m2013-01612-SC-RL1-RL

Law Office of
JOE G. RILEY
115 Lake Street
P.O. Box 40
Ridgely, TN 38080

Rule 31 Listed General Civil Mediator
E-Mail: jriley@ecsis.net

Phone: (731) 264-5671
Fax: (731) 264-9433

July 26, 2011

Michael W. Catalano, Clerk
Re: Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 31
100 Supreme Court Building
401 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37219-1407

RE: Proposed Amendments to Rule 31

Your Honors:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon the Alternative Dispute Resolution Commission's proposed amendments. My only comment concerns Section 18(b). As a condition of continued listing as a Rule 31 mediator, the proposed rule provides as follows:

> "The Rule 31 Mediator must not be the subject of three or more open complaints made to the Board or Agency charged with hearing complaints about the applicant's professional conduct. If there are three or more open complaints with the relevant Board or Agency, the Mediator will be put on the inactive list by the ADRC until the applicant has advised the ADRC that three or more open complaints no longer exist."

In my view, the problem is that there is no requirement that such complaints have any merit. The deprivation is simply based upon complaints pending. It would appear to be unfair to punish a mediator because three people have filed, and have pending, what may well be meritless or even frivolous complaints. We cannot assume that meritless complaints will be immediately dismissed upon their filing by the disciplinary authority. Many complaints against attorneys are found to be without merit after an investigation. I assume the proposed rule would mean three disgruntled litigants in the same lawsuit could file separate disciplinary complaints against the opposing attorney at or about the same time, resulting in non-renewal of that attorney's listing even though the complaints are subsequently found to be without merit by the BPR.

I am sure the ACRC has reasons for its proposal, but the present proposal appears to deprive a mediator of the listing merely because of the number of complaints, which may or may not have merit, that may be pending at the time of renewal.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely yours,

Joe G. Riley

M2013-01612-SC-RL1-RL

Knoxville Bar Association

Knoxville Bar Association
505 Main Street, Suite 50
P.O. Box 2027
Knoxville, TN 37901-2027
PH: (865) 522-6522
FAX: (865) 523-5662
www.knoxbar.org

October 31, 2013

VIA EMAIL
AND UNITED STATES MAIL

Mr. Michael W. Catalano, Clerk
Tennessee Appellate Courts
100 Supreme Court Building
401 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37219-1407

Re: Comment of the Knoxville Bar Association Regarding the Proposed Amendments to Rule 31

Dear Mr. Catalano:

Pursuant to the Tennessee Supreme Court's order filed July 22, 2013, soliciting comments on proposed amendments to Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 31, the Knoxville Bar Association has carefully considered the proposed amendments and respectfully submits the following comments.

The KBA, through its Professionalism Committee, studied the proposed amendments and felt that only two of the proposed amendments required comment or discussion. The particular sections are Section 10, Paragraph (f) and Section 18, Paragraph (b).

Considering Section 10(f), it is the KBA's position that the Court should adopt the proposed amendment that a "Rule 31 Neutral shall not be called as a witness to enforce the terms of the resulting agreement." Some initial concerns were raised that the mediator is the only neutral actor able to inform a Court as to the ability of the parties to enter into a mediated agreement. However, there was unanimous agreement that absolute immunity from being called as a witness would be preferred and would better enable Rule 31 Mediators to carry out one's duties. It was discussed that the Court may consider adding an additional, separate paragraph co-opting Federal language, such as found in Local Rule 16.4:

> The Mediation Conference of all proceedings relating thereto, including statements made by any party, attorney, or other

participant, are confidential and are inadmissible to the same extent as discussions of comprise and settlement are inadmissible under Federal Rules and Evidence 408.

Lastly, as to Section 18 (b), it is KBA's recommendation that the Supreme Court not adopt the language as proposed and further study the issue. The KBA shares the Supreme Court's desire to ensure the quality of Rule 31 Mediators, but the KBA has doubts that the proposed language will achieve the desired results. One issue identified is that the Rule 31 Mediators are not only attorneys, but come from many allied professions and further information would be necessary to determine the different processes existing for the making of and processing of complaints to the relevant boards or agencies for those allied professions. Additionally, there is no requirement that the three or more open complaints be valid or meritorious. The proposed language seems to place more value on the existence of complaints themselves rather than on the merits of the complaints. The proposed language could bar quality mediators from the active list due to three frivolous open complaints where a suspect Rule 31 Mediator could remain on the active list because several valid complaints have now been closed. The proposed language would allow for unscrupulous parties to detrimentally affect the practice of a Rule 31 Mediator by simply having numbers of anonymous complaints made to the board. Additionally, the KBA has reviewed the July 26, 2011 letter from Joe G. Riley, Esq. to Michael W. Catalano, Clerk regarding the proposed amendments to Section 18(b) and agree with his concerns.

