

FILED
SEP 11 2015
Clerk of the Courts
Rec'd By _____

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE

**IN RE: PETITION TO AMEND TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT RULE 9,
SECTION 5.4(c)**

No. ADM 2015-01135

**BOARD OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY'S REPLY TO COMMENT OF
THE TENNESSEE BAR ASSOCIATION**

The Board of Professional Responsibility of the Supreme Court of Tennessee (Board) makes the following reply to the Comment of the Tennessee Bar Association (TBA) regarding the Board's Petition to Amend Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 9 § 5.4(c):

First, the explicit language of Tenn. Sup. Ct. R.9 § 5.4 states, "An advisory ethics opinion may be issued by Disciplinary Counsel when there is readily available precedent." While Ethics Counsel responds to the majority of attorneys' requests for ethics opinions, all Disciplinary Counsel regularly if not daily respond to requests. Restricting disclosure of requests and responses from Disciplinary Counsel would impede the Board's service of providing ethics opinions. Second, to address the TBA's concerns about privilege, the Board proposes amending the proposed language of Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 9 § 5.4(c) as follows:

- 5.4(c) An advisory ethics opinion may be issued by Disciplinary Counsel ~~orally~~ when there is readily available precedent. The advisory opinion shall not be binding on the Board and shall offer no security to the person requesting it. All requests for advisory opinions, oral and written, and the Board's Responses shall be confidential and privileged and shall not be public records or open for public inspection, except as otherwise provided in Section 32 and subject to waiver by the requesting attorney.

Respectfully submitted,

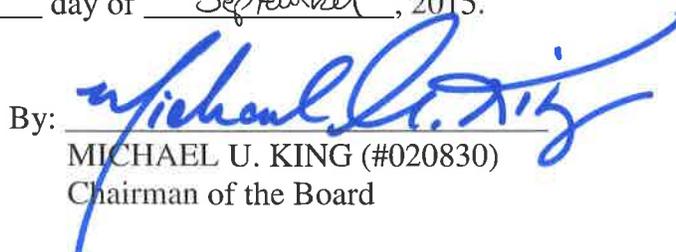

Michael King, Chair (BPR No. 020830)
Board of Professional Responsibility

King and Thompson, Attorneys at Law
12880 Paris Street
P.O. Box 667
Huntingdon, TN 38344-0667


Sandy Garrett, (BPR No. 013863)
Chief Disciplinary Counsel
Board of Professional Responsibility
10 Cadillac Drive, Suite 220
Brentwood, TN 37027
(615) 361-7500

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that the foregoing has been mailed to Allan F. Ramsaur, Esq., Executive Director, Tennessee Bar Association, 221 4th Avenue North, Suite 400, Nashville, Tennessee by U.S. mail, on this the 11 day of September, 2015.

By: 
MICHAEL U. KING (#020830)
Chairman of the Board

By: 
SANDY L. GARRETT (#013863)
Chief Disciplinary Counsel

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE,
AT NASHVILLE

FILED

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ADMITTED TO THE BAR
KNOXVILLE

IN RE: PETITION TO AMEND)
TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT) NO. ADM2015-01135
RULE 9, SECTION 5.4(c))

COMMENT OF THE KNOXVILLE BAR ASSOCIATION

The Knoxville Bar Association (the “KBA”), through its Professionalism Committee and Board of Governors, has carefully considered the Petition to Amend Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 9, Section 5.4(c).

In its review, the KBA sought the opinions of its members regarding the confidentiality of all written and oral advisory opinions from disciplinary counsel at the Board of Professional Responsibility. The Professionalism Committee of the KBA (the “Committee”), has a longstanding practice of evaluating proposed rule changes. Consistent with that practice, the Committee carefully considered these proposals.

After discussion, the Committee voted to recommend to the KBA Board of Governors, (the “Board”), that the Board adopt the recommendations of the Board of Professional Responsibility. The matter was thoroughly considered at the meeting of the Board on August 19, 2015, and the proposed amendment to Supreme Court Rule 9, Section 5.4(c) was approved as recommended.

Respectfully submitted this 24th day of August, 2015.

KNOXVILLE BAR ASSOCIATION



TASHA C. BLAKNEY, BPR #019971
President, Knoxville Bar Association

Dwight Aarons
President, National Bar Association,
William Henry Hastie Chapter
University of Tennessee College of Law
1505 Cumberland Avenue. Room 363
Knoxville, TN 37996-0681

Katharine Gardner
Chapter President
Federal Bar Association Chattanooga
103 Stratford Way
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2520

Bradford Box
President
TN Defense Lawyers Association
Rainey, Kizer, Reviere & Bell, PLC
209 East Main Street
Jackson, TN 38301

Jeff Kinsler
Dean
Belmont University College of Law
1900 Belmont Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37212

Melanie Gober
Executive Director
Lawyers Association for Women Marion
Griffin Chapter
P.O. Box 190583
Nashville, TN 37219

Barri Bernstein
Executive Director
Tennessee Bar Foundation
618 Church Street, Suite 120
Nashville, TN 37219

Ed Lancaster
Chair, TN Commission on CLE and
Specialization Chair
TFIC
P.O. Box 998
Columbia, TN 38402

Amanda Dunn
President
SETLAW
Luther Anderson PLLP
P.O. Box 151
Chattanooga, TN 37401-0151

Doug Blaze
Dean
UT College Of Law
1505 W. Cumberland Avenue, Room 278
Knoxville, TN 37996

Tiffany Johnson
President
Tennessee Alliance for Black Lawyers
QP Legal Research & Writing Services
1067 Fleece Place
Memphis, TN 38104-5620

