



ANNUAL REPORT

September 1, 2019 – August 31, 2020

Office of the Ombudsman for the Attorney Discipline System of the State Bar of Texas

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Presented to the Supreme Court of Texas on October 13, 2020

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CREATION OF THE OFFICE, STATUTORY MANDATES, AND PUBLIC ACCESS

The Office of the Ombudsman for the Attorney Discipline System of the State Bar of Texas (Ombudsman) was created during the Sunset Review process for the 85th Legislature.¹ As the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission explained, the Ombudsman position was recommended along with other changes “to help improve efficiency and responsiveness for attorneys and the public, and help the Office of the Chief Disciplinary Counsel better do its job to monitor and take action against unethical attorneys.”² This was echoed by the Chief Disciplinary Counsel, who noted that “[a]lthough the Office of the Chief Disciplinary Counsel [was already] subject to oversight and accountability, the [Texas] Legislature established the position of ombudsman for the attorney discipline system as an additional measure.”³ The Texas Legislature codified the recommendation during the 85th Legislative Session, it went into effect on June 1, 2018 with the Texas Supreme Court’s adoption of amendments, and the current Ombudsman began the job on July 14, 2018.⁴ The statute makes it clear that the Ombudsman is:

- A source of information for the public – The Ombudsman is tasked with answering questions from the public on the grievance system’s operations, accessing the system, the filing of grievances, and the availability of other State Bar of Texas programs.⁵
- A monitor of the attorney discipline system – The Ombudsman is responsible for receiving complaints about the system and investigating complaints to make sure the proper procedures were followed by the State Bar of Texas.⁶ Also, the Ombudsman makes recommendations to the Supreme Court of Texas as well as the State Bar Board of Directors for improvements to the attorney discipline system.⁷
- Independent – The Ombudsman reports directly to the Supreme Court of Texas and is independent of the State Bar Board of Directors, the Commission for Lawyer Discipline, the Chief Disciplinary Counsel, and the Board of Disciplinary Appeals.⁸ The independence allows the Ombudsman to impartially evaluate any complaints from the public about the grievance system and provide reports to the Supreme Court of Texas as an outside party.
- Confidential – The Ombudsman cannot disclose any information, proceedings, hearing transcripts, or statements she receives, including documents from various State Bar of Texas departments, to any person other than the Chief Disciplinary Counsel.⁹

¹ See Staff Report with Final Results, Tex. Sunset Advisory Comm’n (Jun. 2017). A copy of the Staff Report with Final Results, redacted for relevancy, is included as Exhibit 1 to the Appendix.

² *Id.* at A7.

³ Linda A. Acevedo, *Texas Attorney Discipline System Update*, 81 Tex. B. J. 444, 445 (2018).

⁴ See *id.*

⁵ Tex. Gov’t Code § 81.0883(a). A copy of Tex. Gov’t Code §§ 81.0881 – 81.0885 is included as Exhibit 2 to the Appendix.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* at § 81.0883(a)(6).

⁸ *Id.* at § 81.0882(b).

⁹ *Id.* at § 81.0885(a).

While the Texas Legislature imbued the Ombudsman with many abilities and protections to help her embody the attributes listed above, it also made it clear in the statute that there are certain actions that the Ombudsman cannot take in pursuit of improving the attorney discipline system. Namely, the Ombudsman is prohibited from:

- (1) “draft[ing] a complaint for a member of the public;
- (2) act[ing] as an advocate for a member of the public;
- (3) revers[ing] or modify[ing] a finding or judgment in any disciplinary proceeding; or
- (4) intervene[ing] in any disciplinary matter.”¹⁰

Despite these statutory restrictions, the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, the Texas Legislature and those involved in the attorney discipline process trusted the Ombudsman to “provide an additional means to receive information and support regarding the attorney discipline system and an independent avenue to verify compliance with the grievance process.”¹¹ Ultimately, the Ombudsman was created to “foster further confidence in the attorney discipline system.”¹²

Based on the statutory mandates explained above and the overarching goals of increasing transparency, independence, and access within the attorney disciplinary system, the Ombudsman built a program focused on public customer service. Other than the enabling statute, the main source of public information about the Ombudsman’s office is its website, which explains the role of the Ombudsman, details what an Ombudsman can and cannot do for the public, lists contact methods, and gives useful links to resources within the State Bar of Texas and other disciplinary entities.¹³ Since the Ombudsman is an employee of the Supreme Court of Texas, the website was placed under the Bar & Education section of the Texas Judicial Branch’s webpage. However, in an effort to make it easier to find this crucial information, the Ombudsman also had links to the webpage placed at numerous places on the State Bar of Texas’ and Supreme Court of Texas’ websites, including the Supreme Court of Texas’ FAQs page and the State Bar of Texas’ Contact Us, Grievance and Ethics Information, and File a Grievance pages.