As always, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on proposed rules promulgated by the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Sincerely,

Heidi A. Barcus

Heidi A. Barcus, President
Knoxville Bar Association

TENNESSEE BAR
ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENT
Cindy Wyrick
P.O. Box 5365
Sevierville, Tennessee 37862
(865) 453-2866
FAX (865) 429-1540
Email: crwyrick@ogrlawfirm.com

PRESIDENT-ELECT
Jonathan Steen
464 North Parkway, Suite A
Jackson, Tennessee 38305
(731) 660-2332
FAX (731) 664-1109
Email: jsteen@rsslawfirm.com

VICE PRESIDENT
Bill Harbison
150 3rd Avenue South
Suite 1100
Nashville, Tennessee 37201
(615) 742-4200
FAX (615) 742-4539
Email: bharbison@sherrardroe.com

TREASURER
Sherie Edwards
P.O. Box 1065
Brentwood, Tennessee 37024
(615) 846-8205
FAX (615) 846-6070
Email: sheriee@svmic.com

SECRETARY
Jason Pannu
P.O. Box 198615
Nashville, Tennessee 37219-8615
(615)259-1366
Fax: (615)259-1389
Email: jpannu@lewisking.com

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Jacqueline Dixon

BOARD OF GOVERNORS
Dan Berexa, Nashville
Tasha Blakney, Knoxville
The Honorable Jerri Bryant, Athens
Carl Carter, Memphis
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Campbell Smoot, Tullahoma
Charles Trotter, Huntingdon
Chris Varner, Chattanooga
Stacie Winkler, Memphis
Randall York, Cookeville

GENERAL COUNSEL
Paul Ney, Nashville

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Allan F. Ramsaur, Nashville
Email: aramsaur@tnbar.org

January 15, 2014

The Honorable Michael Catalano
Clerk, Tennessee Supreme Court
Supreme Court Building, Room 100
401 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37219

IN RE: PETITION FOR THE ADOPTION OF
AMENDED SUPREME COURT RULE 31

Dear Mike:

Attached please find an original and six copies of the Comment of the Tennessee Bar Association in reference to the above matter.

We would like to acknowledge the assistance in the preparation of this comment by Christy Gibson a staff member at the TBA and a student at the Nashville School of Law.

As always, thank you for your cooperation. I remain,

Very truly yours,

Allan F. Ramsaur
Executive Director

cc: Cindy Wyrick, President, Tennessee Bar Association
Jackie Kittrell, Chair, TBA Dispute Resolution Section
Paul Ney, General Counsel
Christy Gibson
Service List

Tennessee Bar Center
221 Fourth Avenue North, Suite 400
Nashville, Tennessee 37219-2198
(615) 383-7421 • (800) 899-6993
FAX (615) 297-8058
www.tba.org

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE

IN RE: PETITION FOR THE ADOPTION OF AMENDED TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT RULE 31	)	**No. M2013-01612-SC-RLI-RL**

COMMENT OF THE TENNESSEE BAR ASSOCIATION

The Tennessee Bar Association ("TBA"), by and through its President, Cynthia R. Wyrick; Chair, TBA Dispute Resolution Section, Jackie Kittrell; General Counsel, Paul C. Ney; and Executive Director, Allan F. Ramsaur, makes the following comment regarding the amendments to the Tennessee Supreme Court Rule (TN. Sup. Ct. R.) 31.

On July 22, 2013, this Honorable Court issued an Order soliciting comments on various amendments proposed by the Alternate Dispute Resolution Commission (ADRC). The TBA solicited comments from all of the affected practice groups in the association. Based upon the recommendations of the affected sections the TBA hereby submits comments related to two proposed changes: (1) adding the role of

"scrivener" to TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31, Section 10(e) and (2) expanding eligibility requirements in TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31, Section 17(d)(1) for those who completed required mediation coursework and training at an "accredited graduate school."