Jamie Ballinger-Holden
President, E. TN Lawyers Assoc. for Women
Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell &
Berkowitz
265 Brookview Centre Way, Suite 600
Knoxville, TN 37919

Chris Guthrie
Dean
Vanderbilt University School of Law
131 21st Avenue South, Room 108
Nashville, TN 37203-1181

Jade Dodds
President
National Bar Assoc., S.L. Hutchins Chapter
Miller & Martin PLLC
832 Georgia Avenue, Suite 1000
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Peter Letsou
Dean
University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys
School of Law
1 North front Street
Memphis, TN 38103

Martin Holmes
President
Federal Bar Association Nashville Chapter
Dickinson Wright, PLLC
424 Church Street, Suite 1401
Nashville, TN 37219

Suanne Bone
Executive Director
TN Assoc. of Criminal Defense Lawyers
530 Church Street, # 300
Nashville, TN 37219

Imad Al-Deen Abdullah
President, National Bar Association
Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell &
Berkowitz
165 Madison Avenue, #2000
Memphis, TN 38103

Sandy Garrett
Chief Counsel
The Board of Professional Responsibility
10 Cadillac Drive, Suite 220
Brentwood, TN 37027-5078

Dawn Deaner
Chair
TN Lawyers Fund for Client Protection
Metropolitan Public Defender's Office
404 James Robertson Parkway, #2022
Nashville, TN 37219

Karol Lahrman
Executive Director
Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women
P.O. Box 331214
Nashville, TN 37203

Julian Bibb
President
TN Board of Law Examiners
Stites & Harbison, PLLC
401 Commerce Street, Suite 900
Nashville, TN 37219

Eric Hudson
President
Federal Bar Association Memphis Chapter
Butler Snow LLP
6075 Poplar Avenue, Suite 500
Memphis, TN 38119

Vinh Duong
President, Tennessee Asian Pacific
American Bar Association
Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis LLP
511 Union Street, Suite 2700
Nashville, TN 37219

Keating Lowery
President, Lawyers Association for Women
Marion Griffin Chapter
Lawrence & Russell
5178 Wheelis Drive
Memphis, TN 38117

Suzanne Keith
Executive Director
Tennessee Association for Justice
1903 Division Street
Nashville, TN 37203

Mark Dessauer
President, Federal Bar Association
Northeast Tennessee Chapter
Hunter, Smith & Davis, LLP
P.O. Box 3740
Kingsport, TN 37664

Syd Beckman
Lincoln Memorial University Duncan
School of Law
601 West Summit Hill Drive
Knoxville, TN 37902

Lela Hollabaugh
Chair, Board of Professional Responsibility
Bradley Arant
1600 Division Street, Suite 700
Nashville, TN 37203

Joanna Douglass
President
Lawyers Association for Women
Tennessee Department of Human Services
225 Martin Luther King Drive, #210
Jackson, TN 38301

John Manson
President, National Bar Association,
Napier-Looby Chapter
Special Master 8th Circuit Court
1 Public Square, 604 Metro Courthouse
Nashville, TN 37201

Judy McKissack
Executive Director
Tennessee Commission on Continuing
Legal Education
221 Fourth Avenue North, Suite 300
Nashville, TN 37219

Jeremy Ball
President
Jefferson County Bar Association
District Attorney Office
P.O. Box 690
Dandridge, TN 37725

Frances Riley
Immediate Past President
Association for Women Attorneys
US Bankruptcy Court
327 Central Cove
Memphis, TN 38111

William Cockett
President
Johnson County Bar Association
Smith & Cockett Attorneys
247 West Main Street
Mountain City, TN 37683-0108

Douglas Bates
President
Hickman County Bar Association
Bates & Bates
P.O. Box 1
Centerville, TN 37033

Lisa Perlen
Executive Director
Tennessee Board of Law Examiners
401 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37219

Curt Collins
President
Greene County Bar Association
C. Collins Law Firm
128 S. Main Street, Suite 102
Greeneville, TN 37743-4922

Bill Young
Administrative Director
Administrative Office of the Courts
511 Union Street, #600
Nashville, TN 37219

Mario Ramos
President, Tennessee Association of
Spanish Speaking Attorneys
Mario Ramos PLLC
611 Commerce Street, Suite 3119
Nashville, TN 37203

Neil Campbell
President
Williamson County Bar Association
Neil Campbell Attorney at Law
136 4th Avenue S.
Franklin, TN 37064-2622

Sherry Percival
President, National Bar Association,
Ballard Taylor Chapter
Percival Law Office, P.C.
219 N. Parkway, Suite I
Jackson, TN 38305-2717

Mark Blakley
President
Scott County Bar Association
Stansberry, Petroff, Marcum & Blakley PC
3 Courthouse Square
Huntsville, TN 37756-0240

William Stover
Immediate Past President
Tennessee Alliance for Black Lawyers
W. Stover, Attorney at Law
500 Church Street, Suite 450
Nashville, TN 37219-2370

Daryl Colson
President
Overton County Bar Association
Colson & Maxwell
808 North Church Street
Livingston, TN 38570-1134

Ben Boston
President
Lawrence County Bar Association
Boston, Holt, Sockwell & Durham PLLC
P.O. Box 357
Lawrenceburg, TN 38464

Cheryl Rice
President
Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women
Egerton, McAfee, Armistead & Davis, P C
900 S. Gay Street, Suite 1400RIV
Knoxville, TN 37902

Mary Morris
Vice President
Federal Bar Association Mid-South Chapter
Burch, Porter & Johnson, PLLC
130 North Court Avenue
Memphis, TN 38103

