

# Dorsaneo, Texas Litigation Guide 

| Publication 719 | Release 129 | May 2018 |
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## HIGHLIGHTS

## Jury Charge

- The Texas Supreme Court has held that a party, to preserve error in the charge, need not object to an immaterial question that should not have been submitted or cannot support a judgment. See Ch. 122.


## Health Claim Expert Report

- When one expert report submitted to support a health care liability claim stated that a particular medical event was the cause of the patient's death, the report need not attribute that event to the negligence of any particular defendant because that issue was separately addressed by other expert reports, and Tex. Civ. Prac. \& Rem. Code § 74.351(i) specifically permits compliance by multiple reports. See Ch. 321.


## Child Support

- The Texas Supreme Court has held that a trial court may consider direct payments either to the other parent or to a third party in deciding whether an arrearage exists,
even if the original support order specifies a different manner of payment. See Ch. 372.

This release updates Texas Litigation Guide with recent Texas Supreme Court and court of appeals decisions and federal cases. Many of the significant developments in this release are summarized below.

## Pretrial, Trial, and Appellate Practice

Attorney Disqualification. This release includes Range v. Calvary Christian Fellowship, 530 S.W.3d 818, 836 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, no pet. h.), in which the court of appeals held that to disqualify an attorney from a current representation, the current and former representations must concern the same or a substantially related matter, which must be proved by evidence of specific similarities. See Ch. 3, Professional Responsibility, § 3.06[2][d].

Suggestion of Death Does Not Constitute General Appearance. In Hegwer v.

Edwards, 527 S.W.3d 337, 340 (Tex. App.-Dallas 2017, no pet. h.), the court of appeals held that filing a because the court is required to issue a scire facias requiring the administrator, executor, or heir to appear on behalf of the deceased defendant. See Ch. 12, Pleading the Parties, § 12.03[2][b].

Class Actions. This update includes Lon Smith \& Assocs. v. Key, 527 S.W.3d 604 (Tex. App.-Fort Worth 2017, pet. filed), in which the court of appeals discussed many issues regarding class certification, including requirements for a representative plaintiff, the predominance of common issues, and typicality. See Ch. 13, Class Actions, §§ 13.03, 13.04.

Showing for Appellate Review of Attorney's Fees Award. In Ho \& Huang Props., L.P. v. Parkway Dental Assocs., P.A., 529 S.W.3d 102, 122 (Tex. App.Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, pet. filed), the court of appeals held that to show that an attorney's fees finding was excessive, a complaining party must establish that the evidence was factually insufficient to support the finding. See Ch. 22, Attorney's Fees, § 22.52[2].

Dismissal for Filing False Affidavit of Indigence. This update includes Poff $v$. Guzman, 532 S.W.3d 867, 870-871 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, no pet. h.), in which the court of appeals held that if a party filed a fraudulent affidavit of indigence under Tex. R. Civ. P. 145, a trial court has statutory authority under Tex. Civ. Prac. \& Rem. Code § 13.001(a)(1) to dismiss the action. See Ch. 30, Commencement of Actions, § 30.04[4].

Nonsignatory Bound by Arbitration Agreement Pursuant to Construction of Contract. In Branch Law Firm L.L.P. v. Osborn, 532 S.W.3d 1, 13 (Tex. App.Houston [14th Dist.] 2016, no pet.), the
court of appeals held that the question of who is bound by an arbitration agreement is ultimately a function of the intent of the parties, as expressed within the terms of the agreement. See Ch. 44, Arbitration, § 44.02[1][c].

## Declaratory Judgment Actions Not for

 Resolving Factual Issues. This release includes Shahin v. Mem'l Hermann Health Sys., 527 S.W.3d 484, 491-492 (Tex. App.-Houston [1st Dist.] 2017, pet. filed), in which the court of appeals held that declaratory judgment actions may not be useful for resolving issues such as the reasonableness, necessity, and unequitable nature of a defendant's actions. See Ch. 45, Declaratory Relief, § 45.04[5].Equitable Remedies. The Texas Supreme Court, in Longview Energy Co. v. Huff Energy Fund LP, 533 S.W.3d 866, 874 (Tex. 2017), discussed the methods of proving entitlement to a constructive trust, and the burden of identifying the particular property on which the trust may be imposed. See Ch. 55, Constructive Trusts, §§ 55.01[1], 55.03[1].

