

Installation Speech:

Vision for the Future

June 6, 2024



By Patrick A. Talley, Jr.

I would like to thank Chief Justice John Weimer for administering the oath of office to me and all the incoming Bar leaders. I was elected to this position in 2022 but, first, you must serve as president-elect, so I've been waiting in the wings for this for almost two years now. But I have been very fortunate to have had Shayna Sonnier as my predecessor. I have learned a lot from her, and I consider her to be a dear friend. She also has been a very inspiring leader. With Shayna continuing her Bar service as immediate past president and Ed Walters beginning his position as president-elect (and our future president), I believe we will have an awesome leadership team, and we look forward to leading the LSBA this year.

As I begin my term as your president, I would like to discuss some of the plans and goals I have, as I think this will tell you where we are going as an organization.

But first, here's a little bit about me. I would like to thank my family and friends for their support. To my immediate family, my wife Sharon, our three children, our daughter Sarah, our two sons Peyton and Trey and his wife and our daughter-in-law Margaret, thank you for everything you have done to support me on the road to the LSBA presidency. To my two sisters from Savannah and my brother who lives in Charleston and their spouses, and to dear friends from college who have traveled long distances to be here, thank you for being here.

I would also like to thank my law school friends, some who also traveled long distances to be here. We had an unusually close-knit group in law school and have remained close since graduation more than 40 years ago. I wouldn't

be here today as the LSBA president if it weren't for you all and I'd like to say thanks to you for your help along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank my law partners and colleagues at Phelps Dunbar for their support of me on this road to the LSBA presidency. I've been a partner in three outstanding law firms in my career. I sincerely believe that my tenure at Phelps is the most rewarding. I could not do this without the support of the firm. Thanks to all my partners and colleagues at Phelps!

Let's move on to discuss our plans and goals this coming year.

First, our theme for this year is *"I get by with a little help from my friends."* This theme has a double meaning (more on that later), but, foremost, it is a theme about access to justice, the first goal. I have a fundamental belief and commitment to access to justice because I believe that every citizen of this state should have the right to access the courts and have their grievances addressed by a judge or jury, regardless of their social status, economic background or any disability they might have.

Unfortunately in many parts of our state, access to justice remains a distant dream for many of our citizens. While I am quite proud of the accomplishments we have made to access to justice, the reality in our state today is that 1.8 million of our citizens are still unable to afford a lawyer when they need one. 1.8 million people! And we have tremendous swaths of legal deserts in our state.

This picture is even bleaker when it comes to criminal cases. This is particularly true in north Louisiana where most of our legal deserts exist and where, sadly, many defendants who are charged

with a crime are unable to have legal representation. So they sit in jail.

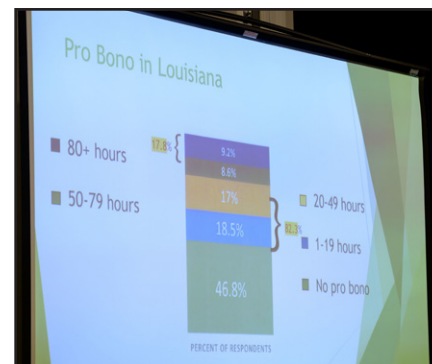
Our job is not done, not yet, and we still have challenges that we need to address. We must do more. We will, first and foremost, continue our commitment to fund legal programs for the poor at the same level or higher than in the past.

In addition to the poor in our state, we must also focus on the neuro-diverse population in our state, which is growing every year and which has fallen through the cracks of our judicial system, particularly the children and youth who fall on the autism spectrum. A person who thinks differently and does not respond in a typical manner is likely to be subjected to bullying and harassment, and possibly discipline without due process, and that person may be expelled from school or terminated from a job. What happens to this child or young adult if his family is without means to obtain a lawyer or the legal support they need? Plain and simple, there is no access to the courts for these children and young adults, particularly if they are poor, and even if they can get into the legal system, our courts may not be adequately equipped to deal with the special problems, time and attention that the neuro-diverse population presents. We must ensure that our judicial system is adequately funded and resourced, with enough judges, courtrooms and support staff to handle these special cases, irrespective of one's ability to pay.

Another aspect of access to justice that we will work on this year is pro bono service in our state, which, quite frankly, is not working as well as it should be. In Louisiana, every lawyer should strive to provide 50 hours of pro bono work each year. But therein lies the problem. The



Patrick A. Talley, Jr. during the installation luncheon delivering his installation speech, inset shows slide concerning Louisiana Pro Bono participation. Photos by Matthew Hinton Photography.



The mental health of our profession is also being addressed by bar leaders in other states so we are right in step with everyone in the country on this. *They can get by with a little help from their friends.*

We will also focus on two other areas during my presidency: Strategic Planning and Artificial Intelligence.

Our current Strategic Plan is more than seven years old, and we have completed all the goals we set out to complete. So, we will begin crafting a new Strategic Plan and establish new goals for the LSBA's future.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will change the way we practice law in the future, and it is here to stay. Since AI is not without risks, we need to take a close look to determine what its best practices should be and make sure that we properly regulate and govern its use in our profession. At the first meeting of the new Board of Governors, I appointed a task force consisting of lawyers and judges, including Supreme Court representation, to consider where we need to go as a profession with AI.

In conclusion, I would like to say thank you to everyone for the confidence shown to me in electing me as your 84th LSBA president. The magnitude and responsibility of this position is not lost on me. I cannot, however, do it alone, *"but I can get by with a little help from my friends."* Friends, it is an honor and a privilege for me to serve our profession as LSBA president and I will do my best to be the best leader that I can be as your president this year.

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goal is only aspirational, and more than 82% of the lawyers in our state do not meet this goal. Aspiration is clearly not working for us.

In a state with more than 23,000 lawyers, there's really no excuse for someone to sit in a jail cell, day in and day out, because he can't afford a lawyer. We should be embarrassed when that happens. On the other hand, just think for a second where we would be if every lawyer in the state met this goal and performed 50 hours of pro bono work annually. We could go a long way toward making access to justice a reality in our state for the people who are unable to afford a lawyer.

In her President's speech last year, Shayna Sonnier said it's all about service to our profession, and I agree, and to Shayna's remarks I add, if not us, then who? Who will address these issues and ensure that access to justice is a reality and not just a dream? It is our responsibility as members of the LSBA

to ensure that these barriers to access to justice are removed, and that all citizens in Louisiana, including the poor and neuro-diverse population, have an opportunity to seek justice and have their grievances addressed in the courts. *They can get by with a little help from their friends.*

Changing gears, we must also continue to focus on the mental health of our membership. We know from the numerous studies that we have a higher-than-normal percentage rate of burnout, anxiety and depression within our profession. This is true because, as lawyers, we are driven by perfectionism and the need to avoid failure. And forget about making a mistake, as mistakes are not countenanced in our profession. Our clients and our families count on us not making a mistake. Of course, perfection is an impossible goal and this leads to feelings of failure, which is a leading cause of the high levels of stress, anxiety and depression in our profession.