NOTABLE UPDATES FROM THE 2019-2020 REPORTING PERIOD

The most notable update from this past year was the emergence of COVID-19 and its impact on the operations of the Ombudsman’s office as well as the attorney discipline system as a whole. In an effort to protect the health of the public and its employees, the State Bar of Texas mandated most employees, including the Ombudsman, telecommute beginning on March 16, 2020. While this of course necessitated some adaptation, including changing how the office receives and responds to phone inquiries and taking occasional trips to the physical office to check for mail, the Ombudsman’s office was able to stay fully operational from the date the work-from-home mandate started through the date of this report. As the COVID-19 protocols remain, it is the goal of the Ombudsman’s office to continue to thoroughly and efficiently provide services to the public from a home office environment.

¹⁰ *Id.* at § 81.0883(b).

¹¹ Acevedo, *supra* note 3, at 445.

¹² *Id.*

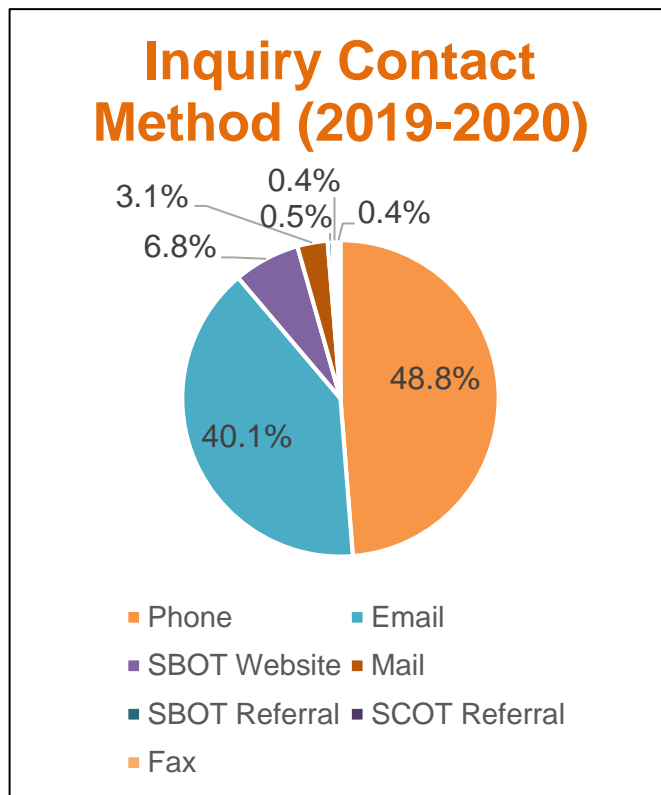
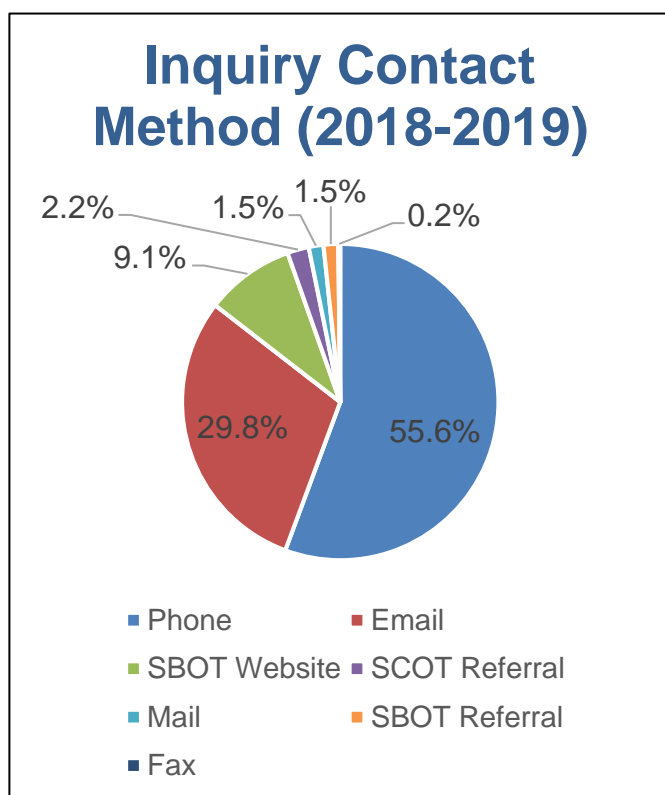
¹³ A copy of the Ombudsman’s current website is included as Exhibit 3 to the Appendix.