Comments related to TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31 Section 10(e):

GREATER CLARITY AND GUIDANCE SHOULD BE PROVIDED REGARDING THE NEWLY DEFINED ROLE OF SCRIVENER AS IT APPLIES TO NEUTRALS.

The ADRC proposes the following paragraph be added to TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31 Section 10(e):

> "Rule 31 Neutrals may assist the parties by serving as a scrivener to record or memorialize the terms of the settlement agreement."

In regards to this new language, the TBA recommends that greater clarity and guidance is needed to avoid confusion and possible violation of ethical obligations when neutrals are acting in this new role of "scrivener":

(1) The Rule should include a clear definition for the role of "scrivener," that takes into account the specific duty of the neutral in assisting the parties. Especially given that this new role of "scrivener" is a permissive one, the specific obligations of the neutral should be emphasized, especially when certain issues arise. Some of

these potential issues include but are not limited to: giving legal advice; recording or memorializing complex settlement agreements; engaging in the unauthorized practice of law; and, in situations when parties are not represented by counsel. "Scrivener" implies a clerical or notary role and mediators who scribe agreements would be required to remain in the neutral role. However, the parties who ask for assistance in recording or memorializing an agreement often are those who are either not represented by counsel or whose counsel does not attend the mediation session. The legal advice and UPL issues that may arise during the recording or memorializing of an agreement can be addressed by providing a more clear definition of the term and role of "scrivener," thus assisting the mediator to better understand his or her role during the process.

(2) The Rule should include comments that provide guidance to mediators, especially related to the affirmative duties and obligations outlined in the context of the entire TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31, Section 10. Comments would be helpful in providing direction and examples for handling similar issues, which would alleviate confusion or dilemmas that may arise when the neutral is serving as "scrivener." Comments could help address numerous potential issues that may arise, including but not limited to those mentioned above: giving legal advice;

recording or memorializing complex settlement agreements; engaging in the unauthorized practice of law; and, in situations when parties are represented by counsel.

(3) The Rule should clarify between allowed scribing by lawyer and non-lawyer mediators. The lawyer's role in dispute resolution actions is governed by TN. Sup. R. 8, RPC 2.4.Section 2.4(e) reads:

> "upon termination of a lawyer's service as a dispute resolution neutral, the lawyer: (1) may, with the informed consent of all the parties to the dispute and in compliance with the requirements of RPCs 1.2(c) and 2.2, draft a settlement agreement that results from the dispute resolution process, but shall not otherwise represent any or all of the parties in connection with the matter, and (2) shall afford each party to the dispute the protections afforded a client by RPCs 1.6, 1.8(b), and 1.9."

On the other hand, there are no similar rules addressing scribing by non-lawyer mediators.

(4) The Rule should be revised to provide specific guidelines to non-lawyer mediators to allow them to avoid engaging in the Unauthorized Practice of Law, especially as it relates to serving in the role of scrivener. The Tennessee

Unauthorized Practice of Law statute Tennessee Code Annotated § 23-3-101 reads as follows:

> "No person shall engage in the "practice of law" or do "law business"...unless such person has been duly licensed therefore."

This language makes it very clear that a non-lawyer cannot engage in the practice of law. Questions that arise under TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31, Section 10(e) are whether it is even possible for the non-lawyer mediator to serve as scribe without engaging in the practice of law. While the mediator may provide information to the parties about legal matters and community resources that are within the mediator's expertise, there are many issues that might arise that are within a gray area for the mediator as discussed above in (1) when the terms of a settlement agreement are memorialized.

Comments related to TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31 Section 17(d)(1):

RECOGNITION OF REQUIRED DISPUTE RESOLUTION COURSES SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR CREDIBLE ACCREDITING BODIES.

The current TSC Rule 31 section 17(d)(1) allows the ADRC to waive the normally required mediation training for those applicants who graduated from an accredited "law school" and took substantially the same subjects and received at least three

semester hours of credit. The proposed change would add eligibility based on completed coursework from "accredited graduate schools."