Heidi Barcus
Immediate Past President
Knoxville Bar Association
London & Amburn, P.c.
607 Market Street, Suite 900
Knoxville, TN 37902

Mike Spitzer
Chair
Tennessee Bar Foundation
The Spitzer Firm
19 Cedar Street
Hohenwald, TN 38462

Paige Collins
President
Hamblen County Bar Association
Terry, Terry and Stapleton Law Offices
P.O. Box 724
Morristown, TN 37815

Ann Pruitt
Executive Director
Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services
1220 Vintage Place
Nashville, TN 37215

Ted Burkhalter
President
Blount County Bar Association
Burkhalter & Associates, PC
605 Smithview Drive
Maryville, TN 37803

Colby Baddour
President, Giles County Bar Association
A. Colbrook Baddour, Attorney at Law
P.O. Box 296
Pulaski, TN 38478-0296

Jon Peeler
President
Tennessee Association for Justice
401 Church Street, L&C Tower, 29th Floor
Nashville, TN 37219

Kirk Caraway
Past President, Memphis Bar Association
Allen, Summers, Simpson, Lillie &
Gresham, PLLC
80 Monroe Avenue, Suite 650
Memphis, TN 38103-2466

Executive Director
Nashville Bar Association
150 4th Avenue N., Suite 1050
Nashville, TN 37219

Samuel Perkins
President, Tennessee Association of
Criminal Defense Lawyers
SL Perkins Law Group PLLC
156 Court Avenue
Memphis, TN 38103-2212

Allan Ramsaur
Executive Director
Tennessee Bar Association
Tennessee Bar Center, Suite 400
221 Fourth Ave., N
Nashville Tennessee 37219-2198

Mary Whitfield
President
Association for Women Attorneys
Shea Moskovitz & McGhee
530 Oak Court Drive, Suite 355
Memphis, TN 38117-3733

Bratten Cook
President
DeKalb County Bar Association
Bratten Hale Cook II
104 N. 3rd Street
Smithville, TN 37166

Chad Cox
President
Paris-Henry County Bar Association
Ainley, Hoover, Clark & Hoover
104 North Brewer Street
Paris, TN 38242-4006

Paul Hatcher
President-Elect
Chattanooga Bar Association
Duncan, Hatcher, Hixson & Fleenor PC
1418 McCallie Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37404

Joseph Ford
President
Franklin County Bar Association
McBee & Ford
17 S. College Street
Winchester, TN 37398

Katherine Kroeger
President, Anderson County Bar Assoc.
7th Judicial District Office of the Public
Defender
127 N. Main Street
Clinton, TN 37716-3607

Lucas Hobbs
President
Bristol Bar Association
Elliott Lawson Minor PC
110 Piedmont Avenue, Suite #300
Bristol, VA 24201

Jason Davis
President
Marshall County Bar Association
Davis Law Firm
113 W. Commerce Street
Lewisburg, TN 37091

William Lawson
President
Unicoi County Bar Association
William B. Lawson, Attorney At Law
112 Gay Street, Suite A
Erwin, TN 37650-0016

Charles Grant
President, Nashville Bar Association
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell &
Berkowitz PC
211 Commerce Street, Suite 800
Nashville, TN 37201-1817

Hilary Duke
President
Dickson County Bar Association
Reynolds, Potter, Ragan & Vandivort, PLC
210 East College Street
Dickson, TN 37055

Kevin Keeton
President
Hawkins County Bar Association
Law Office of James N. Point
115 E. Washington Street
Rogersville, TN 37857-3317

Matthew Willis
President
Dyer County Bar Association
Ashley Ashley & Arnold
P.O. Box H
Dyersburg, TN 38025

Jason Holly
President
Carter County Bar Association
Holly & Holly PLLC
415 Hudson Drive
Elizabethton, TN 37643-2881

Shawn Fry
President
Putnam County Bar Association
Qualls & Fry PLLC
165 E. Spring Street
Cookeville, TN 38501

Amber Lee
President
Washington County Bar Association
Lee Law Group, PLLC
300 E. Main Street, Suite 159
Johnson City, TN 37601

Nathan Hunt
President
Montgomery County Bar Association
Patton & Pittman
109 S. Third Street
Clarksville, TN 37040

Matthew Edwards
President
Cumberland County Bar Association
Law Office of Matthew Edwards
69 E. First Street, Suite 203
Crossville, TN 38555-4575

Terri Crider
President
Gibson County Bar Association
Flippin, Atkins & Crider PC
P.O. Box 160
Humboldt, TN 38343

James Haywood
President
Haywood County Bar Association
Haywood Law Office
50 Boyd Avenue
Brownsville, TN 38012-0438

Andrew Frazier
President
Benton County Bar Association
Whitworth Law Firm
P.O. Box 208
Camden, TN 38320

Edward Lanquist
President-Elect
Nashville Bar Association
Wadley & Patterson, PC
1600 Division Street, Suite 500
Nashville, TN 37203

William Douglas
President
Lauderdale County Bar Association
William Dan Douglas, Jr
109 N. Main Street
Ripley, TN 38063-0489

Jay Ingram
President
Sumner County Bar Association
Phillips & Ingram
117 E. Main Street
Gallatin, TN 37066

Kristin Green
President
Bedford County Bar Association
300 E. Lane Street
Shelbyville, TN 37162-0461

Creed Daniel
President
Grainger County Bar Association
Daniel & Daniel
115 Marshall Avenue
Rutledge, TN 37861-0006

Sarah Kennedy
President
McMinn-Meigs County Bar Association
Jerry N. Estes Law Offices, PLLC
296 W. Madison Avenue
Athens, TN 37303