Additionally, the Ombudsman met with various other departments within the State Bar of Texas as well as outside agencies to explain the purpose and duties of the Ombudsman's office and gain an understanding of how the Ombudsman can work with these other groups to better serve its mission. Such groups included the Commission for Lawyer Discipline, the Client-Attorney Assistance Program, the State Bar of Texas' Legal Services to the Poor in Criminal Matters Committee, and the Texas Indigent Defense Commission. As detailed in the statute that created the office, the Ombudsman also attended a State Bar of Texas Board of Directors meeting on January 24, 2020 where she presented her report for the 2018-2019 year and took questions and comments from those in attendance.

PUBLIC INQUIRIES – REQUEST CONTENT AND RESPONSES

Inquiry Content

Due to the website discussed above and other referral methods, the Ombudsman received 578 inquiries during the period from September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020. This is an increase of approximately 25% from the 464 inquiries received during the last reporting period. It is unclear if this is a result of more individuals learning about the existence of the Ombudsman's office and deciding to use its services or if the unique circumstances surrounding COVID-19 led to the uptick in inquiries. Regardless, it meant that the one-person Ombudsman department had to increase efficiency to accommodate the traffic.



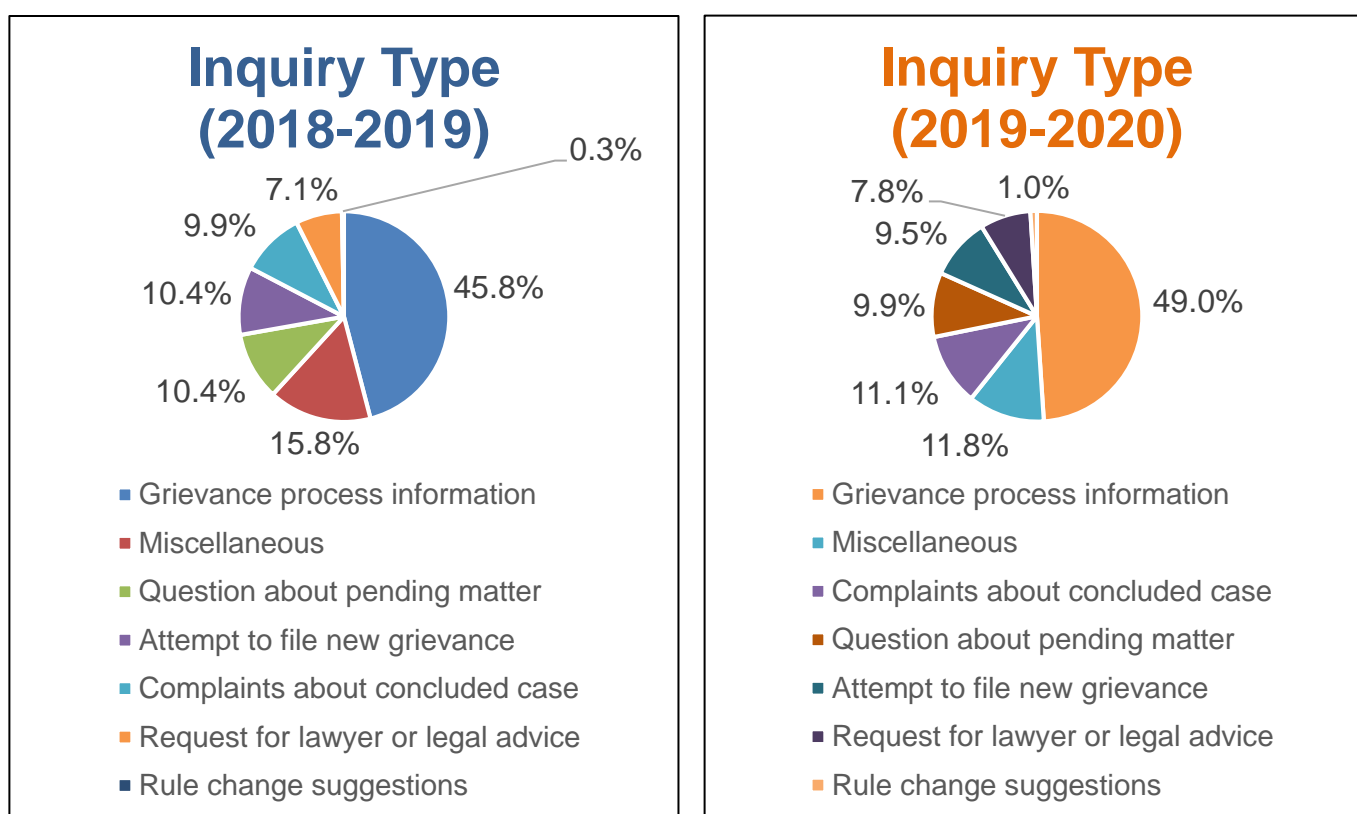
As detailed in the charts above, the methods used to contact the Ombudsman included phone, email, the State Bar of Texas website, referrals from the Supreme Court of Texas, referrals from the State Bar of Texas, mail, and facsimile. As was the case with the 2018-2019 reporting period, the inquirers most frequently contacted the Ombudsman by phone. However, that 49% does represent an approximately 6% drop in phone inquiries from the same period last year. Although merely anecdotal, some of this drop can almost certainly be attributed to the COVID-19 epidemic and the operations changes that necessitated.

