

Speaker Biographies



Dr. Debra Austin, JD, PhD is a nationally recognized expert in professional well-being. She writes and speaks about how neuroscience and psychology research can help law students, lawyers, and other professionals improve their performance and well-being by enhancing brain health and mental strength. She teaches Lawyering Process, Regenerative Leadership, and Professionalism and Well-being Skills for the Effective Lawyer. She received the University of Denver Distinguished Teaching Award in 2019 and the William T. Driscoll Master Educator Award in 2001.

Dr. Austin is the author of *The Legal Brain: A Lawyer's Guide to Well-being and Better Job Performance*, Cambridge University Press (2024), an essential guide for legal professionals seeking to understand the impact of chronic stress on their brain and mental health. The book translates complex scientific concepts into actionable advice for those looking to enhance their well-being and thrive amidst the demands and stressors of the profession. Chapters cover optimizing cognitive fitness and performance, avoiding or healing cognitive damage, and protecting “the lawyer brain.” This book provides valuable insights and strategies for building resilience, maintaining peak performance, and protecting your most important asset - your brain.



Justice Jeffrey S. Bivins took office as a member of the Tennessee Supreme Court on July 16, 2014. He was appointed by Governor Bill Haslam. He was elected to the remainder of the full term in August 2016. He was reelected in August 2022 to another eight-year term. Justice Bivins served as Chief Justice from September 2016 through August 2021. Prior to his appointment to the Tennessee Supreme Court, Justice Bivins was a judge on the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals from 2011 until July 2014. Previously, Justice Bivins also served as Circuit Court Judge for the 21st Judicial District of Tennessee. He is a 1986 graduate of Vanderbilt University

School of Law. He received a B.A. Degree, magna cum laude, in 1982 from East Tennessee State University, with a major in political science and a minor in criminal justice. Justice Bivins is a past President of the Tennessee Judicial Conference.



James J. Grogan is an Illinois lawyer and educator who concentrates his practice in professional responsibility and lawyer ethics law. Mr. Grogan received an undergraduate degree from Lewis University in 1977 and his J.D. degree from the Loyola University of Chicago School of Law in 1980. He retired in 2019 as the Deputy Administrator and the Chief Counsel of the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission of the Supreme Court of Illinois (ARDC) where, for almost 40 years, he investigated and prosecuted hundreds of charges of lawyer misconduct and argued dozens of disciplinary cases in the Supreme Court of Illinois. Mr. Grogan is a Past President of the National Organization of Bar Counsel (NOBC), the bar association of lawyer

regulators. For over 36 years he has taught legal ethics, first at the DePaul University College of Law and then at the Loyola University of Chicago School of Law, where he is an Adjunct Professor. Over the course of his career, he has presented over twelve-hundred speeches, lectures

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and workshops to law firms, bar associations, corporations and judicial and governmental groups and agencies on various lawyer regulation topics. He has also served as an ethics consultant and an expert witness regarding a variety of lawyer regulatory concerns.



Chief Justice Holly Kirby In 1995, at the age of 38, Justice Holly Kirby became a gender milestone, the first woman in Tennessee history to serve on the Tennessee Court of Appeals. In 2014, after she had served on the intermediate appellate court for almost 19 years, Justice Kirby was appointed to the Tennessee Supreme Court by Governor Bill Haslam. She served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 2023 through September 2025.

A lifelong Tennessean, Justice Kirby earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Memphis where she graduated with high honors, with a B.S. in mechanical engineering. In 1982, Justice Kirby graduated from the University of Memphis School of Law with high honors. She then served as judicial law clerk on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. After her clerkship, Justice Kirby joined the Memphis law firm of Burch, Porter & Johnson, where she became the firm's first female partner.

A career appellate jurist, Justice Kirby has participated in many thousands of appellate decisions from across the state. From the time of her appointment to the Court of Appeals to the present, Justice Kirby has won 6 statewide elections.

The University of Memphis chose Justice Kirby as the University's Outstanding Young Alumna in 1996, Outstanding Alumna for the College of Engineering in 2002, Special Distinguished Alumna for the School of Law in 2016, and a Pillar of Excellence for the School of Law in 2025. She has received the Marion Griffin-Frances Loring Award from the Memphis Association for Women Attorneys, The Distinguished Leadership Award from Women in Numbers, and was named Community Mother of the Year by the Tennessee Justice Center. As Chief Justice, Justice Kirby received the Justice Frank F. Drowota III Award in 2024 and the TBA's President's Award in 2025.



Lucian Pera is a partner with the Memphis Office of Adams & Reese, LLP. His practice includes legal ethics, media law, and commercial litigation. He represents lawyers, law firms, and others on issues of legal ethics and lawyer professional responsibility. The ABA Center for Professional Responsibility has bestowed on him the prestigious Michael Franck Award, their highest award for work in the field of ethics and professional responsibility over his career. He served for 5 years on the ABA "Ethics 2000" Commission, which rewrote the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct.

He has chaired the editorial board of the *ABA/BNA Lawyers' Manual on Professional Conduct* and served as president of the Association of Professional Responsibility Lawyers.

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Bill Ramsey joined Womble Bond Dickinson in August of this year after a successful career with Neal & Harwell in Nashville. He is highly regarded in the entertainment industry for representing prominent artists, entertainers, and key figures in the music business, including business managers, financial advisors, talent agents publishers, and record labels. As a dedicated advocate, Bill consistently achieves exceptional outcomes for his clients, many of which remain confidential due to the sensitive nature of the matters involved. In recognition of his work, he has been included in Billboard's Top Music Lawyers list since 2003.

Bill has been named "Best of the Bar" on multiple occasions for his work in litigation and technology. He also received the David Rutherford Award from the Nashville Bar Association. Bill has a strong interest in technical issues and applies that expertise to the practice of law. "The Bill Show" travels to various organizations and trade shows to share the latest tech gadgets for work and entertainment. Additionally, he writes a monthly article for the *Nashville Bar Journal* and many other legal publications.

Bill owns and operates his family's farm in Viola, Tennessee, where he was born and raised. He applies the wisdom he learned from his father and other farmers to all aspects of his life, including the practice of law.



Buddy Stockwell was appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court on July 1, 2020, as the new Executive Director of the Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program (TLAP). Stockwell comes from south Louisiana where he was volunteer and program monitor for the state's Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse since 1993, and Executive Director of Louisiana's LAP from 2010 to 2020. He is a Certified Clinical Interventionist through "Love First" training at the Betty Ford Center and he has supported hundreds of bar members, bar applicants, and family members of the bar with a wide range of substance use disorders and mental health issues. He has also personally been in recovery for 42 years. Stockwell earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Management from Louisiana State University in 1989 and a Juris Doctor degree from LSU School of Law in 1993. He currently serves on the ABA's Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs (CoLAP) and is Chair of the ABA CoLAP's Committee on LAPs that provide formal recovery monitoring.