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### **The Virginia Bar Association urges funding to fill judicial vacancies**

RICHMOND (March 2, 2012) — The Virginia Bar Association strongly supports the crafting of a state budget that appropriates funds to fill as many of the 48 existing judicial vacancies as possible.

The VBA, the largest voluntary association of lawyers and judges in the Commonwealth, actively advocates for law reform to improve the administration of justice and to enhance access to justice.

“We firmly believe that unfilled judicial vacancies, and the resulting case overload in our courts, creates a severe detriment to the sound and efficient administration of justice in the Commonwealth, and restricts access to justice by our citizens,” said Hugh M. Fain III, president of the VBA.

Because of a freeze on hiring judges in 2010 followed by continuing state budget concerns, as well as judges’ mandatory retirement at age 70, a number of judicial positions have gone unfilled. In some judicial districts and circuits, judges now handle caseloads double the state average.

On February 19, the Virginia House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance Committee reported their 2012–2014 budget recommendations. The House approved its bill that proposes hiring 32 more judges. The Senate version, which was defeated, recommended adding 10 more judges. The Senate also rejected the House version. Yesterday (March 1), the House unanimously voted to reintroduce its budget plan for reconsideration.

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According to data available from Virginia Supreme Court, 48 openings on the bench exist and 16 retirements are expected in 2013, before the end of this budget cycle.

"We were pleased to see that versions of the budget proposed in both houses of the General Assembly included funding to fill judicial vacancies unfunded in previous budgets," Fain said. "The VBA encourages both the House and Senate to continue to work to develop a budget that will fill as many vacancies as possible.

"We also encourage our legislators to consider the available caseload statistics during their deliberations and to fill vacancies in those jurisdictions where the courts are handling caseloads significantly in excess of normal capacity," Fain said.

### **About The Virginia Bar Association**

The Virginia Bar Association, the state's oldest and largest voluntary bar association, with about 5,500 members, is the independent voice of the Virginia lawyer, advancing the highest ideals of the profession through advocacy and volunteer service.

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