Transfer of Venue. In In re Lowe's Home Ctrs., L.L.C., 531 S.W.3d 861, 872 (Tex. App.-Corpus Christi 2017, orig. proceeding), the Corpus Christi Court of Appeals discussed the propriety of a plaintiff taking a nonsuit and refiling in another county after a motion to transfer venue has been denied, concluding that this procedure is forbidden. See Ch. 61, Venue, § 61.20[6], [7].

Discovery. In In re DISH Network, LLC, 528 S.W.3d 177, 185-187 (Tex. App.-El Paso 2017, orig. proceeding), the El Paso Court of Appeals discussed the parameters of the "joint client" exception to the attorney-client privilege. See Ch. 90, Discovery: Scope and Limitations, § 90.06[2][c].

Summary Judgment. In Starwood Mgmt., LLC v. Swaim, 530 S.W.3d 673, 679 (Tex. 2017), the Texas Supreme Court noted that, in legal malpractice cases, expert witness testimony generally is required to rebut defendant's motion for summary judgment challenging the causation element. See Ch. 101, Summary Judgment, § $101.07[3][\mathrm{b}]$.

Disqualification of Counsel. In In re Turner, 2017 Tex. LEXIS 1181, at *9 (Tex. Dec. 22, 2017) the Texas Supreme Court discussed the procedures for disqualification of a firm based on a nonlawyer employee's conduct, emphasizing the need to instruct the employee to refrain from working on any matters on which the employee worked in any previous employment before the employee begins work on the new firm's case. See Ch. 110A, Disqualification of Judge or Counsel, § 110A.11[5][c].

Jury Charge. In BP Am. Prod. Co. v. Red Deer Res., LLC, 526 S.W.3d 389, 401 (Tex. 2017), the Texas Supreme Court held that a party, to preserve error in the charge, need not object to an immaterial question that should not have been submitted or cannot support a judgment. See Ch. 122, Jury Charge, § 122.07[3][d].

Review by Mandamus. In In re Coppola, 2017 Tex. LEXIS 1150, at **7-8 (Tex. Dec. 15, 2017), another case illustrating the Texas Supreme Court's broad understanding of the "no adequate remedy on appeal" prong of the test for availability of mandamus, the Court held that a relator need only establish a trial court's abuse of discretion to demonstrate entitlement to mandamus relief with regard to a trial court's denial of a timely-filed motion to designate responsible third parties under Tex. Civ. Prac. \& Rem. Code § 33.004. See Ch. 152, Original Proceedings in Court of Appeals and Supreme Court,
§§ 152.03[1][b], 152.04[3].

## Business and Commercial Litigation

Texas Antitrust Act. In Champion Printing \& Copying LLC v. Nichols, 2017 Tex. App. LEXIS 7909 (Tex. App.Austin 2017, pet. denied) (mem. op), a plaintiff's live pleading failed to allege anticompetitive effects of appellee's actions and therefore no cognizable claim for illegal restraint of trade under Tex. Bus. \& Com. Code § 15.05(a). The restraint-oftrade cause of action was based on alleged interference with the plaintiff's contracts, but those facts do not allege illegal restraint of trade as it is recognized under the Texas Antitrust Act. See Ch. 200A, Texas Antitrust Laws, § 200A.10[3][b].

Compensation and Retention Pay Provisions. A court of appeals has held that a provision that contains no limits on repayment obligations on a compensation and retention pay provision will impose significant hardship on the employee by clawing back substantial compensation already paid (and on which taxes were paid) and injure the public by limiting choice and mobility of skilled employees [Rieves v. Buc-ee's Ltd., 532 S.W.3d 845, 2017 Tex. App. LEXIS 9580, *14 (Tex. App.-Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, no pet. h.)] See Ch 201, Covenants Not To Compete, § 201.04[3][a].
ERISA. The Fifth Circuit recently discussed the multi-step process for determining whether an ERISA plan administrator abused his discretion in construing a plan's terms. The first question is whether the reading of the plan is legally correct. If legally correct, the inquiry ends and there is no abuse of discretion. Alternatively, when the court finds that the administrator's interpretation was legally incorrect, it must then determine whether the decision was an abuse of discretion [Conn. Gen. Life Ins.

