May 1, 2009

Dear Texas Attorney:

Last year, Texas attorneys voluntarily gave more than $540,000 through the Access to Justice contribution on the State Bar of Texas dues statement to provide civil legal services to the poor (those with an annual income of less than $13,000 for an individual or $26,500 for a family of four). Thanks to your generosity, Texans in critical need received basic legal help to free themselves and their children from domestic violence, to secure subsistence benefits when age or disabilities prevented them from working, and to secure protections for the elderly.

We are proud that Texas attorneys contributed so much to those who desperately need legal aid. We encourage you to be even more generous this year to help meet the increased demand for civil legal services as a result of Hurricane Ike. While many of you have already contributed to help meet the needs of the survivors immediately following Ike, pressing legal needs still continue even months later. Legal services programs already working with limited resources have been overwhelmed. Further, the continued economic downturn has dramatically reduced funding sources for legal services to the poor. As a result, programs providing basic civil legal services to the poor are struggling to meet an increased demand with fewer resources. Please help by taking the opportunity to contribute through your dues statement.

In addition to generous financial contributions, Texas attorneys are also generous with their time. A recent State Bar survey shows that 58 percent of Texas lawyers performed pro bono work in 2007, with an average of 48.5 hours. The Supreme Court commends your contributions of time and talent. We recognize, however, that only a fraction of the legal needs of the poor are being addressed. Therefore, we challenge every Texas attorney to contribute 50 hours of pro bono service this year.

So that the State Bar may demonstrate the value of lawyers’ service to the poor, we also encourage you to report your pro bono hours and financial contributions online at www.texasbar.com/reporting. If you do not have internet access, please contact Texas Lawyers Care at the State Bar at 800-204-2222, ext. 1855.

It is important for our profession to lead the way in bringing attention to this societal need and to assist in every way we can. We urge each of you to participate by contributing the suggested amount on the dues statement and by completing the online voluntary reporting so that access to justice for all can become a reality.

Sincerely,

Wallace B. Jefferson
Chief Justice

Nathan L. Hacht
Justice

Harriet O’Neill
Justice

Dale Wainwright
Justice

John Pollack
Justice

Scott Brister
Justice

Paul W. Green
Justice

Phil Johnson
Justice

Don R. Willett
Justice

David M. Medina
Justice

Paul L. Flowers
Justice