As mentioned above, the State Bar of Texas mandated its employees work from home from March 16, 2020 through the time of this report. Due to this, the Ombudsman was no longer able to answer direct phone calls from the public to either of its office numbers. Rather, the Ombudsman receives an email notification after a message is left on the office voicemail, checks the message remotely, and then returns the call from her personal cell phone. In an effort to safeguard her personal cell phone number from the public, any return call is from a blocked number or a number with no caller ID. The outgoing voicemail message that greets inquirers informs them of this process and suggests that they can also reach the Ombudsman via email, which could potentially result in a quicker response. As such, there were many individuals who ended up sending emails after leaving a voicemail and the Ombudsman suspects that others sent emails without leaving a voicemail after hearing that suggestion. Because the Ombudsman was mainly able to operate from home exactly as she was able to run the office from the State Bar of Texas' building, this is one of the few areas where COVID-19's impact can be seen in its operations. Even though the percentage of phone inquiries decreased, a large portion of the Ombudsman's typical day is still spent counseling people on calls, which could last anywhere from 5 minutes to well over an hour.

Although they constitute a relatively small number of inquiries, the referrals from the State Bar of Texas and the Supreme Court of Texas have proven to be vital outlets for the distribution of work among those in the attorney discipline system. Additionally, they have had the added benefit of putting inquirers in touch with an independent office specifically designed to handle their complaints or questions, which can lead to more inquirer satisfaction with the process. The Ombudsman has continued to receive cases from other members of the Texas government through this process, including additional inquiries from state legislators' offices. Although other departments at the State Bar of Texas are often necessarily involved as well, the inclusion of an Ombudsman in the matter added an extra layer of independent scrutiny in frequently complex cases.

As is shown in the Inquiry Type charts below, most people contacted the Ombudsman to obtain more information about the attorney discipline system. Typically, a person in this category is having an issue or disagreement with an attorney and they get in touch with the Ombudsman to hear what their options are. However, there were also several instances of researchers or academics that contacted the office to get a more general sense of the position and how it fits into the overall grievance process that are included in this 49% of inquiries. This slight increase in this category of inquiries, up 3% from the same period last year, reiterates that people frequently seek out the Ombudsman's office for basic information. The inquiries labeled miscellaneous constitute a wide variety of issues, all of which are outside the scope of the Ombudsman's expertise or purview. For example, some of these contacts are people wanting an Ombudsman's help with a complaint against a judge or another government official, while many are individuals wanting more information on a specific attorney's membership status with the State Bar of Texas. Although this category still constituted almost 12% of the inquiries to the Ombudsman's office, it did decrease about 4% from the same period last year. Hopefully this represents a trend of people better understanding the purpose of the Ombudsman's office that will continue in future reporting periods.

Complaints about concluded cases increased slightly from the last report, from 9.9% to 11.1%, which could represent an increased dissatisfaction with the operation of the attorney discipline system or an increased understanding of the Ombudsman's role in this area. Whatever the cause, the increase means even more of the Ombudsman's overall resources must be dedicated to handling these files, which typically require the most time to review and respond to. In this category, individuals have already gone through the grievance process, and in most cases their grievance has been dismissed and their opportunity to appeal has run out. To fully discharge the Ombudsman's duty in these matters, the office must request and review the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's files on the particular grievance to ensure that proper procedures were followed. This often also mandates taking suggestions and complaints about the attorney discipline system from the inquirer. Therefore, while the number of inquirers who contact the Ombudsman with the main purpose of suggesting changes to the disciplinary system is a miniscule 1%, the overall amount of recommendations received from the public is significantly greater.



