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McDougal Must Go? Directors Call for Texas Bar President's Ouster Amid #BLM Controversy

Some board of director members are calling on Larry McDougal to resign as State Bar of Texas president, but McDougal has no plans to do so.

By Angela Morris | July 16, 2020



Black Lives Matter protest in Washington, D.C., on June 6, 2020. Photo: Diego M. Radzinski/ALM

Controversy has swirled all week about State Bar of Texas President Larry McDougal's online comments that have offended many lawyers. Now, the board of directors is stepping into the fray.

After fielding voluminous feedback on social media, the directors will hold a virtual board meeting to listen to the public, lawyers and fellow directors give their thoughts and opinions about what should happen to McDougal now. Some directors are now saying McDougal should resign, but others are supporting his remaining term in office.

McDougal does not plan to resign, said an email by Christine Haas, who said she is handling public relations for McDougal, who underwent surgery this week.

"I denounce racism in every form," McDougal wrote in a statement. "I am deeply sorry I made any insensitive comments and for the hurt those decisions caused then and now. This behavior is not in keeping with who I am today and the values I have fought for throughout my career in the police force or legal system. I recognize that it will take time and serious effort to heal the damage this conduct has caused. I am ready to do that important work and mend every fence possible."

At the board meeting, which is scheduled for July 27 (<https://blog.texasbar.com/2020/07/articles/state-bar/state-bar-of-texas-board-of-directors-call-special-meeting/>), the public and attorneys will have a chance to speak about McDougal's online comments. So will the directors.

"I do think our job as the board is to listen to the general public, listen to attorneys, and hear what they say and respond," said Board Chairman Charlie Ginn, who said he was speaking for himself, not the bar. "It's a very divisive issue, and I think it needs the board to respond to it."

Bar Executive Director Trey Apffel said that this is an important moment for the bar.

"This is a real opportunity for the bar to move forward in a positive way, from the standpoint of emphasizing our efforts toward diversity and inclusion," Apffel said.

Black Lives Matter comments

The conflict began on July 10 when McDougal posted a comment on a Facebook post of an election poll worker who was wearing a Black Lives Matter T-shirt.

McDougal wrote that Black Lives Matter was affiliated with a political party and that wearing the T-shirt would violate a state law barring electioneering at the polls. He said the woman in the shirt should have been removed and issued a citation.

Next, attorneys on Facebook began posting online comments by McDougal—made before he ran for the state bar—that they felt were offensive. In one comment on a blog post, McDougal stated that Black Lives Matter was a "terrorist group."

Another post (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10221201152714956&set=p.10221201152714956&type=3>) by McDougal showed a police officer pinning a man to the ground with the slogan, "Justice: It usually happens before the trial."

In a fourth comment placed on a Facebook post about an attorney practicing law with a suspended license, McDougal wrote, "She is hot in her Texas Bar picture but she has meth head written all over her today."

Read more: Lawyers Call On Texas Bar President to Resign Over Black Lives Matter Comments

(<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/2020/07/13/lawyers-call-on-texas-bar-president-to-resign-over-black-lives-matter-comments/>)

Directors call for resignation

Like tons of attorneys on Facebook, some directors are calling on McDougal to resign as president, but others are standing up for him and want him to remain on the job.

Randy Sorrels, the immediate past president of the bar, said the widespread reaction from McDougal's comments have impacted the whole bar and its mission.

"There's been people who support either what Larry has said or support the fact he has a right to say those things. There's people who think his comments are maybe dismissive of certain groups, and he should take a different course," Sorrels said.

Bar directors Jason Smith and Diane St. Ives both say he should resign.

"I think Larry McDougal's comments were racist," said Smith, a Fort Worth solo.

Read Smith's resignation statement
(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PXQ-qOQB6bZxt96hels_cK9cb9imbHqw/view?usp=sharing)

St. Ives said the controversy harmed McDougal's ability to lead the bar.

"The division that his comments have caused prevents the bar from working. We are not moving forward with the things we have to do," said St. Ives, a Houston family law attorney.

But fellow Director Steve Fischer of El Paso said that McDougal should remain the bar president.

"I support Black Lives Matter," said Fischer. "I disagree with Larry's statements. I think Black Lives Matter is OK. Here's the issue I have: He didn't say that as bar president. He said it in 2015. Two, he has a right to free speech."

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