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November 21, 2023

TO THE TEXAS BAR COLLEGE AWARDS COMMITTEE:

This letter nominates Tracy Nuckols for the Merianne Gaston Award for Excellence in Legal Support. Tracy recently retired from the State Bar of Texas, where she began in CLE and then spent more than a decade overseeing the Sections Department. We can think of no finer candidate for this award.

Before explaining why we believe Tracy merits this recognition, a few words about the nominators. Rather than inundate the committee with separate letters, we chose to nominate Tracy as a group. Cumulatively, the signers of this letter include:

- *two former chairs of the State Bar of Texas Board of Directors;

- *three former chairs of the Texas Bar College;

- *six current or former chairs of the State Bar of Texas Council of Chairs;

- *six current or former section representatives to the State Bar of Texas Board of Directors;

- *four current or former elected directors of the State Bar of Texas; and

- *multiple former chairs of the Appellate, Consumer & Commercial, Civil Rights & Civil Liberties, Family, Real Estate, Labor & Employment, Probate & Trust, Tax, Women

& the Law, LGBTQ, and Litigation sections of the State Bar of Texas.

As previously mentioned, Tracy began her career at the State Bar as a CLE planner. Even among the many superstars at the State Bar of Texas, Tracy stood out. One thing that distinguished her was intellect. Simply put, Tracy was smarter than most of the lawyers she dealt with during her time at the State Bar. She grasped concepts—even complicated legal ones—quickly and easily.

Because of this keen intellect, Tracy developed exceptional expertise not only in seminar planning but in the substantive legal areas of the programs she planned. Within just a few years, Tracy knew what substantive legal topics needed to be included on programs discussing consumer law, family law, criminal law, and so on.

One example illustrates the point. Years ago, I served as chair of the planning committee for the Advanced Consumer and Commercial Law Course. The committee met in Austin to plan the program. A few days after my return to Dallas, I received a telephone call from Tracy telling me the program as planned was “awful—awful topics, awful speakers.” Tracy asked me to return to Austin, so the two of us could design a better program. We did. And I can assure you of two facts. First, Tracy contributed at least half of the topics and speakers. Second, the program we planned and presented was light years better than the original version.

A final note about Tracy’s work in CLE that may interest the committee. Tracy was the principal planner (indeed, to my recollection, the sole planner) several times during the early, formative years of the Summer School Course. She played an integral role in its growth into the course we all know and love today.

Eventually, Tracy left CLE to assume leadership of what had become a listless Sections Department. To say that Tracy transformed the Sections Department would be a little bit like saying Mickey Mantle could “kind of” hit major-league pitching.

Recognizing that any entity is only as strong as its leadership, Tracy quickly assisted numerous sections in attracting more energetic, experienced, and diverse leaders. Realizing the importance of continuity and sound practices, she insisted that all sections ensure they had bylaws conforming to best practices. When she recognized that a few sections were inactive, she stepped in to assist them in getting back on track. She transformed the Council of Chairs meetings to provide greater relevance to attendees, and broadened the range of services offered to sections by the State Bar.

While serving as both chair of the Council of Chairs and chair of the State Bar Board of Directors, I was amazed by the exceptional grasp Tracy had on the inner workings of every section council. She had instant recall of each section—including its chair and chair-elect—and knew which sections required additional attention from the State Bar.

Throughout her tenure, Tracy encouraged sections to be creative and innovative. She assisted them in developing new initiatives. Mindful of the State Bar's critical role in promoting access to justice, she particularly encouraged initiatives (and donations) in that arena. She wasn't above occasionally even pestering a section into donating excess funds to the ATJ Foundation.

Tracy also never lost her passion for CLE. She continued to encourage the sections to provide low-cost, high-quality CLE as a benefit to their members—and particularly preached the value of providing programming oriented towards ethics and professionalism. Just last year, Tracy twisted my arm to persuade my law firm to absorb the costs of my travel to San Antonio to make a CLE presentation to a group of military and veterans' lawyers both as a public service and a reminder of the State Bar's commitment to service members and veterans. Tracy's tireless work for veterans and access to justice helped to elevate the prestige of the profession in the eyes of the public.

Tracy's passion for her work was evident throughout her career at the State Bar. She was, to say the least, a "24/7" employee. It wasn't

November 21, 2023
Tracy Nuckols Nomination Letter

uncommon for any of us signing this letter to receive text messages from Tracy about section business late at night or on the weekends. She lived, ate, and slept State Bar sections. The result of that passion is that Tracy left the Sections Department in far better condition than she found it.

Finally, a more personal comment. During her time at the State Bar, Tracy mentored numerous lawyers in their efforts to become more involved in professional activities and leadership. Speaking just for myself, it was the greatest honor of my professional career to serve as chair of the State Bar Board of Directors. And that would not have happened without Tracy. She is the person who first put me on a CLE program more than 20 years ago. She guided me every step of the way in my State Bar activities. Years later, I found out (to my chagrin) that I'm not special—Tracy put similar efforts into helping numerous other lawyers in their pathways through State Bar leadership.

All of us signing this letter have benefited from our association with Tracy over the years. We cannot conceive of a more deserving candidate for the Merianne Gaston Award than Merianne's former co-worker and dear friend, Tracy Nuckols. We hope you will agree.

Respectfully,

/s/Chad Baruch
Dallas

/s/David Keltner
Fort Worth

/s/Hon. Xavier Rodriguez
San Antonio

/s/Jerry Bullard
Grapevine

/s/Alyson Outenreath
Lubbock

/s/Shelley Skeen
Dallas

/s/Christy Amuny
Beaumont

/s/Matthew Kolodoski
Dallas

/s/Melissa Matthews
Dallas

November 21, 2023
Tracy Nuckols Nomination Letter

/s/Emily Miller
Brownwood

/s/Dylan Drummond
Dallas

/s/Cade Browning
Abilene

/s/Tina Green
Dallas

/s/G. David Smith
Rockwall

/s/John Sloan
Longview

/s/Carlos Cardenas
El Paso