Beyond the statistics collected and provided above, the Ombudsman also compiled information about: (1) the types of cases the inquirers were contacting the Ombudsman about; (2) the relationship of the respondent-attorney to the inquirer; (3) and the alleged attorney behavior that is the subject of the inquiry. While it was impossible to get this information for every inquiry, the data can provide some insight into the demographics of cases that are likely to result in grievances. For example, about 40% of the inquiries where the case type was disclosed were family law cases and 28% were criminal cases, which is very similar to statistics from last year's reporting period. While the number of inquiries that involved divorce and child-custody cases remained high, the Ombudsman's office saw decidedly less inquiries concerning guardian ad litem during the 2019-2020 reporting period. As was true last year, it appears that many inquirers (about 39%) who contact the Ombudsman about an attorney are concerned with his

or her non-responsiveness, which indicates the importance of programs that help individuals that are having communication issues with their attorney, such as the Client Attorney Assistance Program. A distant second are individuals who believe that their attorney is guilty of various errors akin to a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel. Finally, as was also true last year, most inquirers were members of the public or current or potential complainants. After noticing this during the last reporting period, the Ombudsman took particular note of when an inquirer identified themselves as an attorney, whether they were offering up complaints about the disciplinary system, asking questions as a respondent, or inquiring about something outside the purview of the Ombudsman's office. While this number continued to be small, 4.5%, it does appear that more attorneys reached out to the Ombudsman this year.¹⁴ In the future, the Ombudsman hopes that more attorneys will contact the office to offer their insight into the operation of the attorney discipline system.

Response Content

Although the unique aspects of each inquiry necessitate some customization, the Ombudsman has developed a standard response to inquirers who request general information about the attorney discipline system. In particular, the response includes information about the Client Attorney Assistance Program and how to file a grievance through the Office of the Chief Disciplinary Counsel. With both programs, the letter or email provides background details, contact information, brochures, and forms needed to enroll in the program or file a grievance. In the 2019-2020 reporting year, this standard response was altered to include a link to the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, the statute that governs attorney behavior in Texas and is used by the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office to determine if misconduct was committed. This addition hopefully provided potential complainants with necessary background and context to understand the standards in place and determine whether filing a grievance is appropriate.¹⁵

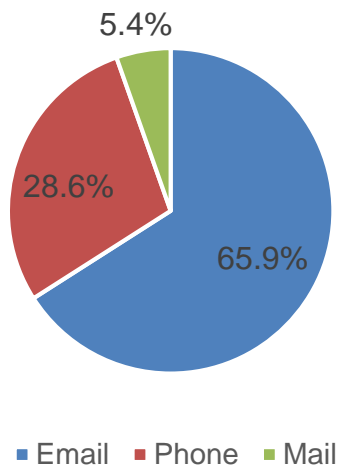
For some responses it was also necessary to include information on other programs or agencies. For example, in a case where someone wishes to file a complaint against a judge, the response would include information on how to contact the State Commission on Judicial Conduct. On the other hand, in an instance where an individual is having trouble with his or her attorney and would like assistance in finding a new one, the response directs them to resources like the Lawyer Referral and Information Service, which helps individuals find a lawyer or other resource that best matches his or her legal needs and financial means. Similarly, if an inquirer is solely concerned with the amount of fees charged by his or her attorney, the response will include a link to information about local bar associations' fee dispute committees. In the event the Ombudsman receives an inquiry from a Supreme Court of Texas or State Bar of Texas referral, the first step is always to send an acknowledgement letter to the inquirer. In that letter, the Ombudsman explains how she received the communication, why it was forwarded to them, and the role she plays in the disciplinary system.¹⁶ This standard response lets the inquirer know that his or her communication was received, provides context and contact information for the Ombudsman, and in the event follow-up is required, assures them that someone is looking into his or her issues.

¹⁴ Although most attorneys did not contact the Ombudsman to offer critiques or suggestions of the grievance process, a few did. These comments are noted in the Common Complaints section below.

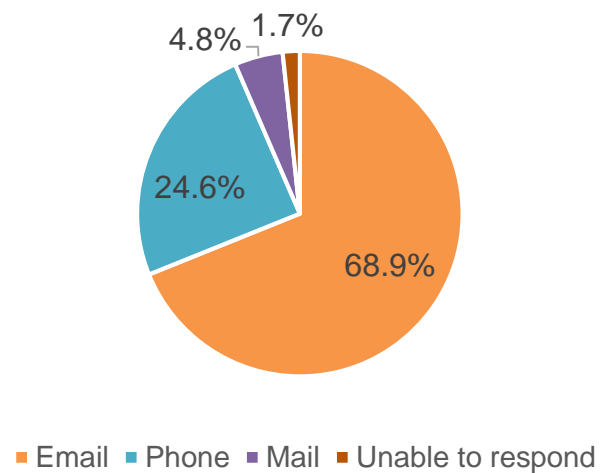
¹⁵ A redacted example of a typical response to such an inquiry, including the link to the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, is included as Exhibit 4 to the Appendix.