Specifically, the ADRC proposes the following change in TN. Sup. Ct. R. 31, Section 17(d)(1):

> (d)(1) Upon petition to and acceptance by the ADRC, the following persons may be qualified as Rule 31 Mediators without first complying with the qualification and training requirements set forth in Section 17(a), (b), or (c): (i) graduates of accredited law schools **or accredited graduate schools** who have passed a ~~**law school**~~ mediation course which awards at least three semester hours credit and which includes the curriculum components set forth in this Rule or their substantial equivalent as determined by the ADRC and who have four years of **full time** practical work experience; (ii) trained mediators who substantially comply with the qualifications set forth for Rule 31 Mediators in general civil cases or Rule 31 Mediators in family cases as may be determined by the ADRC with the assistance of the AOC Programs Manager, provided that their training be the substantial equivalent of that required under this Rule and that the training has been completed within fifteen years prior to the application. If a trained mediator has complied with the qualifications for approval as a mediator by another state and such approval has been granted, and if the mediator is in good standing in such state at the time of the application for approval in Tennessee, the ADRC may, upon review of the qualifications of the applicant, waive such training requirements as required by Section 17. **(iii) Alternative dispute resolution professors at accredited law schools or graduate schools who have taught a mediation course which awards at least three semester hours credit for at least two semesters and which includes the curriculum components set forth in this Rule or their substantial equivalent as determined by the ADRC and who have four years of full time practical work experience.**

In regards to this amendment the TBA makes the following recommendations:

(1) The rule should define an accredited graduate school as a school accredited by an independent accrediting agency recognized by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the United States Department of Education (USDE) or both. There are numerous private organizations throughout the United States that claim to be accredited institutions of higher learning many of which may or may not be legitimate. Defining an accredited graduate school as one accredited by an official organization recognized by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the United States Department of Education (USDE) or both should prevent any legitimacy issues that may arise in the future.

(2) There should be a defined criteria and process for determining whether the required graduate school coursework taken is equivalent to the approved mediation-training curriculum. One specific area of concern arises with programs that utilize online or other distance instruction in the required mediation courses. Many graduate schools offer distance learning as an option and some programs are entirely comprised of coursework completed remotely. Although the Distance

Education Training Council (DETC) may accredit these programs, the ADRC approved mediation training depends on face-to-face interaction and role-play simulation. Providing specific criteria for how distance-learning programs are substantially equivalent or otherwise provide for this interaction would be helpful in evaluating them.

Specifying the appropriate accreditation and how to determine the equivalency of graduate school coursework and mediation-training curriculum should ensure that the ADRC's mediation training standards are met.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated, the TBA urges the Court to modify the rules changes sought by the ARDC before adopting the proposed amendments.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

By: /s/ by permission

CYNTHIA R. WYRICK (016872)
President, Tennessee Bar Association
Ogle, Gass & Richardson PC
P.O. Box 5365
Sevierville, TN 37864
(865) 453-2866

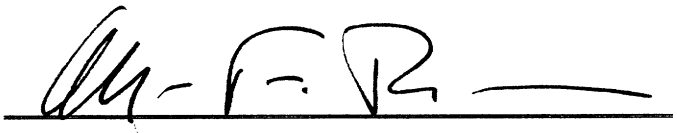
By: /s/ by permission

JACKIE KITTRELL (013578)
Chair, Tennessee Bar Association
Dispute Resolution Section
Community Mediation Center
912 S. Gay, Suite L-300
Knoxville, Tennessee 37902
(865) 594-1879

By: /s/ by permission

PAUL C. NEY (011625)
General Counsel,
Tennessee Bar Association
Waddey & Patterson
1600 Division Street,

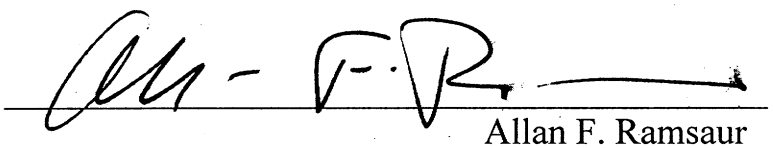
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 242-2400

By: 

ALLAN F. RAMSAUR (005764)
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

Charles Grant
President
Nashville Bar Association
211 Commerce St., Suite 800
Nashville, TN 37201-1817

Shawn Fry
President
Putnam County Bar Association
165 E Spring St.
Cookeville, TN 38501

Kirk Caraway
President
Memphis Bar Association
Brinkley Plaza 80 Monroe Ave., Ste 650
Memphis, TN 38103-2466

Ted Burkhalter
President
Blount County Bar Association
405 Ellis Ave.
Maryville, TN 37804-5823

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

Tish Holder
President
Hickman County Bar Association
820 Hwy 100
Centerville, TN 37033

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

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

Gigi Woodruff
Executive Director
Nashville Bar Association
150 4th Avenue N; Suite 1050
Nashville, TN 37219