Co. v. Humble Surgical Hosp., L.L.C., 878 F.3d 478, 2017 U.S. App. LEXIS 25588, *6 (5th Cir. [Tex.] 2017)]. See Ch. 203, Employer-Employee Relations, § 203.24[3][c].

Immunity Under the Texas Tort Claims Act. Tex. Civ. Prac. \& Rem. Code § 101.106(f), part of the Texas Tort Claims Act, can afford governmental immunity against a tortious interference with contract claim. Section 101.106(f) mandates that plaintiffs pursue lawsuits against a governmental unit rather than its employees and provides qualified immunity against the individual employee if (1) the conduct was within the general scope of the individual's employment with a governmental unit; and (2) the tortious interference claim against the individual could have been brought against the governmental unit [Wilkerson v. Univ. of N. Tex., 878 F.3d 147, 159-162 (5th Cir. [Tex.] 2017)] See Ch. 205, Tortious Interference with Business Relations, § 205.05[5].

UCC Article 2 Revocation of Acceptance. A buyer is unable to revoke its acceptance when it substantially changes the good, altering its composition and function. Further, its continued use of the good with knowledge of its potential nonconforming nature precludes the buyer from revoking its acceptance. Thus, the proper remedy is a breach of warranty claim under Tex. Bus. \& Com. Code § 2.714 [Minsa Corp. v. SFTC, 2017 Tex. App. LEXIS 11034, *10 (Tex. App.-2017, no pet. h.)]. See Ch. 210, Sales, § 210.31[3].

Choice of Law in Guaranty Agreements. The Fifth Circuit noted that Texas law dictates that a choice of law clause in a guaranty agreement governs the substantive components of a lawsuit, but Texas procedural law will be applied. It also held
that a statute of limitations provision is most often procedural, although Texas recognizes that certain limitations periods are outside of the default procedural category [W.-Southern Life Assurance Co. v. Kaleh, 879 F.3d 653 (5th Cir.[Tex.] 2018)]. See Ch. 231, Guaranty Agreements, § $231.05[4]$.

Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. A company that collects debts that it purchased for its own account does not trigger the statutory definition of a "debt collector" under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. The Court held that by the plain language of the statute, it regulates debt collection only by debt collectors, not originators of the debt [Henson v. Santander Consumer USA Inc., 137 S. Ct. 1718, 1725-1726, 198 L. Ed. 2d 177 (2017)]. See Ch. 242, Unfair Collection Practices, § $242.04[1][\mathrm{c}]$.

## Personal Injury Litigation

## Health Care Claim Expert Report.

 Gracy Woods I Nursing Home v. Mahan, 520 S.W.3d 171 (Tex. App.—Austin 2017, no pet.) held that when an action alleges that negligence of a health care provider resulted in the claimant or patient being the victim of a crime on the provider's premises, an initial expert report is not required to address whether the alleged crime actually occurred. See Ch. 321, Medical Malpractice, § 321.15[1A].Staying Discover for Inadequate Expert Report. Harvey v. Kindred Healthcare Operating, Inc., 525 S.W.3d 281 (Tex. App.-Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, no pet.) held that when discovery is stayed because the claimant has not served an adequate expert report, the stay supersedes any docket control order issued by the trial court setting a deadline for discovery from or designation of expert witnesses. See Ch. 321, Medical Malpractice, § 321.15[3].

Release of Medical Records. Davenport v. Adu-Lartey, 526 S.W.3d 544 (Tex. App.-Houston [1st Dist] 2017, pet. filed), and, Borowski v. Ayers, 524 S.W.3d 292 (Tex. App.-Waco 2016, pet. filed) each held that when an authorization form for the release of medical records fails to identify all medical providers for the five years preceding the incident at issue, the form is fatally defective and does not toll limitations on the claim. See Ch. 321, Medical Malpractice, §§ 321.14[2], 321.101[1].