¹⁶ A redacted example of an acknowledgement letter is included as Exhibit 5 to the Appendix.

Response Method (2018-2019)



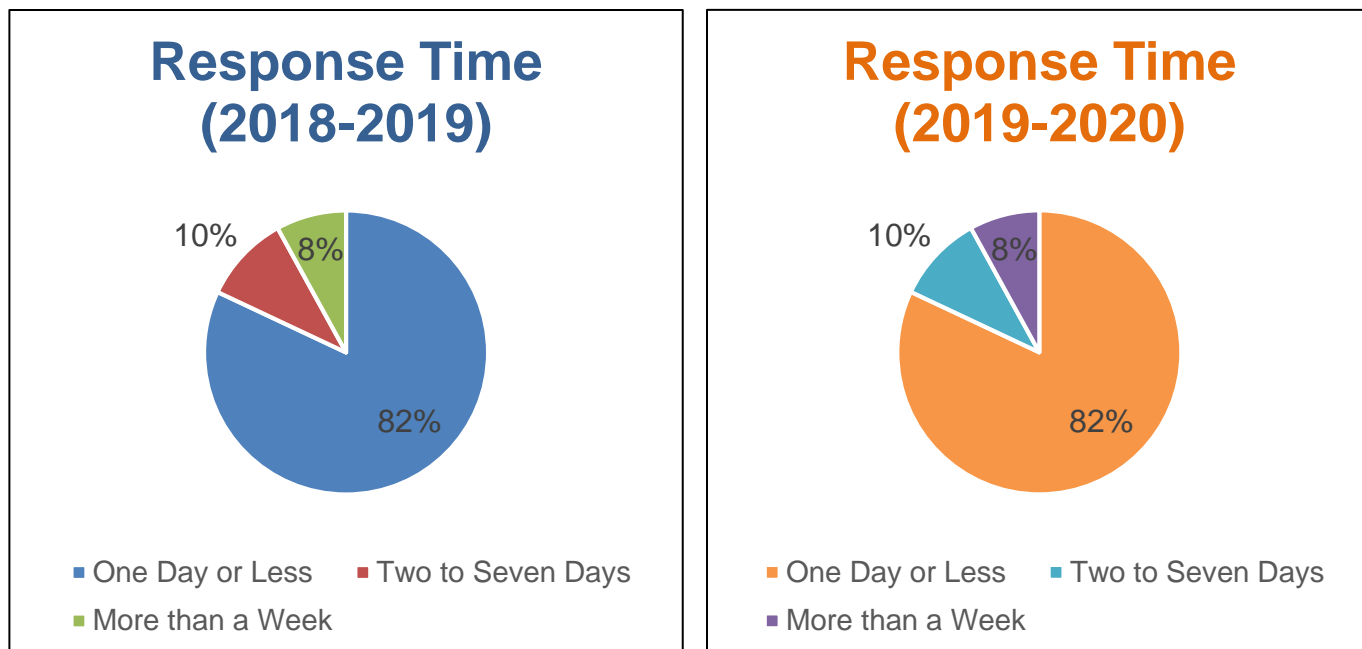
Response Method (2019-2020)



While inquirers can contact the Ombudsman through a wide variety of methods, the responses have all been by email, phone, and mail, as seen in the chart above. In an effort to provide inquirers with a document that they can consider and reference at any time, the Ombudsman will often send an email that includes relevant information even after explaining all necessary details about applicable resources and programs over the phone. Although this often leads to additional work for the Ombudsman, it probably reduces the likelihood that an individual will have to contact the Ombudsman with additional questions and ultimately increases inquirer satisfaction. As such, even though inquirers overwhelmingly prefer discussing matters with the Ombudsman over the phone, the most common response method continued to be email at 68.9%. Similarly, some of the responses categorized as mail were also initially discussed over the phone. The response trend follows what was seen in contact methods (discussed above) with email responses seeing a slight increase and phone and mail responses seeing a similar decrease. This reporting year, the Ombudsman also saw a few instances where they were unable to respond to an inquiry. As seen in the chart above, this only constituted 1.7% of all inquiry responses and often occurred because an individual did not leave any return contact information in a voicemail or piece of mail.

The Ombudsman makes every effort to respond to each inquiry as fully and efficiently as possible. During the period discussed in this report, the average time to close inquiries, whether a simple one-off question or request for review of a complex grievance file, was 1.65 days. This average represents a 45% decrease from the 3-day average seen during the 2018-2019 reporting period. This increased efficiency is particularly meaningful during a time when the Ombudsman had to adjust its office operations to accommodate changes during COVID-19 and suggests that the office has improved while working remotely. As further detailed in the chart below, 82% of all inquiries were responded to and closed within a day and 93.6% of all inquiries were handled within a week. These statistics are similar to those seen during the last reporting period, with a slight increase in matters closed within a week and decrease in

matters taking more than a week. It is worth noting that the times referenced in this chart include weekends and holidays, which necessarily increase the response time.



