Brandon Aghamalian
President, Focused Advocacy

"Keynote Speaker: Telecom & Cable Right-of-Way Lawsuits"

Brandon Aghamalian is the president of Focused Advocacy and co-founder of the company's Local Government Practice. His primary focus is representing cities, counties, and other local government entities before the Texas Legislature. Mr. Aghamalian also leads the company's business development strategies and efforts.

Mr. Aghamalian is recognized as an expert on local government issues including transportation, economic development programs, and water districts. Over the course of his career, Mr. Aghamalian has represented dozens of municipalities across Texas while helping his clients pass hundreds of pieces of legislation over his career. He has also consulted with Fortune 500 companies, professional sports teams and large trade associations.

His background with economic development programs is notable including instrumental roles in the passage of the Texas Economic Development Act (Chapter 313 Tax Code), the Convention Center Hotel Financing Act, the Texas Moving Image Fund, the Texas Enterprise Fund and the Texas Special Events Trust Funds. He has consulted on several corporate projects across the state to successfully secure millions of dollars in tax incentives for clients expanding and building facilities in Texas.

From 2002 to 2006, Mr. Aghamalian served as the Director of Government Relations for the City of Fort Worth during the administrations of Mayors Kenneth Barr and Mike Moncrief.

Before that, Mr. Aghamalian worked as the Chief-of-Staff to State Representative Kim Brimer, was the Director of the House Committee on Business & Industry, and also served as the Legislative Director for Rep. Todd Smith. Prior to joining Focused Advocacy, Mr. Aghamalian founded and led a very successful Local Government Practice at HillCo Partners from 2006 to 2010.

Mr. Aghamalian is a graduate of Texas State University in San Marcos where he was an NCAA scholarship track athlete and student body vice president while he earned a Bachelor's degree in accounting.

In 2000, he earned a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the UT School of Law and a Masters of Public Affairs from the LBJ School.

He is a proud husband, the father of three children, and an avid baseball fan and a musician in a local rock band.

Joshua Blank, PhD
Research Director,
Texas Politics at UT-Austin

"Roundtable: The Legislature's Orientation Towards Cities"

Joshua Blank, PhD, is the Research Director of the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas at Austin.

Born in New York, New York, Dr. Blank has a bachelor's degree in political science from Boston University and a doctoral degree in government from the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Blank has played a primary role in most of the major public statewide polls conducted in Texas since 2010. His interests include public opinion, campaigns and elections, voter behavior, social psychology and computational social science research methods.

Robby Chapman
Presiding Municipal Court Judge,
City of West Lake Hills, Rollingwood, Manor, and Johnson City

Director of Clerk Education, Texas Municipal Courts Education Center

"Municipal Court"

Robby Chapman serves as Presiding Judge for the cities of West Lake Hills, Rollingwood, Manor, and Johnson City. He is also currently the Director of Clerk Education for the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center, which provides continuing judicial education to municipal judges and court clerks throughout Texas.

Judge Chapman previously served as Assistant District Attorney for Nueces County and as the municipal prosecutor for the City of Cedar Park. Judge Chapman earned his Doctor of Jurisprudence from St. Mary's University School of Law and Bachelor of Arts from The University of Texas at Austin. He has spoken on issues affecting courts for state and national groups, including the
Christopher Collins
Investigative Journalist, Texas Observer
"Environmental & Utilities"
Christopher Collins is an investigative journalist based in Abilene. The Wichita Falls native graduated from Midwestern State University in 2012 with a degree in Mass Communication. He previously has worked as a reporter at the Abilene Reporter-News and the Wichita Falls Times Record News, along with running a freelance reporting business. At the Observer, he writes about rural Texas. He can be reached on Twitter (@collins_reports) or at collins@texasobserver.org.

Georgia Crump
Energy & Utility Practice Group—Chair, Lloyd Gosselin Rochelle & Townsend, P.C.
"Utilities & Transportation"
Georgia chairs the firm’s Energy and Utility Practice Group, focusing her practice on utility and telecommunications issues, and municipal law. She represents both private and municipal clients and has been actively involved in municipal law and utility administrative law throughout her legal career.

Leela Fireside
Assistant City Attorney, City of Austin
"Finance"
Leela Fireside is an Assistant City Attorney in the City of Austin Law Department. Her areas of practice include municipal finance and bond-related contracts, ordinances, and issues for the City of Austin; answering questions about lawful use of fees, hotel occupancy taxes, and other city funds; assisting with the process to adopt the city’s tax rate and budget each year; drafting agreements for public private partnerships; training for lawyers and financial staff.

