

🖨 [Click to print](#) or Select 'Print' in your browser menu to print this document.

Page printed from: <https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/2020/05/26/covid-19-hasnt-wrecked-auto-accident-lawyers-earnings-yet-but-a-crash-is-coming/>

COVID-19 Hasn't Wrecked Auto Accident Lawyers' Earnings Yet. But a Crash Is Coming

In a national survey, 58% of car wreck lawyers said their income stayed the same during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it flips on the head in terms of future income expectations. There were 71% who expected a future drop in earnings. Why?

By Angela Morris | May 26, 2020



(Photo: [tommaso79/Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com/author/tommaso79))

People stay at home. Highways have fewer cars. One result? Fewer auto collisions.

That means fewer lawsuits.

And less income for plaintiff lawyers who handle that litigation.

"During the shutdown, I saw images of Mopac from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. on a Friday—it was wide open," Austin solo practitioner Joe Lopez said about a busy highway in the Texas capital city. "If there's no cars on the road, then yes, the case intake will go down, and you will see a reflected downturn in revenue in six, nine or 12

months. It's still a ways out. You have not been through that cycle quite yet.”

In a survey by ALM Media that examined how the coronavirus pandemic is impacting attorneys' incomes, 58% of the 45 motor vehicle attorneys who responded said their income has stayed the same during the pandemic—the largest rate of any practice area polled. These respondents came from Connecticut, Texas, Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida and New York.

However, that figure flipped on its head when attorneys predicted their future income: 71% of the lawyers said they are expecting a decrease.

View the results:

Graphic: David Palmer/ALM

Lawsuit Pipeline

Why haven't motor vehicle injury lawyers already felt the pinch from the coronavirus?

It's because the cases that are paying out now have been in the pipeline since before the pandemic, Lopez explained.

"Those were already produced goods, if you think of it from a factory-output standpoint," he said.

But it's new cases that are taking a hit.

Clients have stopped calling these lawyers: 73% of respondents told us they're getting fewer contacts from potential clients seeking representation.

Attorneys also are seeing decreases in new case numbers. When we asked how their case volumes have already changed, 62% of the motor vehicle lawyers reported a current decreased.

Pennsylvania defense attorney Daniel E. Cummins, who represents the insured defendants in collision cases, said his insurance company clients are already cutting the number of assignments they give Cummins' firm.

Cummins said he thinks more claims are settling before they get to the litigation stage.

"Some insurance companies are reaching out to plaintiffs' attorneys to settle cases. Some plaintiffs' attorneys may need to settle cases to keep the cash flow running and keep their offices running and take care of their overhead," he said. "Also, you have plaintiffs out of work because their places of employment are shut down. They may need a quick boost to their bank account. All those factors may come together to make all the parties involved more willing to reach an amicable solution."

Another reason that plaintiffs counsel are filing fewer lawsuits now is because it's harder to get clients' medical records from health care providers that are closed down or running on skeleton crews, said Guy Choate, a partner at Webb, Stokes & Sparks in San Angelo, Texas.

The silver lining is that Choate said he does not view the future as bleak. People will start having car collisions again, and there will be work for lawyers.

The survey showed that motor vehicle lawyers do expect clients to pick up the phones again—somewhat. Even though 60% still expected fewer calls, there were 18% of the 45 attorneys who thought they'd get more client calls in the future.

"Obviously, nothing like this has happened in any of our lifetimes. But if the experience shows us anything, it's that we will prevail and come back," said Choate. "It's the nature of the contingent fee practice: You have good years and bad years. We've been here a long time, and a 30% or 50% drop is really something we would rather not have, but we will survive."

Read more:

The Numbers Are in: Attorney Income Nosedived Nationwide in the Last 2 Months

(<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/2020/05/26/the-numbers-are-in-attorney-income-nosedived-nationwide-in-the-last-2-months/>)

Florida Criminal Defense Lawyers Eyeing Civil Work? How COVID-19 is Affecting Attorney Income

(<https://www.law.com/dailybusinessreview/2020/05/26/florida-criminal-defense-lawyers-eyeing-civil-work-how-covid-19-is-affecting-attorney-income/>)

Connecticut Lawyers Brace for Sharp Drop in Income This Year

(<https://www.law.com/ctlawtribune/2020/05/26/connecticut-lawyers-brace-for-sharp-drop-in-income-this-year/>)

Family Lawyers, Criminal Law Attorneys Are Hurting Worst Than Others in COVID-19 Economy

(<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/2020/05/26/family-lawyers-criminal-law-attorneys-are-hurting-worst-than-others-in-covid-19-economy/>)

Recession-Proof? Debt and Contract Lawyers Are Weathering the Coronavirus Storm Better Than Others (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/2020/05/26/recession-proof-debt-and-contract-lawyers-are-weathering-the-coronavirus-storm-better-than-others/>)

Copyright 2021. ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved.