

# TEXAS BAR JOURNAL

October 2019 • Vol. 82, No. 9 • [texasbar.com/tbj](http://texasbar.com/tbj)



## CHILDREN / JUVENILES

- A JUDICIAL PERSPECTIVE ON DUAL STATUS YOUTH •
- TRANSITIONS FROM FOSTER CARE TO ADULthood •
- HIGH-QUALITY COURT-APPOINTED ATTORNEYS •



**EL PASO STANDS STRONG**

# EL PASO

## Standing strong in the face of tragedy.

BY AMY STARNES

“El Paso Strong” means different things to different people. The words are emblazoned on banners hoisted to the tops of area businesses and on T-shirts of individuals attending a CLE to learn how to recover from a community disaster many would call unthinkable just weeks before.

To the approximately 75 lawyers and judges who filled an El Paso courtroom on August 22, perhaps “El Paso Strong” means to be united, prepared, and ready to give back.

Less than three weeks after a gunman killed 22 people and wounded dozens more at a local Walmart, these lawyers and judges coordinated and attended a free CLE session to understand “How Do You Respond to a Community Disaster.” Hosted by the El Paso Bar Association with help from Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, or TRLA, the event taught attorneys how to answer and assess problems that may be posed to them by survivors of the mass shooting and their families.

“I was heartbroken, saddened, and just disturbed that someone would come to our community and do what they did,” Daniel Hernandez, president of the El Paso Bar Association, told the crowd. “We are El Pasoans, and we are strong. And this community has responded to those who are in need.”

Several experts from TRLA, the State Bar of Texas Family Law Section, the Office of the Texas Attorney General, the El Paso County Attorney’s Office, and Judge Patricia Chew, of El Paso’s Probate Court No. 1, walked attendees through the various types of legal issues that can affect survivors of disasters.

TRLA attorney Brittany Perrigue explained the phases of disaster recovery and informed attorneys that given the trauma associated with this type of tragedy, survivors actually may be hesitant to go to crowded places like a resource or recovery center to ask for help. This fact alone could delay cases and make it more challenging to ensure survivors receive the assistance they need.

In the first four weeks after a disaster, Perrigue said, survivors are addressing immediate needs such as safety and security, housing and employment issues, and perhaps public or financial assistance depending on the situation.

In the midterm—one to six months out—survivors may need help addressing health, life, or property insurance problems. If they have been unable to work for physical or mental health reasons, they could face employment concerns, Perrigue said. If they have been unable to pay bills as a result of any of these factors, there could be evictions, car repossessions, or debt collections.

Long-term legal issues—arising one to three years after the disaster—include heirship and probate matters, foreclosures, bankruptcy, title

clearance needs on property or vehicles, increasing debt, and performance-based employment issues stemming from trauma, Perrigue said.

Attorneys must remember the El Paso tragedy has created legal issues for individuals who were simply in the vicinity of the shooting but not directly attacked. For example, hundreds of cars in the Walmart parking lot were temporarily impounded. Many shoppers dropped whatever they were carrying—including purses that held cellphones, IDs, and even Lone Star Cards—and ran, said TRLA attorney Bernadette Segura. Those items were collected, cataloged, and taken as evidence. Recovering them is possible but still a process that some may struggle to navigate, she said.

TRLA attorney Soraya Yanar Hanshew said the agency is assisting many clients with unemployment cases. While Walmart has offered to move employees to other stores, some workers are unable to return to work due to trauma, the lack of transportation options available to them, or the needs of dependents. Employees stuck in situations like this over the long term could face shift reductions or layoffs, Hanshew said.

Nancy Gallego, executive director of the El Paso Bar Association, said the CLE event came together in a matter of days as the bar rallied speakers, assembled topics, and received MCLE accreditation for the event.

“I am extremely happy and touched that our legal community came together so fast in the face of this horrible shooting,” Gallego said. “Everyone who attended was very pleased and happy that the EPBA stepped up. They told me that they learned so much vital information that will help the victims and the community.” **TBJ**



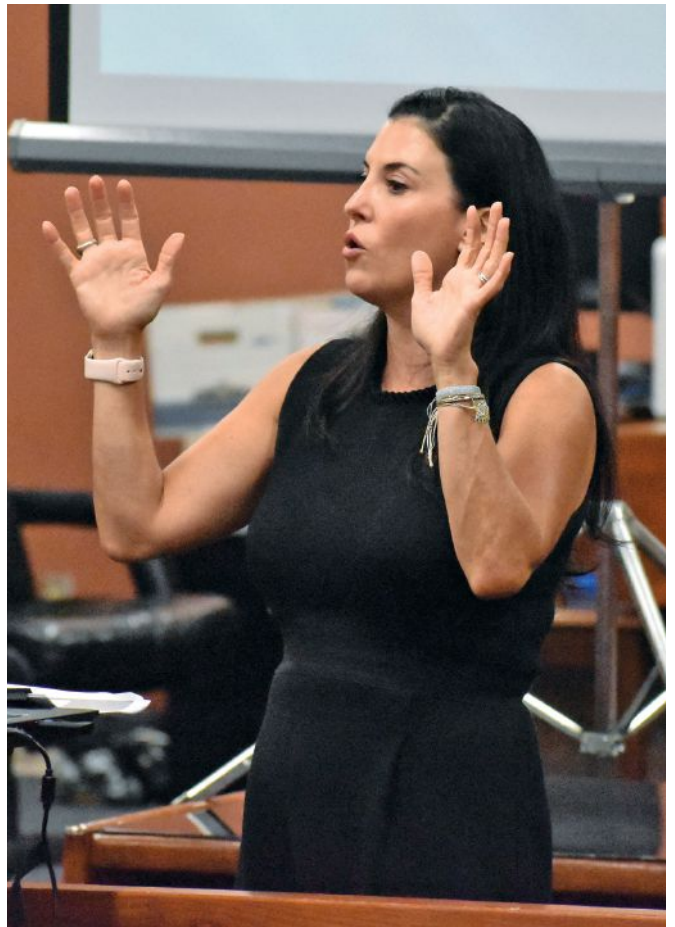
**AMY STARNES**

*is the public information director for the State Bar of Texas.*

In response to the tragic mass shooting in El Paso, the State Bar of Texas created a webpage—**[texasbar.com/elpasosupport](https://texasbar.com/elpasosupport)**—to communicate with members and the public on how best to receive help or offer it. The page includes information about CLE events, donations, and attorney wellness in light of the tragedy.

Leaders and legal professionals taught attendees at a free CLE session in El Paso how to respond to a community disaster in the wake of the mass shooting there just a few weeks earlier. Clockwise from top left: Judge Patricia Chew, of El Paso Probate Court No. 1, discussed probate disaster issues; Soraya Yanar Hanshew, of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, talked about employment disaster issues; Veronica Carbajal, of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, examined evictions and foreclosures disaster issues; and Daniel Hernandez, president of the El Paso Bar Association, provided an update on the bar’s response to the tragedy.





PHOTOS BY AMY STARNES