

Kim Meador

ADM2025-01403



From: Shirley Bondon <Shirley.Bondon.1412204761@advocatefor.me>
Sent: Saturday, March 7, 2026 3:00 PM
To: appellatecourtclerk
Subject: From Black Clergy Collaborative of Memphis: Comments on No. ADM2025-01403

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Dear Clerk Hivner and Honorable Justices of the Tennessee Supreme Court,

I am writing in response to the Court's request for comments on the regulation of the legal profession and Tennessee's access-to-justice crisis. I strongly endorse the Court's suggestion that people without law degrees could deliver legal services and support authorizing legal helpers to assist with basic civil legal needs. This is a smart, compassionate, and practical way to make justice more accessible.

I am with the Black Clergy Collaborative of Memphis, and in my community, expanding access to legal help is important because people can't afford attorneys for evictions, clearing titles, wills, and trust. I would want legal helpers to have oversight by a nonprofit or company, and subject-matter training that can be done online in under 10 hours. I would want legal helpers to be able to assist with debt collection, employment and workplace law, small claims and money disputes, housing, domestic violence and protective orders, public benefits and assistance, and reentry and civil legal consequences.

Across our state, people struggle to access the legal assistance they need; lawyers are too expensive for most people, and many counties are classified as legal deserts because there just aren't enough lawyers to go around.

I urge the Court to focus on low-barrier approaches that expand access to basic help now. Authorized legal helpers could receive short, modular, and accessible subject-matter training, and work under the supervision of non-profits, libraries, community and religious centers, and legal businesses. Licensure that requires extensive training or costly credentialing risks recreating the lawyer-only bottleneck under a different name, while there are countless routine, low-risk legal needs that could be met today by a neighbor who has undergone a short online course.

The Court should also consider clear carveouts from Unauthorized Practice of Law rules for low-risk legal assistance, like helping individuals understand court processes and filling out paperwork, which should not be treated as the practice of law. Tennesseans who would receive this help are already protected by existing consumer protection laws, negating the need for the enforcement mechanism that comes with licensure.

Allowing legal helpers would put help directly where people need it—in libraries, churches, and community centers—and ensure that people are not shut out of our justice system simply because of where they live or how much money they have.

I'm grateful that the Tennessee Supreme Court is leading this effort to reform and modernize our legal

system. I encourage you to authorize the delivery of legal services by legal helpers and continue exploring ways to ensure that every Tennessean can get the legal guidance they need, when and where they need it.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Shirley Bondon
Memphis, TN