Status of Government Employee. Univ. of Tex. Health Sci. Ctr. v. Rios, 61 Tex. Sup. Ct. J. 174 (Tex. 2017) held that (1) the individual defendants' status as government employees under the election of remedies provision of the Tort Claims Act was established by judicial admissions in the plaintiff's petition; and (2) the statutory right to dismissal of the employees accrued when the motion was filed, and was not impaired by later amendments to the pleadings or motion for dismissal. See Ch. 293, Claims Against Governmental Entities, §§ 293.10[3][b], 293.16[3][a].

Governmental Immunity. Rosenberg Dev. Corp. v. Imperial Performing Arts, Inc., 526 S.W.3d 693 (Tex. App.-Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, pet. filed) held that a city's economic development corporation was a government unit eligible to appeal the denial of its plea to the jurisdiction but did not have immunity from suit on the claim. See Ch. 293, Claims Against Governmental Entities, § 293.10[3][a].

Police Officers's Personal Firearm. Annab v. Harris Cty., 524 S.W.3d 793 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 2017, pet. filed) held that: (1) any alleged negligence of a county in permitting its law enforcement officer to carry a personal firearm as his service weapon did not state a viable claim
under the Tort Claims Act because the county did not "use" the weapon merely by allowing the officer to use it; and (2) any negligent entrustment claim is barred when the employee rather than the government unit owns the property. See Ch. 293, Claims Against Governmental Entities, §§ 293.10[5][c], 293.12[11].

Continuous Motion. In re Coppola, 61 Tex. Sup. Ct. J. 170 (Tex. 2017) (per curiam) held that: (1) when a continuance motion is granted or the trial date is otherwise postponed by court order, the deadline to designate a responsible third party is likewise reset, and a motion made at least 60 days before the new trial date is timely; (2) mandamus is available to correct a clear abuse of discretion in denying a timely motion to designate; and (3) attorneys for the parties are not categorically exempt from designation. See Ch. 293, Claims Against Governmental Entities, § $291.03[2][\mathrm{b}]$.

TCPA. Elite Auto Body LLC v. Autocraft Bodywerks, Inc., 520 S.W.3d 191 (Tex. App.—Austin 2017, pet. filed) held that when a communication falls within one of the categories protected by the TCPA, an allegation that it is not constitutionally protected under the First Amendment does not remove it from the Act; instead, that issue is considered in the second step of whether the claimant has made out a prima facie case to defeat a motion for dismissal. See Ch. 333, Libel and Slander, § $333.42[1][\mathrm{b}]$.

Premises Liability. Lopez v. Ensign United States S. Drilling, LLC, 524 S.W.3d 836 (Tex. App.-Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, no pet.) held that: (1) when a contractor was hired to perform services at a well site, but a contractor's employee was injured by a condition of a stairwell on a drilling rig, Chapter 95 of the Civil Prac-
tices and Remedies Code limiting the owner's liability did not apply because the well and rig were separate improvements; but (2) the condition of the stairwell was both open and obvious and known to the claimant, so the owner had no duty and liability was barred. See Ch. 310, Premises Liability, §§ 310.02[3][a], [d], 310.05[2][d].

## Insurance Litigation

Third-Party Plaintiff. Ch. 322, Professional Malpractice has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas courts of appeals, including Eng'g \& Terminal Servs., L.P. v. Tarsco, Inc., 525 S.W.3d 394 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, pet. filed), which held that a third-party plaintiff asserting claims against a design professional is not required to file a certificate of merit, even if it is also the original plaintiff that commenced the action. See Ch. 322, Professional Malpractice, § 322.04[2][d][v].

Exclusions. Ch. 342, Uninsured Motorist Coverage has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas courts of appeals, including Johnson v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 520 S.W.3d 92 (Tex. App.-Austin 2017, pet. denied), which held that: (1) a policy provision excluding vehicles owned by or furnished for the regular use of the insured or a family member from the definition of uninsured or underinsured vehicles is enforceable; and (2) a rental car is available for "regular use" during the rental term, so the exclusion applies. See Ch. 342, Uninsured Motorist Coverage, § 342.01[4][b].

