

About *V·B·A*

The Virginia Bar Association

A tradition of debates

In 1985, The Virginia Bar Association (VBA) began a tradition of sponsoring debates between the Virginia gubernatorial candidates during its summer meetings in an Allegheny Mountains resort.

The first VBA-sponsored debate for U.S. Senate hopefuls took place in 1994, with the four-way race among retired Marine Col. Oliver L. North, former Attorney General J. Marshall Coleman, U.S. Sen. Charles S. Robb and former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder. That newer tradition has continued with the 1996, 2000, 2006, 2008 and 2012 Senate contests.

History of the VBA

In July 1888, more than 100 attorneys met in Virginia Beach. They formed what is now The Virginia Bar Association, a voluntary membership organization for lawyers.

For 50 years, the VBA was the only statewide bar association. That changed in 1938 when, after 13 years of work by VBA members, the Virginia State Bar was created by statute. The VSB is a regulatory agency for the legal profession and is not part of the VBA. Virginia is one of only a few states in the nation with both voluntary (VBA) and mandatory (VSB) statewide bar groups.

Who can join

All licensed Virginia lawyers and lawyers in good standing of the bar in other states and the District of Columbia are eligible for full membership in the VBA. Membership also is extended to all Virginia judges and lawyer-legislators; law school faculty; government and public service lawyers; retired and disabled attorneys; and law students. The VBA is the largest statewide voluntary bar group in Virginia.

The purpose of the VBA

From its inception to today, the VBA addresses the many facets of the practice of law and promotes programs that preserve the efficient and equitable administration of justice. Its members seek to improve the law, serve the people of Virginia and engage with like-minded lawyers. The VBA actively supports and proposes statutory changes before the Virginia General Assembly that are in the public interest and selectively opposes those not in the public interest.

VBA Programming and Conferences

In addition to The Virginia Bar Association's signature membership conventions, its Annual Meeting held every January in Williamsburg and Summer Meeting held every July generally in a mountain resort, the VBA offers a wide variety of substantive law programs and supports other affiliated legal education opportunities to benefit its members.

Section Programs

The VBA offers 19 substantive law sections, or subgroups, that connect practitioners in specific areas of the law. These facilitate the sharing of information on recent developments and practice pointers to aid lawyers in the day-to-day representation of clients. Many of these sections play host to annual conferences and roundtable meetings to educate their members on current practice trends. They often provide continuing legal education (CLE) credits, which are required by practicing attorneys in Virginia. A full listing of our programs may be viewed on our calendar, found online at vba.org/calendar.

Divisions

Two former sections have become divisions with broad-based involvement.

All VBA members belong to the **Law Practice Management Division** (vba.org/lpmd). The division was established to help lawyers balance their personal and professional lives and to assist lawyers and law firms of all sizes in the management, administration and conduct of their individual practices. The division presents varied programming and recently studied, compiled and released the "VBA Best Practices Guide" on client engagement.

The **Young Lawyers Division** (vba.org/yld) comprises lawyers age 36 and younger, as well as those having been admitted to their first bar less than three years earlier. The activities of the division consistently involve service to the public and the bar. About 40 committees or projects remain active at a time, many of which have received recognition from the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division as the most outstanding programs in the nation.

Affiliated Programs

The VBA provides administrative support for a variety of programs that serve our mission of advancing the ideals of the profession through advocacy and volunteer service:

Capital Defense Workshop – Nov. 15-16, Hilton Richmond Hotel & Spa: An annual training in defense of capital cases, this workshop is presented by the VBA Criminal Law Section and financed by the Virginia Law Foundation. This program offers 10 hours of continuing legal

education credits, the amount required to meet the criteria for representation of those accused in capital murder cases.

Boyd-Graves Conference (Invitation Only): The Boyd-Graves Conference brings together select legal scholars to develop an annual comprehensive civil law reform agenda vetted by all attendees. Participation is balanced between plaintiff and defense attorneys, with an aim toward improving statutes and procedures governing civil litigation in Virginia.

Pro Bono Summit: In 2010, the initial Chief Justice's Pro Bono Summit called together volunteer lawyers, bar association leaders, legal aid representatives and members of the judiciary to discuss Virginia lawyers' donation of professional services to those in need. Then-Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. urged statewide bar associations and particularly The Virginia Bar Association "to assist with the planning of a bold and comprehensive statewide initiative for Virginia's lawyers and law firms so that we can significantly increase the provision of legal services to the poor."

In 2012, the VBA organized another summit meeting to mark progress since 2010 on collaborative efforts in providing legal services to low-income individuals, discuss challenges and present goals to be accomplished locally, statewide and nationally. Pro bono award winners from local, state and specialty bar associations and legal aid organizations were recognized. Discussions included JusticeServer, a cost-saving case management system developed by Capital One Financial Corp. that is expected to be implemented statewide next year. Shortly after the program was announced in January, Central Virginia law firms pledged \$170,000 to implement JusticeServer. The program is in pilot testing in the region.