Anne Fritz
Executive Director
Memphis Bar Association
145 Court Avenue, Suite 1
Memphis, TN 38103-2292

Michael Davis
President
Morgan County Bar Association
415 N. Kingston Street
Wartburg, TN 37887-0925

Lynda Hood
Executive Director
Chattanooga Bar Association
801 Broad Street
Suite 420, Pioneer Building
Chattanooga, TN 37402

James Gass
President
Sevier County Bar Association
Ogle, Gass & Richardson PC
P.O. Box 5365
Sevierville, TN 37864

William Locke
President
Warren County Bar Association
General Sessions Judge
Warren County Courthouse
McMinnville, TN 37111-0228

Mau Maddox
President
Carroll County Bar Association
Attorney at Law
P.O. Box 827
Huntingdon, TN 38344

Jarod Richert
President
Robertson County Bar Association
Richert & Dilliha PLLC
516 S. Main Street
Springfield, TN 37172

Lynn Newcomb
President
Cheatham County Bar Association
Balthrop, Perry, Noe, Newcomb & Morgan
102 Frey Street
Ashland City, TN 37015

Linda Warren Seely
Immediate Past President
Memphis Bar Association
Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.
116 Tuckahoe Road
Jackson, TN 38305

Amber Shaw
President
Tipton County Bar Association
Law Office of J. Houston Gordon
114 W. Liberty Avenue, Suite 300
Covington, TN 38019

Robin Miller
Immediate Past President
Chattanooga Bar Association
Spears Moore Rebman & Williams PC
P.O. Box 1749
Chattanooga, TN 37401

Matt West
Jackson-Madison-Henderson County
Bar Association
Teel & Maroney PLC
425 E. Baltimore Street
Jackson, TN 38301

Jennifer Porth
President
Fifteenth Judicial District Bar Association
J. Stephen Brown PC
224 W. Gay Street
Lebanon, TN 37088-0792

Darren Mitchell
President
Campbell County Bar Association
P.O. Box 375
Jacksboro, TN 37757

Harriet Thompson
President
Hardeman County Bar Association
P.O. Box 600
Bolivar, TN 38008

Timothy Mickel
President
Chattanooga Bar Association
Evans Harrison Hackett PLLC
835 Georgia Avenue, Suite 800
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Tom Sherrard
Immediate Past President
Nashville Bar Association
Sherrard & Roe PLC
150 3rd Avenue S. #1100
Nashville, TN 37201-2011

Thomas Parkerson
Rutherford-Cannon County Bar Association
Parkerson Santel, PLLC
121 E. Main Street
Murfreesboro, TN 37130

Derreck Whitson
President
Cocke County Bar
P.O. Box 1230
Newport, TN 37822

David Stanifer
President
Claiborne County Bar Association
Stanifer & Stanifer
P.O. Box 217
Tazewell, TN 37879

David Myers
President
Union County Bar Association
105 Monroe Street
Maynardville, TN 37807-0013

Ian McCabe
President
Loudon County Bar Association
329 Ellis Avenue
Maryville, TN 37804-5840

Randall Self
President
Lincoln County Bar Association
Randall E. Self, Attorney At Law
131 A Market Street E.
Fayetteville, TN 37334-0501

Ashley Ownby
President
Bradley County Bar Association
Ashley L. Ownby Attorney at Law
P.O. Box 176
Cleveland, TN 37364-0176

Tyler Weiss
President
Monroe County Bar Association
Worthington & Weiss, P.C.
409 College Street N., Street 1
Madisonville, TN 37354-3103

Denny Mitchell
President
White County Bar Association
Mitchell Law Office
112 South Main Street
Sparta, TN 38583

James Taylor
President
Rhea County Bar Association
1374 Railroad Street, Suite 400
Dayton, TN 37321-2211

Beverly Rayburn
President
Maury County Bar Association
14 Public Square
Columbia, TN 38401

Lee McVey
President
Kingsport Bar Association
The Mcvey Law Firm
108 E. Main Street, Suite 208
Kingsport, TN 37660

Shawn Trail
President
Coffee County Bar Association
Shawn C. Trail, Attorney
117 S. Spring Street
Manchester, TN 37355

Tommy Parker
President, Memphis Bar Association
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell &
Berkowitz PC
165 Madison Avenue, Suite 2000
Memphis, TN 38103

John Miles
President
Obion County Bar Association
John Miles, Atty.
P.O. Box 8
Union City, TN 38281

Jim Smith
President
Roane County Bar Association
305 W. Rockwood Street
Rockwood, TN 37854

Beau Pemberton
President
Weakley County Bar Association
Law Office Of James H. Bradberry
109 North Poplar Street
Dresden, TN 38225-0789

John Lee Williams
President
Humphreys County Bar Association
Porch Peeler Williams Thomason
102 S. Court Square
Waverly, TN 37185-2113

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE**

FILED
2015 AUG 17 PM 12:18

**IN RE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT
RULE 9, SECTION 5.4(c)**

APPELLATE COURT CLERK

No ADM2015-01135

COMMENT OF THE TENNESSEE BAR ASSOCIATION

The Tennessee Bar Association (“TBA”), acting through its President, Bill Harbison; Chair, TBA Standing Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility, Brian S. Faughnan; General Counsel, Paul Ney; and Executive Director, Allan F. Ramsaur, in response to the June 23, 2015 Order of this Court soliciting public comment submits the following comment on the petition filed in this matter by the Board of Professional Responsibility (“BPR”) on June 18, 2015.