Joshua Haley
Attorney, TMU Intergovernmental Risk Pool
"Public Safety—First Responders"
Joshua Haley has been an attorney at the Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool for over 14 years. The Risk Pool provides Texas cities and other units of local government with a stable source of risk financing and loss prevention services. In addition to handling litigation, contract, employment, legislative, and self-insurance coverage matters at the Risk Pool, Mr. Haley has written papers and presented topics on various employment law, open government, public officials’ liability, first responder, and workers’ compensation issues. He earned his law degree from Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law in 2004 and was licensed as an attorney by the State Bar of Texas the same year.

Harvey Kronberg
Entrepreneur, The Quorum Report
"Keynote Speaker: What Happened to Cities?"
Serial entrepreneur Harvey Kronberg publishes two online news services, Quorum Report and the Texas Energy Report. In addition, he owns Austin Flag and Flagpole with his wife Michele. Kronberg is also the political analyst for YNN. At YNN, Kronberg also appears in a personalized weekly political commentary.
Christopher L. Nichols ("Chris") has been in private practice since May 2002. He is a proud graduate of Texas Tech University School of Law (2001) and received his B.A. from Baylor University in 1996. Mr. Nichols has been working in city government since 2007 and is the principal and managing attorney of The Nichols Firm, PLLC, in Houston, where he focuses on representing municipalities and economic development corporations in all local government matters as well as community associations (HOAs, POAs, etc.) Mr. Nichols regularly speaks at Texas Municipal League/Texas City Attorneys Association Conferences on issues ranging from land use to municipal revenue sources.

Grady Randle
President, Randle Law Offices, L.L.P.
"Public Safety—Disaster"

Texas native J. Grady Randle concentrates his practice in municipal law in Houston and the surrounding counties. Mr. Randle represents governmental entities and local municipalities in litigation, employment, regulation, land development, zoning, land use, and other matters so numerous, humorous and salacious that he has threatened to write a tell all book. If you have worked in local government for any length of time, you know what I mean. He serves as a city attorney for cities that seem to be 45 miles from his office—except he does represent the Village Fire Department in Houston, which is thankfully only 2 exits from his office. His Baylor Law School training prepared him as a litigator, and he has argued before the Texas Supreme Court and the Federal 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. In addition, Mr. Randle has a wealth of experience in the areas of business formation and litigation-related commercial contracts, business torts, construction, commercial landlord-tenant law, trademarks, copyrights, wills, and probate.

Kimberly Reeves
Freelance Journalist, Quorum Report
"Roundtable: The Legislature’s Orientation Towards Cities"

Kimberly Reeves is a long-time Capitol press corps freelancer. She has spent 10 years apiece in Austin and Houston, covering local government for online and print publications. At the Capitol, she has written for the online Quorum Report for more than 20 years. For the last three sessions, Reeves has been the legislative stringer for the four American City Business Journals in Texas. She’s also worked behind the scenes at four television stations in the Austin and Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Gunnar Seaquist
Attorney,
Bickerstaff, Heath, Delgado, Acosta, LLP
"Human Resources"

Gunnar focuses his practice on litigation and counseling on behalf of both public and private entities. Before joining Bickerstaff, he practiced for over five years in the General Litigation and Tax divisions of the Texas Office of the Attorney General. He has extensive experience in litigation, having tried cases to both judges and juries. Gunnar represents clients in matters involving commercial disputes, personal injury, land use, real estate, construction defects, employment practices, eminent domain, voting rights, statutory and constitutional rights, and regulatory compliance. Gunnar also advises private clients on compliance with state and federal laws and administrative regulations, and counsels governmental entities on issues of open government, governmental procedure, and contracting.

Caroline Webster
Assistant City Attorney,
City of Austin
"Elections"

Caroline Webster graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 1994 and began working for the Travis County Clerk as a legislative Aide and then as an Elections Specialist, running all aspects of the County’s election day program. After several years there, Ms. Webster moved on to the Elections Division of the Texas Secretary of State’s Office, where she worked as a staff attorney. She remained at that office for most of the rest of her professional career, until May of 2018, when she accepted a position as an assistant City Attorney for the City of Austin. At the city, Ms. Webster focuses on elections as well as on open government and ethics issues.

Charles E. Zech
Partner,
Denton, Navarro, Rocha, Bernal & Zech PC
"Open Government"

Charlie is a shareholder in the law firm Denton, Navarro, Rocha, Bernal & Zech PC. He represents local government entities, officials and employees across the state of Texas. He married way out of his league, was forced into the ownership of four dogs, listens to a variety of musical styles at high volume, likes to road bike, and has one daughter—who just went over one hundred thousand followers on Twitter. He has been told by his daughter that this is a very big deal.