COMMON COMPLAINTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Transparency-Related Complaints

As was the case with the last reporting period, complaints concerning the lack of transparency of the attorney discipline process occurred with more frequency than any other category of criticism and many of the objections raised in the 2018-2019 report persisted. For example, inquirers continued to voice frustration and anger over what they deem to be a lack of a satisfactory explanation of why a particular grievance was dismissed. What the Ombudsman's office noticed this year in particular was that the targets of this complaint were more diverse than those included in the previous year's report. Last year most of the complaints were confined to the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's dismissal letters at the classification stage but during the 2019-2020 period, inquirers also frequently mentioned the affirmation of dismissals issued by the Board of Disciplinary Appeals as well as findings of no just cause issued by Summary Disposition Panels.¹⁷ Again, inquirers noted that the letters seemed generic and unspecific to their particular grievance in that they failed to note how the facts stated in their submission did not amount to misconduct.¹⁸

¹⁷ A dismissal in the attorney discipline context means one of two things. If it was dismissed as an inquiry at the classification stage, it indicates "that the grievance alleges conduct that, even if true, does not constitute professional misconduct or disability cognizable under the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct." Tex. Gov't Code, *supra* note 5, at § 81.073(a)(2). If it was dismissed after it was classified as a complaint, it means that the body making the determination has found that "there is no just cause" See *id.* at § 81.075(b)(1).

¹⁸ Redacted examples of a typical dismissal letter sent to a grievance classified as an inquiry sent by the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office, a typical letter affirming a dismissal sent by the Board of Disciplinary Appeals, and a typical letter sent to a

Beyond the many complaints concerning dismissal explanations, inquirers voiced concerns about their lack of knowledge of the overall process and noted that this ignorance often led to them making bad decisions about how to present their grievance or proceed through the process. Several complainants referred to the disciplinary system as “opaque” and commented to the Ombudsman’s office that they found the overall process “very confusing.” Adding to this perception is the fact that no one is allowed to attend Summary Disposition Panel hearings and while complainants are allowed to attend investigatory hearings, complainants have noted that the Chief Disciplinary Counsel’s office did not encourage them to attend or note what effect non-attendance could have. This lack of knowledge led to several inquirers taking what they believe to be ill-advised actions, such as filing their grievance as soon as possible without taking into account the limited time they will have to provide additional evidence or the limit on the number of grievances that a complainant can file against a particular attorney. Similarly, several complainants lamented that the Chief Disciplinary Counsel’s office set up unrealistic expectations as to the outcome and process and noted that if they had a better understanding of the process and factors used for determining misconduct, they would have been less upset with the final ruling.

The most notable development this year concerning transparency is the fact that the Ombudsman received several more comments that inquirers were unable to communicate with the Chief Disciplinary Counsel’s office about their grievance. Of course, many of these comments could be attributable to COVID-19 and adjustments in office operations and contact methods. Similarly, there was an increase in the number of complainants claiming that they never received a copy of a dismissal letter from the Chief Disciplinary Counsel’s office, leading to some stress and confusion about their options to appeal and deadlines associated with those appeals.

Complaints Related to Bias

As was true during the previous reporting period, the Ombudsman’s office received many complaints concerning the perceived bias of the attorney discipline system. While some of the inquirers merely provided blanket statements about the corruption or partiality they believe are inherent in the system, there are some specific comments that are worth noting here.

First, there seemed to be an appreciable increase in the number of comments concerning racial or economic bias, with some complainants stating that the system puts people of color and indigent individuals at a disadvantage and others exclaiming that the process and individuals involved are blatantly racist. Another common focus of complainants’ ire was the potential for conflicts of interest to exist, particularly when the grievance concerns a well-known or established attorney and the decision-makers are from the same city or area. This potential led to suggestions ranging from a requirement to disclose any potential conflict of interest to holding hearings in another area of the state when the possibility of a conflict of interest is high. Another focus of bias complaints concerned the role of the classification attorney in the discipline process. Many inquirers were uncomfortable with the fact that it is one attorney that reviews the grievance at that point and makes the very consequential decision of whether or not it proceeds to the investigation phase. This gives the classification attorney too much power the complainants argued and could lead to one individual’s bias having a profound impact on the underlying matter. Lastly, the office also received comments about the preference given to respondents at

complainant after a Summary Disposition Panel finds there is no just cause are included as Exhibits 6, 7, and 8, respectively, to the Appendix.