The BPR petition cites a concern that there may not be sufficient confidentiality protections under the existing rules for attorneys who request oral or written advisory ethics opinions. The BPR notes that Disciplinary Counsel responded to almost 2,300 such requests during fiscal 2013-2014. The BPR suggests that certain revisions are necessary to assure confidentiality of such interactions, which will aid lawyers in complying with Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 8, RPC 1.6(b)(4) that permits attorneys to disclose confidential information about their representation of their clients to seek advice about their own compliance with their ethical duties.

The TBA considers the informal ethics advice that Disciplinary Counsel provides to Tennessee attorneys through its designated Ethics Officer to be a very valuable service. The TBA agrees that an interpretation of the Court’s rules that has a chilling effect on the willingness

of Tennessee attorneys to seek out such guidance would be bad for the profession and the public. Given that the Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 9, § 5.4(c) already explicitly provides that any such “advisory opinion shall not be binding on the Board and shall offer no security to the person requesting it,” it seems hard to believe that so many inquiries would be received annually if Tennessee lawyers did not believe that their inquiries would at least be maintained as confidential.

The TBA respectfully suggests that better, clearer language could be used to revise the language in Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 9, § 5.4(c) to address this concern effectively so that the rule would still permit the lawyer receiving the ethics advice to authorize its disclosure or dissemination. The TBA submits that the reference to Section 32 of Rule 9 alone does not address the issue in a manner that would permit, for example, the lawyer and Disciplinary Counsel to agree to make an informal ethics opinion publicly available as guidance to the rest of the bar, as has occurred in the past. Nor does reference to Tenn. Sup Ct. R. 9, § 32 sufficiently protect the inquiring attorney from having Disciplinary Counsel use details learned during the consultation against the lawyer in a future disciplinary proceeding. The TBA also believes that to avoid any confusion about the meaning of the term “privileged” in this context that the section should make clear that, while the communications are treated as privileged and confidential, no attorney-client relationship between Disciplinary Counsel and the requesting lawyer is actually created.

The TBA submits that revising existing Tenn. Sup Ct. R. 9, § 5.4(c) in the following manner would accomplish the goals articulated in the BPR’s petition by providing sufficient confidential treatment of inquiries and properly address the issue raised in this Comment as well:

5.4(c) An advisory ethics opinion may be issued by Disciplinary Counsel orally when there is readily available precedent. The advisory opinion shall not be binding on the Board and shall offer no security to the person requesting it. A lawyer shall have a privilege as to any request for advisory opinion, oral or

written, and the lawyer's request and the Board's response shall be confidential and shall not be public records or open for public inspection. Based on this privilege, no such requests or responses shall be shared with disciplinary counsel for the Board or publicly-disclosed absent the lawyer's permission. No attorney-client relationship shall be created by a lawyer making or receiving a response under this subsection.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: /s/ by permission 

WILLIAM (BILL) L. HARBISON (07012)
President, Tennessee Bar Association
Sherrard & Roe, PLC
150 Third Avenue, South
Suite 1100
Nashville, Tennessee 37201
(615) 742-4200

By: /s/ by permission 

BRIAN S. FAUGHNAN (19379)
Chair, Tennessee Bar Association
Standing Committee on Ethics & Professional
Responsibility
LEWIS THOMASON
40 S. Main Street, 29th Floor
Memphis, TN 38103
(901) 577-6139

By: /s/ by permission 

PAUL NEY (11625)
General Counsel,
Tennessee Bar Association
Patterson Intellectual Property Law, P.C.
1600 Division Street, Ste. 500
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 242-2400

By:



ALLAN F. RAMSAUR (05764)
Executive Director,
Tennessee Bar Association
Tennessee Bar Center
221 Fourth Avenue North, Suite 400
Nashville, Tennessee 37219-2198
(615) 383-7421

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned certifies that a true and correct copy of the foregoing has been served upon the individuals and organizations identified in Exhibit "A" by regular U.S. Mail, postage prepaid within seven (7) days of filing with the Court.



Allan F. Ramsaur

"Exhibit A"

Dwight Aarons
President, National Bar Association,
William Henry Hastie Chapter
University of Tennessee College of Law
1505 Cumberland Avenue, Room 363
Knoxville, TN 37996-0681

Laurel Ball
President, East Tennessee Lawyers
Association for Women
Leitner, Williams, Dooley & Napolitan
900 S. Gay St., # 1800 Riverview Tower
Knoxville, TN 37902

Syd Beckman
Dean
Lincoln Memorial University Duncan
School of Law
601 West Summit Hill Drive
Knoxville, TN 37902

Mark Blakley
President, Scott County Bar Association
Stansberry, Petroff, Marcum & Blakley PC
2301 Jacksboro Pike, Suite 4C
La Follette, TN 37766-2959

Ben Boston
President, Lawrence County Bar
Association
Boston, Holt, Sockwell & Durham PLLC
P.O. Box 357
Lawrenceburg, TN 38464

David Byrd
President, Hamblen County Bar
Association
Capps, Cantwell, Capps & Byrd
P.O. Box 1897
Morristown, TN 37816-1897

William Cockett
Johnson County Bar Association President
Smith & Cockett Attorneys
247 West Main Street, P.O. Box 108
Mountain City, TN 37683-0108

Bratten Cook
President, DeKalb County Bar Association
Bratten Hale Cook II
104 N. 3rd Street
Smithville, TN 37166

Creed Daniel
President, Grainger County Bar Association
Daniel & Daniel
115 Marshall Avenue
P.O. Box 6
Rutledge, TN 37861-0006

Jason Davis
President, Marshall County Bar Association
Davis Law Firm
113 W. Commerce Street
Lewisburg, TN 37091