Amber Shaw
President
Tipton County Bar Association
114 W. Liberty Avenue, Suite 300
Covington, TN 38019

Diana Burns
Rutherford-Cannon County Bar Association
20 N Public Sq Ste 202
Murfreesboro, TN 37130-3667

Chris Varner
President
Robertson County Bar Association
835 Georgia Ave, Suite 800
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Jack Tapper
President
Bradley County Bar Association
2625 Ralph Buckner Blvd NE
Cleveland, TN 37311-1452

Christopher Keeton
President
Coffee County Bar Association
401 Murfreesboro Hwy
Manchester, TN 37355-1580

James Taylor
President
Rhea County Bar Association
1374 Railroad St., Ste 400
Dayton, TN 37321-2211

Lynda Hood
Executive Director
Chattanooga Bar Association
801 Broad St ., Suite 420 Pioneer Bldg
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Jason Holly
President
Carter County Bar Association
415 Hudson Dr.
Elizabethton, TN 37643-2881

Matthew Willis
President
Dyer County Bar Association
PO Box H
Dyersburg, TN 38025

Stanley Ross
President
Montgomery County Bar Association
PO Box 925
Clarksville, TN 37041-0925

Matthew Edwards
President
Cumberland County Bar Association
69 E First St., Ste 203
Crossville, TN 38555-4575

Daryl Colson
President
Overton County Bar Association
808 North Church St
Livingston, TN 38570

John Willis
President
Anderson County Bar Association
310 N. Main St.
Clinton, TN 37716-3752

Jay Ingrum
President
Sumner County Bar Association
117 E Main St.
Gallatin, TN 37066

William Phillips
President
Hawkins County Bar Association
210 E Main St.
Rogersville, TN 37857

Marsha Wilson
Executive Director
Knoxville Bar Association
P.O. Box 207
Knoxville, TN 37901

Anne Fritz
Executive Director
Memphis Bar Association
80 Monroe, Suite 220
Memphis, TN 38103

Hilary Duke
President
Dickson County Bar Association
210 East College Street
Dickson, TN 37055

Chuck Holliday
Jackson-Madison-Henderson County Bar Association
65 Stonebridge Blvd.
Jackson, TN 38305

Jennifer Porth
President
Fifteenth Judical District Bar Association
224 W Gay St.
Lebanon, TN 37088-0792

Robert Curtis
President
Giles County Bar Association
209 W Madison St.
Pulaski, TN 38478-3222

Karol Lahrman
Executive Director
Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women
PO Box 331214
Nashville, TN 37203

John Lee Williams
President
Humphreys County Bar Association
102 S Court Square
Waverly, TN 37185

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

Carmon Hooper
President
Haywood County Bar Association
PO Box 55
Brownsville, TN 38012

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

William Lawson
President
Unicoi County Bar Association
112 Gay St., Suite A
Erwin, TN 37650-0016

Randall Self
President
Lincoln County Bar Association
131 A Market St. E
Fayetteville, TN 37334-0501

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

John Miles
President
Obion County Bar Association
PO Box 8
Union City, TN 38281

Mark Blakley
President
Scott County Bar Association
PO Box 240
Huntsville, TN 37756

Creed Daniel
President
Grainger County Bar Association
PO Box 6
Rutledge, TN 37861

William Mitchell
President
White County Bar Association
112 South Main Street
Sparta, TN 38583

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

Andrew Frazier
President
Benton County Bar Association
PO Box 208
Camden, TN 38320

David Stanifer
President
Claiborne County Bar Association
PO Box 217
Tazewell, TN 37879

Joseph Ford
President
Franklin County Bar Association
17 S College St.
Winchester, TN 37398

Mary Helms
President
Hamblen County Bar Association
P. O. Box 1834
Morristown, TN 37816

Craig Brent
President
Williamson County Bar Association
224 1st Ave S
Franklin, TN 37064-2214

Matt Maddox
President
Carroll County Bar Association
PO Box 827
Huntingdon, TN 38344

Robin Miller
President
Chattanooga Bar Association
PO Box 1749
Chattanooga, TN 37401

Gerald Largen
President
Roane County Bar Association
PO Box 266
Kingston, TN 37763

John White
President
Bedford County Bar Association
PO Box 169
Shelbyville, TN 37162

Bratten Cook
President
Dekalb County Bar Association
104 N 3rd St.
Smithville, TN 37166