Investigatory Hearings. In particular, the inquirer noted that the respondent's attorney is given much more leeway to establish the narrative and commented that the hearings should be conducted like hearings in a typical civil case.

Other Complaints

Beyond the categories identified above, inquirers also provided critiques of miscellaneous policies within the attorney discipline system.

One frequent complaint was that the inquirer did not believe that the investigator performed a thorough review of the evidence. In particular, the Ombudsman received criticisms that the investigator did not contact or interview them or the witnesses they provided. Similarly, several inquirers noted that they do not think that the investigator in their case reviewed all evidence provided because the investigators were not well informed when communicating with the inquirers and seemed to not know the basic facts of the cases. In these inquirers' minds, their grievances were incorrectly dismissed because of the lack of fact gathering by the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's investigators that occurred.

Additionally, the Ombudsman's office received suggestions from several licensed attorneys, although it was unclear if they were respondents in a particular matter or merely licensed attorneys who want to comment on the disciplinary process. This is especially notable because to the Ombudsman's knowledge, its office received little or no such comments during the last reporting period. Most of comments concerned the Ombudsman's recommendation that complainants be able to file grievances via email. The inquirers voraciously rejected this recommendation and further asked that complainants be required to notarize any grievances filed or file them under penalty of perjury. One also noted that there should be a penalty for vexatious grievance filers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Chief Disciplinary Counsel and State Bar of Texas process and investigate thousands of grievances every year and have used their collective experience to create an efficient and effective system to do so. However, as is true with any organization or process, it can be improved. Below are recommendations for improvements to the system based on the comments and criticisms heard by the Ombudsman over the period covered by this report.¹⁹

Recommendation 1: Continue to Allow Communication via Email

Due to COVID-19, the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office began providing the public a way to contact them via email in an effort to decrease the phone communication under work-from-home conditions. Similar to what the Ombudsman's office did as discussed above, this email address is noted in the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's outgoing voicemail message. While this could just be a temporary fix during the COVID-19 era, the Ombudsman's office would suggest that the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office continue to offer communication via email. While some members of the public will still prefer phone

¹⁹ Note that this report makes different recommendations from those offered in the 2018-2019 report, which were (1) enable communication and filing of grievances through email; (2) send acknowledgement communication to confirm receipt of grievances; (3) provide regular status updates to complainants during the investigation phase; and (4) provide a more detailed explanation to complainants upon dismissal of grievances. That does not mean that those recommendations are no longer valid but rather is simply reflective of the Ombudsman's office's desire to offer new proposals or different insight into the concerns raised in the previous year's report.

communication, undoubtedly many will welcome another option, particularly since it will provide them with an answer in writing. In this same vein, during the COVID-19 period the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office has been utilizing email to send classification emails. It is this office's recommendation that this practice continue. It hopefully will decrease the number of individuals who can claim that they did not receive the classification letter and will speed up the grievance process, which can be a lengthy one.

Similarly, it would be worth exploring providing complainants with email addresses for the classification attorneys and investigators assigned to their grievance when they receive the first letter or communication from them. A cautious approach should understandably be taken when considering this step because it could lead to an overwhelming number of emails but it would likely ease the complainant's frustration and facilitate the impression of an open, transparent, and service-oriented process.

Recommendation 2: Provide More Information about the Process on the Grievance Form

Last year's report recommended that the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office send an acknowledgement letter or email upon the receipt of receiving a grievance submittal. While the Ombudsman believes that this recommendation is still valid, in the event the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office determines that it is too logistically complicated or time-prohibitive to implement, the Ombudsman recommends including more facts about what the complainant can expect during the process on the grievance form itself or on the screen before they fill out the grievance form in the online submission system. This information could be anything from a recitation of important facts or deadlines, a list of what the complainant can expect or a flow-chart of the grievance process. There is already information on the front page of the grievance form, such as the notation that the complainant has 10 days after submission to provide additional evidence or documents to the Chief Disciplinary Counsel's office. This recommendation is simply asking for an expansion of this information to ensure that the complainant is as informed as possible prior to filing. This would hopefully set up reasonable expectations and lead to less confusion and anger after the process is over.

CONCLUSION

Although the previous year's reporting period required more from the Ombudsman as far as conceptualizing and setting up the office, the 2019-2020 year had its share of challenges such as adapting to a COVID-19 environment. While the Ombudsman found the attorney discipline system and programs that support it to be professionally and skillfully run, improvements can always be made to better serve the public and further its mission of overseeing the legal profession in Texas. The Ombudsman anticipates that the operation of its office can similarly make improvements in the years to come and strives to operate more efficiently and more effectively to assist the public in the future.