Colby Baddour
President, Giles County Bar Association
A. Colbrook Baddour, Attorney at Law
P.O. Box 296
Pulaski, TN 38478-0296

Beth Bates
President, Tennessee Lawyers Association
for Women
West Tennessee Legal Services
P.O. Box 2066
Jackson, TN 38302

Barri Bernstein
Executive Director
Tennessee Bar Foundation
618 Church Street, Suite 120
Nashville, TN 37219

Tasha Blakney
President, Knoxville Bar Association
Eldridge & Blakney PC
P.O. Box 398
Knoxville, TN 37901

Charles Brasfield
President, Tipton County Bar Association
Brasfield & Brasfield
114 West Liberty Avenue, P.O. Box 846
Covington, TN 38019-0765

Karol Lahman
Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women
P.O. Box 331214
Nashville, TN 37203

Curt Collins
President, Greene County Bar Association
C. Collins Law Firm
128 S. Main Street, Suite 102
Greeneville, TN 37743-4922

Chad Cox
President, Paris-Henry County Bar
Association
Clark and Cox PLLC
104 North Brewer Street
Paris, TN 38242-4006

Wade Davies
Immediate Past President
Knoxville Bar Association
Ritchie, Dillard, Davies & Johnson PC
P.O. Box 1126
Knoxville, TN 37901

Dawn Deaner
Tennessee Lawyers Fund for Client
Protection Chair
Metropolitan Public Defender's Office
404 James Robertson Parkway, #2022
Nashville, TN 37219

Jeremy Ball
President, Jefferson County Bar
Association
District Attorney Office
P.O. Box 690
Dandridge, TN 37725

Douglas Bates
President, Hickman County Bar
Association
Bates & Bates
P.O. Box 1
Centerville, TN 37033

Julian Bibb
President
Tennessee Board of Law Examiners
Stites & Harbison, PLLC
401 Commerce Street, Suite 900
Nashville, TN 37219

Suanne Bone
Executive Director
Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense
Lawyers
530 Church Street, # 300
Nashville, TN 37219

Ted Burkhalter
President, Blount County Bar Association
Burkhalter & Associates, PC
605 Smithview Drive
P.O. Box 5255
Maryville, TN 37802-5255

Kirk Caraway
Past President, Memphis Bar Association
Allen, Summers, Simpson, Lillie &
Gresham, PLLC
80 Monroe Avenue, Suite 650
Memphis, TN 38103-2466

Daryl Colson
President, Overton County Bar Association
Colson & Maxwell
808 North Church Street
Livingston, TN 38570-1134

Terri Crider
President, Gibson County Bar Association
Flippin, Atkins & Crider PC
P.O. Box 160
Humboldt, TN 38343

Michael Davis
President
Morgan County Bar Association
216 N. Kingston Street
P.O. Box 925
Wartburg, TN 37887-0925

Jade Dodds
Chapter President, National Bar
Association, S.L. Hutchins Chapter
Life Care Centers of America
3001 Keith Street, NW, 3480
Cleveland, TN 37320-3480

Dan Douglas
President, Lauderdale County Bar
Association
P.O. Box 489
Ripley, TN 38063-0489

Vinh Duong
President, Tennessee Asian Pacific
American Bar Association
Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis LLP
511 Union Street, #2700
Nashville, TN 37210

Joseph Ford
President, Franklin County Bar Association
McBee & Ford
17 S. College Street
Winchester, TN 37398

Anne Fritz
Executive Director
Memphis Bar Association
145 Court Avenue, Suite 1
Memphis, TN 38103-2292

Sandy Garrett
Chief Counsel
The Board of Professional Responsibility
10 Cadillac Drive, Suite 220
Brentwood, TN 37027-5078

Alberto Gonzales
Dean
Belmont University School of Law
1900 Belmont Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37212

Chris Guthrie
Dean
Vanderbilt University School of Law
131 21st Ave. South, Room 108
Nashville, TN 37203-1181

Mary Helms, President
NE Tenn. Chapter Federal Bar Assoc.
Wimberly, Lawson, Wright, Daves & Jones
P.O. Box 1834
Morristown, TN 37816

Lynda Hood
Executive Director
Chattanooga Bar Association
801 Broad Street, Suite 420
Pioneer Building
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Tiffany Johnson
President, Tennessee Alliance for Black
Lawyers
QP Legal Research & Writing Services
1067 Fleece Place
Memphis, TN 38104-5620

Joanna Douglass
President, Lawyers Association for Women
Tennessee Department of Human Services
225 Martin Luther King Dr., #210
Jackson, TN 38301

Matthew Edwards
President, Cumberland County Bar
Association
Law Office of Matthew Edwards
69 E. First Street, Suite 203
Crossville, TN 38555-4575

Andrew Frazier
President, Benton County Bar Association
Whitworth Law Firm
P.O. Box 208
Camden, TN 38320

Shawn Fry
President, Putnam County Bar Association
Qualls & Fry PLLC
165 E. Spring Street
Cookeville, TN 38501

James Gass
President, Sevier County Bar Association
Ogle, Gass & Richardson PC
P.O. Box 5365
Sevierville, TN 37864

Charles Grant
Immediate Past President, Nash. Bar Assoc.
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell &
Berkowitz PC
211 Commerce Street, Suite 800
Nashville, TN 37201-1817

Paul Hatcher
President, Chattanooga Bar Association
Duncan, Hatcher, Hixson & Fleenor PC
1418 McCallie Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37404

Lela Hollabaugh
Board of Professional Responsibility Chair
Bradley Arant
1600 Division Street, Suite 700
Nashville, TN 37203