Family Member Exclusion. Ch. 341, Liability Insurance has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas courts of appeals, including Johnson v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 520 S.W.3d 92 (Tex. App.—Austin 2017, pet. denied), which applied the family member exclu-
sion of the standard Texas automobile liability policy and held that: (1) the exclusion is not unconscionable, and does not violate public policy or the state constitution; and (2) whether the exclusion applies is determined at the time of the auto accident, not when a claim is made. See Ch. 341, Liability Insurance, § 341.14[1].

## Real Estate Litigation

Damages for Slander of Title. Ch. 257, Real Property Security Interests has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas Supreme Court and courts of appeals, including Allen-Pieroni v. Pieroni, 61 Tex. Sup. Ct. J. 181 (Tex. 2017) (per curiam), which held that damages for slander of title are measured by the difference in the contract price for the lost sale and the price for which the property could be sold at the time of trial with the cloud removed, and the lost profit that the claimant would have derived from the sale is inconsequential. See Ch. 257, Real Property Security Interests, §§ 257.10, 257.13[1].

Easements. Ch. 281, Easements, has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas courts of appeals, including Lindemann Props. v. Campbell, 524 S.W.3d 873 (Tex. App.-Fort Worth 2017, pet. filed), which held that an express easement to construct and "maintain" a radio transmission tower permitted the holder to remove the tower entirely and replace it with a similar structure designed to fulfill the same purposes, even if the new tower was relocated. See Ch. 281, Easements, § 281.06[1][a].

Partition by Sale. Ch. 284, Partition has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas courts of appeals, including Carter v. Harvey, 525 S.W.3d 420 (Tex. App.-Fort Worth 2017, no pet.), which held that: (1) a person who merely owns an improvement on real property is not a
necessary party to an action to partition; and (2) partition by sale was proper when a real estate appraiser who was the only expert witness testified that it was not feasible to divide the property in kind without substantially impairing its value. See Ch. 284, Partition, §§ 284.01[3], 284.04.

Residential Construction Liability Act. Ch. 270A, Residential Construction Defect Disputed has been revised to address recent cases from the Texas courts of appeals, including Vision 20/20, Ltd. v. Cameron Builders, Inc., 525 S.W.3d 854 (Tex. App.-Houston [14th Dist.] 2017, no pet.), which applied the procedural and remedial limitations of the Residential Construction Liability Act and held that: (1) when a plumbing failure caused significant water damage to both the structure and components of a home, all resulting damages were part of the "construction defect" under the RCLA; and (2) a contractor need not show that it was prejudiced by the failure of the homeowner's assignee or subrogee to provide notice in order to claim the RCLA's limitations of liability. See Ch. 270A, Residential Construction Defect Disputed, §§ 270A.20[1], 270A. 21.

Chain of Conveyances. Radcliffe v. Tidal Petroleum, Inc., 521 S.W.3d 375 (Tex. App.-San Antonio 2017, pet. de-
nied) held that a conveyance that arises by operation of law due to the presumption of intestacy rather than by express grant does not break the chain of conveyances from the sovereign for purposes of a trespass-to-try-title claim. Ch. 251, Trespass to Trial Title, § 251.02[2].

## Family Law Proceedings

Child Support. The Texas Supreme Court has held that a trial court may consider direct payments either to the other parent or to a third party in deciding whether an arrearage exists, even if the original support order specifies a different manner of payment [Ochsner v. Ochsner, 517 S.W.3d 717, 722-725 (Tex. 2016)]. See Ch. 372, Enforcement of SAPCR Orders, § 372.04[2][a].

## Administrative Proceedings

When Exhaustion of Administrative Remedies Not Required. This update includes a discussion of Hunt v. City of Diboll, 532 S.W.3d 904, 921 (Tex. App.Tyler 2017, pet. filed) in which the appellate court held that if a statute setting forth administrative remedies is not operative or effective, parties are not required to exhaust administrative remedies before seeking judicial relief. See Ch. 423, Judicial Review of Contested Cases, § 423.02[3][a].

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# DORSANEO, TEXAS LITIGATION GUIDE 

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