Sampling of VBA Community Service Programs

Virginia Law Foundation and The Virginia Bar Association Rule of Law Project: This program aims to change fundamentally the way the rule of law is taught in America's schools. Under the rule of law, the people make the laws, which are to be fairly and equally applied to everyone, and the people agree to obey those laws. This unique educational program, involving members of local bar associations and middle school civics teachers, explains the origin, meaning and applicability of the rule of law as the basis of the freedoms we enjoy as American citizens. Through a collaboration among teachers, lawyers and judges, students can be empowered at a formative age to become active and engaged citizens as adults. Since its pilot program under the VBA in 2009, the project has been presented in 35 school districts and more than 30 have expressed an interest in participating this fall. Learn more online at ruleoflaw-vba.org/

VBA Veterans Initiative: At its 2009 annual meeting, the VBA Committee on Special Issues of National & State Importance presented the program, "A Nation in Debt: Our Obligations to Service members Returning From Combat—Iraq, Afghanistan and Beyond." The session shined

a spotlight on the legal problems that Virginians commonly face upon their return from overseas military duty. That led to a VBA awareness and fundraising campaign in 2010 during Veterans Legal Services Month, which is November. As a result, the VBA created a database of attorneys willing to provide free or reduced-cost legal advice to military veterans on topics ranging from bankruptcy to landlord/tenant matters to wills, estates and trusts. The money raised aided the Veterans Benefits Clinic at the College of William & Mary, where law students assist veterans with filing claims and appealing adverse decisions for compensation with Veterans Affairs. A similar campaign in 2011 added to the database and funds raised supported HMOVHE, Helping Military Veterans through Higher Education. A consortium of Virginia schools plus the community college system, HMOVHE coordinates college resources to assist veterans and service members with their legal, medical and veteran benefits needs. Learn more at: vba.org/veterans

VBA Young Lawyers Division Programs

Legal Food Frenzy: A recent study by Feeding America found that more than 1 million Virginians are considered “food insecure.” A collaboration among the Office of the Attorney General, The Virginia Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, and the Federation of Virginia Food Banks assists in filling that need. The three groups joined efforts in 2007 to create the statewide Legal Food Frenzy—a food and fund drive among all Virginia law firms and organizations. In this friendly competition, the law firm or organization that donates the most receives the Attorney General’s Cup. In two weeks during April 2012, nearly 160 law firms and legal departments across Virginia raised the equivalent of more than 1.4 million pounds of food for food banks statewide. Since the competition began, the legal community has collected and contributed 8.5 million pounds of food for needy Virginians. Virginia’s Legal Food Frenzy model is now being used in Massachusetts, Georgia and other states.

Disaster Legal Assistance: Together with the Virginia State Bar Young Lawyers Conference Emergency Legal Services Committee, the VBA Disaster Legal Assistance Committee trains and coordinates attorneys willing to volunteer their time to assist individuals rendered needy by emergency situations such as natural disasters. When an emergency situation arises, members of the Committee and the volunteer attorneys they have trained provide pro bono legal services to victims of disasters.

Lawyers for the Arts: The Lawyers for the Arts Committee is dedicated to providing legal information to artists, arts organizations and nonprofit organizations. Working in partnership with local art communities and nonprofits, we hold clinics and seminars in the Richmond, Tidewater, Northern Virginia and Charlottesville areas for artists and art organizations focusing on areas of the law in which they have a particular interest.

Pro Bono Hotlines: This VBA Young Lawyer Division initiative actively recruits volunteers to provide telephone advice to callers who meet financial eligibility requirements, thereby easing the caseload of legal aid attorneys. A top priority of the Young Lawyer Division and of the VBA, hotlines exist in several areas with further expansion planned. The Pro Bono Hotlines received the American Bar Association's 1995 Harrison Tweed Award, the highest national honor for projects providing legal services to the indigent.

Learn more about The Virginia Bar Association on our website: www.vba.org

The VBA mission

The Virginia Bar Association is the independent voice of the Virginia lawyer, advancing the highest ideals of the profession through advocacy and volunteer service. The VBA provides many avenues to assist members in the legal profession, ranging from educational programming, social events, community service opportunities, and benefits.

The numbers

The VBA's 5,500 members include attorneys from firms large and small across Virginia. About two-thirds work in smaller firms – those with 14 or fewer lawyers. More than 10 percent of our members are judges and lawyer-legislators.

In 2011, the VBA organized 17 conferences, meetings and seminars that featured educational presentations. Those offerings included more than 80 programs that offered 99 CLE credit hours.

Media contact

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