Nathan Hunt
President
Montgomery County Bar Association
Patton & Pittman
109 S. Third Street
Clarksville, TN 37040

Susan Jones
Napier-Looby Chapter President
Metropolitan Department Of Law
108 Metro Court House
P.O. Box 196300
Nashville, TN 37219-6300

Hilary Duke
President, Dickson County Bar Association
Reynolds, Potter, Ragan & Vandivort, PLC
210 East College Street
Dickson, TN 37055

Amber Floyd
President, National Bar Association,
Ben Jones Chapter
Wyatt, Tarrant & Combs LLP
1715 Aaron Brenner Drive, Suite 800
Memphis, TN 38120

Jennifer Free
Jackson-Madison-Henderson County Bar
Association
Byrd & Byrd PLLC
116 N. Church St., 4th Fl., P.O. Box 2764
Jackson, TN 38302-2764

Jonathan Garner
President, Robertson County Bar
Association
Walker & Garner
122 6th Avenue, W.
Springfield, TN 37172

Melanie Gober
Executive Director
Lawyers Association for Women Marion
Griffin Chapter
P.O. Box 190583
Nashville, TN 37219

Kristin Green
President, Bedford County Bar Association
300 E. Lane Street
P.O. Box 461
Shelbyville, TN 37162-0461

James Haywood
President, Haywood County Bar
Association
Haywood Law, PLLC
50 Boyd Avenue, P.O. Box 438
Brownsville, TN 38012-0438

Martin Holmes
Federal Bar Association
Nashville Chapter President
Dickinson Wright, PLLC
424 Church Street, Suite 1401
Nashville, TN 37219

Bill Koch
Dean, Nashville School of Law
4013 Armory Oaks Drive
Nashville, TN 37204-4577

Kevin Keeton
President, Hawkins County Bar Association
Point & Keeton, PC
115 E. Washington Street
Rogersville, TN 37857-3317

Suzanne Keith
Executive Director
Tennessee Association for Justice
1903 Division Street
Nashville, TN 37203

Katherine Kroeger
President, Anderson County Bar
Association
7th Jud. Dist. Office of the Public Defender
127 N. Main Street
Clinton, TN 37716-3607

William Lawson
President, Unicoi County Bar Association
112 Gay Street, Suite A
P.O. Box 16
Erwin, TN 37650-0016

Keating Lowery
President, Lawyers Association for Women
Lawrence & Russell
5178 Wheelis Drive
Memphis, TN 38117

Matt Maddox
President, Carroll County Bar Association
Attorney at Law
P.O. Box 827
Huntingdon, TN 38344

Lee McVey
President, Kingsport Bar Association
The Mcvey Law Firm
108 E. Main St., Suite 208
Kingsport, TN 37660

John Miles
President, Obion County Bar Association
P.O. Box 8
Union City, TN 38281

Mary Morris
Federal Bar Association,
Memphis/Mid-South Chapter President
Burch, Porter & Johnson, PLLC
130 North Court Avenue
Memphis, TN 38103

Ashley Ownby
President, Bradley County Bar Association
P.O. Box 176
Cleveland, TN 37364-0176

Beau Pemberton
President, Weakley County Bar Association
Law Office Of James H. Bradberry
109 North Poplar Street
P.O. Box 789
Dresden, TN 38225-0789

Sarah Kennedy
President, McMinn-Meigs County Bar
Association
Jerry N. Estes Law Offices, PLLC
296 W. Madison Avenue
Athens, TN 37303

Ed Lancaster
Tennessee CLE Commission Chair
TFIC
P.O. Box 998
Columbia, TN 38402

Peter Letsou
Dean
University of Memphis Cecil C.
Humphreys School of Law
1 North Front Street
Memphis, TN 38103

Trevor Lynch
Rutherford-Cannon County Bar
Association
320 W. Main Street, Suite 100
Woodbury, TN 37190

Ian McCabe
President, Loudon County Bar Association
Law Office of Ian McCabe
200 Prosperity Drive, Suite 113
Knoxville, TN 37923

Brandon Meredith
President, Sumner County Bar Association
Phillips & Ingrum
117 E. Main Street
Gallatin, TN 37066

Denny Mitchell
President, White County Bar Association
Mitchell Law Office
112 South Main Street
Sparta, TN 38583

David Myers
President, Union County Bar Association
105 Monroe Street
P.O. Box 13
Maynardville, TN 37807-0013

Tommy Parker
President, Memphis Bar Association
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell &
Berkowitz PC
165 Madison Avenue, Suite 2000
Memphis, TN 38103

Creed McGinley
Tennessee Bar Foundation Chair
P.O. Box 548
Savannah, TN 38372

Wayne Kramer
President-Elect, Knoxville Bar Association
Kramer Rayson LLP
P.O. Box 629
Knoxville, TN 37901

Edward Lanquist
President, Nashville Bar Association
Patterson PC
1600 Division St., Suite 500
Nashville, TN 37203

William Locke
President, Warren County Bar Association
General Sessions Judge
Warren County Courthouse
P.O. Box 228
Mcminnville, TN 37111-0228

Monica Mackie
Executive Director
Nashville Bar Association
150 4th Avenue N., Suite 1050
Nashville, TN 37219

Judy McKissack
Director
Tennessee Commission on Continuing
Legal Education
221 Fourth Avenue North, Suite 300
Nashville, TN 37219

Donna Mikel
Federal Bar Association
Chattanooga Chapter President
Burnette, Dobson & Pinchak
713 Cherry Street
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Darren Mitchell
President, Campbell County Bar
Association
P.O. Box 375
Jacksboro, TN 37757