William Locke
President
Warren County Bar Association
PO Box 7142
Mcminnville, TN 37111-7142

James Gass
President
Sevier County Bar Association
PO Box 5365
Sevierville, TN 37864

Ben Boston
President
Lawrence County Bar Association
P O Box 357
Lawrenceburg, TN 38464

Timothy Naifeh
President
Lake County Bar Association
227 Church St.
Tiptonville, TN 38079

Michael Davis
President
Morgan County Bar Association
364 Cumberland Mountain Circle
Wartburg, TN 37887-0756

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

Wade Davies
President
Knoxville Bar Association
PO Box 1126
Knoxville, TN 37901

Scott McGinness
President
Tennessee Board of Law Examiners
832 Georgia Ave Ste 1000
Chattanooga, TN 37402

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

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

Mario Ramos
President
TN Assoc. of Spanish Speaking Attorneys
611 Commerce St., Suite 3119
Nashville, TN 37203

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

Sherry Percival
President
NBA, Ballard Taylor Chapter
219 N Parkway, Suite 1
Jackson, TN 38305-2717

Ursula Bailey
President
NBA, William Henry Hastie Chapter
422 S Gay St., Ste 301
Knoxville, TN 37902-1167

Stephen Johnson
President
TN Assoc. of Criminal Defense Lawyers
606 W Main Ave., Ste 300
Knoxville, TN 37902

Melanie Gober
Executive Director
Lawyers Assoc. for Women Marion Griffin
PO Box 190583
Nashville, TN 37219

David McKinney
President
NBA, Ben Jones Chapter
505 Tennessee St., Apt. 118
Memphis, TN 38103-4470

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

Mark Dessauer
President
Federal Bar Association Northeast
PO Box 3740
Kingsport, TN 37664

Wendy Longmire
President
Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women
PO BOX 198985
Nashville, TN 37219

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

Bradford Box
President
Tennessee Defense Lawers Association
209 East Main St.
Jackson, TN 38301

Chantelle Roberson
President
NBA, S.L. Hutchins Chapter
1 Cameron Hill Circle
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Mary Dohner Smith
President
Lawyers Association for Women Marion Griffin Chapter
401 Commerce St., Ste. 1010
Nashville, TN 37219-2484

Eric Hudson
President
Federal Bar Association Memphis Chapter
6075 Poplar Ave., Ste 500
Memphis, TN 38119

John Manson
President
NBA, Napier-Looby Chapter
1 Public Square
Nashville, TN 37201

Vinh Duong
President
TN Asian Pacific American Bar Association
511 Union St., #2700
Nashville, TN 37210

Bill Young
Administrative Director
Administrative Offices of the Courts
511 Union St., # 600
Nashville, TN 37219

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

Lisa Perlen
Executive Director
Tennessee Board of Law Examiners
401 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37243-0740

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

Cindy Wyrick
President
Tennessee Bar Association
PO Box 5365
Sevierville, TN 37864-5365

Rebecca Franklin
President
East TN Lawyers Association for Women
4612 Woodbridge Lane
Knoxville, TN 37921

Frances Riley
President
Association for Women Attorneys
327 Central Cv
Memphis, TN 38111-6008

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

Tiffany Johnson
President
Tennessee Alliance for Black Lawyers
1067 Fleece Place
Memphis, TN 38104-5620

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

Russell Blair
President
McMinn-Meigs County Bar Association
PO Box 1764
Athens, TN 37371

Albert Wade
President
Paris-Henry County Bar Association
109 West Blythe Street
Paris, TN 38242

Lynn Newcomb
President
Cheatham County Bar Association
102 Frey St.
Ashland City, TN 37015

Lesley Tiller
President
Bristol Bar Association
P.O. Box 526
Blountville, TN 37617

Ashley Shudan
President
Loudon County Bar Association
PO Box 905
Loudon, TN 37774

Amber Lee
President
Washington County Bar Association
300 E. Main St., Ste 159
Johnson City, TN 37601

Jason Davis
President
Marshall County Bar Association
520 North Ellington Parkway
Lewisburg, TN 37091

Beau Pemberton
President
Weakley County Bar Association
109 North Poplar Street
Dresden, TN 38225-0789

Lindsey Lane
President
Greene County Bar Association
131 S Main St., Ste 102
Greeneville, TN 37743

Tyler Weiss
President
Monroe County Bar Association
409 College St .N , Ste. 1
Madisonville, TN 37354-3103