Lynn Newcomb
President, Cheatham County Bar
Association
Balthrop, Perry, Noe, Newcomb & Morgan
102 Frey Street
Ashland City, TN 37015

Shauna Billingsley
President, Williamson County Bar Assoc.
City of Franklin, Law Department
109 3rd Avenue South
Franklin, TN 37065

Samuel Perkins
President, Tennessee Association of
Criminal Defense Lawyers
Perkins, Jones, & Associates
80 Monroe, Suite 450
Memphis, TN 38103-2520

Lisa Perlen
Executive Director
Tennessee Board of Law Examiners
401 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37219

Mario Ramos
President, Tennessee Association of
Spanish Speaking Attorneys
Mario Ramos PLLC
611 Commerce Street, Suite 3119
Nashville, TN 37203

Sunny Sandos
President, Washington County Bar Assoc.
West & Rose
537 East Center Street
P.O. Box 1404
Kingsport, TN 37660-4869

Jim Smith
President, Roane County Bar Association
305 W. Rockwood Street
Rockwood, TN 37854

Joycelyn Stevenson
President-Elect, Nashville Bar Association
Littler Mendelson PC
333 Commerce Street, #1450
Nashville, TN 37201

Andrew Taylor
President, Carter County Bar Association
211 South Main Street
Elizabethton, TN 37643-4518

Robert Thomas
National Bar Association,
Ballard Taylor Chapter President
Weinman & Associates
112 S. Liberty St., P.O. Box 266
Jackson, TN 38302-0266

James Tucker
President, Tennessee Defense Lawyers
Association
Manier & Herod PC
150 4th Avenue N., Suite 2200
Nashville, TN 37219

Derreck Whitson
President, Cocke County Bar Association
P.O. Box 1230
Newport, TN 37822

Marsha Wilson
Executive Director
Knoxville Bar Association
P.O. Box 2027
Knoxville, TN 37901

Jennifer Porth
President, 15th Judicial District Bar Assoc.
J. Stephen Brown PC
224 W. Gay Street
P.O. Box 792
Lebanon, TN 37088-0792

Beverly Rayburn
President, Maury County Bar Association
14 Public Square
Columbia, TN 38401

Randall Self
President, Lincoln County Bar Association
Randall E. Self, Attorney At Law
131A Market Street E.
P.O. Box 501
Fayetteville, TN 37334-0501

Abby Sparks
President, Lawyers Association for Women
Marion Griffin Chapter
State of Tennessee, Department of Revenue
500 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37242-0001

William Stover
Immediate Past President,
Tennessee Alliance for Black Lawyers
500 Church Street, Suite 450
Nashville, TN 37219-2370

Deborah Taylor Tate
Administrative Director
Administrative Offices of the Courts
201 Fourth Avenue North, Suite 1900
Nashville, TN 37219

Harriet Thompson
President, Hardeman County Bar
Association
P.O. Box 600
Bolivar, TN 38008

Tyler Weiss
President, Monroe County Bar Association
Worthington & Weiss, P.C.
409 College Street N., Suite 1
Madisonville, TN 37354-3103

John Lee Williams
President, Humphreys County Bar
Association
Porch Peeler Williams Thomason
102 S. Court Square
Waverly, TN 37185-2113

Melanie Wilson
Dean
UT College Of Law
1505 W. Cumberland Avenue, Room 278
Knoxville, TN 37996

Ann Pruitt
Executive Director
Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services
1220 Vintage Place
Nashville, TN 37215

Kathy Rowell
SETLAW President
821 Houston Street, Suite 104
Chattanooga, TN 37403

Christie Sell
President-Elect, Chattanooga Bar Assoc.
Hamilton County
General Session Court Judges
600 Market Street, 203 Courts Building
Chattanooga, TN 37402

David Stanifer
President, Claiborne County Bar
Association
Stanifer & Stanifer
P.O. Box 217
Tazewell, TN 37879

Stephanie Stuart
President, Bristol Bar Association
1990 Highway 394, Suite C
Blountville, TN 37617

James Taylor
President, Rhea County Bar Association
1374 Railroad Street, Suite 400
Dayton, TN 37321-2211

Carla Fenswick
President, Tennessee Stonewall Bar Assoc.
Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis, LLP
P.O. Box 198966
Nashville, TN 37219

Eric Buchanan
President, Tennessee Assoc. for Justice
P.O. Box 11208
Chattanooga, TN 37401

Matthew Willis
President, Dyer County Bar Association
Ashley Ashley & Arnold
P.O. Box H
Dyersburg, TN 38025

The Huskey Firm
Attorneys at Law

ROBERT L. HUSKEY



JASON L. HUSKEY

thehuskeyfirm@att.net

June 26, 2015

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2015 JUN 29 PM 1:53
APPELLATE COURT CLERK
NASHVILLE
514 HILLSBORO BOULEVARD
MANCHESTER, TENNESSEE 37355
TELEPHONE: (931) 728-1800
FACSIMILE: (931) 728-1801

Honorable James M. Hivner, Clerk
RE: Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 9
Tennessee Appellate Courts
100 Supreme Court Building
401 7th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37219-1407

ADM 2015-01135

RE: Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 9

Dear Mr. Hivner,

I have reviewed the proposed amendment to Rule 9 adding the provision of confidentiality to advisory opinions obtained by attorneys. In my personal and professional opinion the amendment is a good one to be made. As the Board of Professional Responsibility has suggested, the failure to add confidentiality to those communications chills the right of the attorney to utilize that assistance. The proposal is good and should be approved.

Thank you.

Yours truly,



Robert L. Huskey
BPR # 3504

RLH/fdt