

# REPORTS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEES

## SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES

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In 1999, the Access Committee worked closely with the Virginia State Bar Council and VSB President John A.C. Keith to develop and promote a new initiative. At Mr. Keith's and Council's direction, the committee refined language for a *Resolution to Enhance Pro Bono Publico Service* in Virginia. The initiative was originally conceived by the committee several years ago as a proposed stand-alone rule of court to encourage the voluntary formation of Pro Bono Committees in each of Virginia's judicial circuits.

As adopted by Council in February of 1999, however, the revised public service initiative, now in resolution format, seeks to encourage cooperation between VSB, the Supreme Court of Virginia, and the voluntary bar associations. In the resolution, VSB agrees to make technical assistance available to groups and coalitions at the local, regional, or judicial circuit level that are trying to assess and address unmet and emerging needs for legal services. The resolution ([www.vsb.probono](http://www.vsb.probono)) also directs the bar to provide opportunities for lawyers to voluntarily describe their public service contributions so that the public might be better informed about the impact and extent of lawyers' pro bono work. While continuing their ongoing outreach efforts to other bar sections and committees, Access Committee members are drafting plans to foster statewide implementation of the resolution.

Aside from its special focus on the resolution project, the committee pursued its traditional mission in several ways. First, it helped to **maintain and enhance the existing legal services delivery system**. It included groups, who responded to its 1998 provider survey, in expanded volunteer recruitment efforts through the bar's "Pro Bono Opportunities" column in the *Virginia Lawyer* magazine. It welcomed the Pro Bono Committee of the Virginia Court Reporters Association to its list of law-related volunteer groups willing to assist Virginia's legal services providers. And, as Congress continued to seriously under-fund and restrict the work of grantees of the national Legal Services Corporation, the committee worked with the Legal Services Corporation of Virginia to promote alternative funding sources.

Consistent with the goal of stabilizing Virginia's network of licensed providers, the committee co-sponsored, along with the VSB Tax Law Section, an ethics CLE on lawyer giving to *law-related charities* during the bar's Annual Meeting. The CLE effort was held in recognition of the expanded definition of pro bono under Rule 6.1 that includes lawyer philanthropy as a pro bono activity. Again, in accordance with its wish to educate lawyers about the new rules, the committee also sponsored the second annual *Meet the Grantmakers* seminar at the Pro Bono Conference in May. That event again provided a forum for donors and grantors to exchange views with legal services providers as well as legal information and referral programs. The committee also continued to **promote awareness of Rules 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3** of the new Virginia Rules of Professional Conduct through articles in bar publications and via targeted outreach to new admittees.

Entitled "Emerging Community Needs: Exploring Diversity in Public Interest and Poverty Law," the May 1999 Pro Bono Conference fulfilled another component of the committee's mission by **informing lawyers about the spectrum of high quality service opportunities** that are available for volunteers who bring varied skill sets and philosophical orientations to the concept of pro bono work. In this vein, the committee was pleased to welcome to its conference faculty, representatives of the Charlottesville-based Rutherford Institute and several religious/cultural institutions.

The committee continues to **recognize attorneys for their many and varied contributions** in advancing the Commonwealth's goal of making adequate legal representation available to all. Members were delighted to honor the Legal Division of Freddie Mac with the 1999 Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Pro Bono Award. The first corporate entity to be so recognized by the bar in Virginia, Freddie Mac was acknowledged for its longstanding professional and foundation support of projects designed to benefit the needy children and their families who are served by Legal Services of Northern Virginia. In another arena, the committee presented Alex R. Gulotta, executive director of the Charlottesville-Albemarle Legal Aid Society, with the Virginia Legal Aid Award. Alex was honored at a special luncheon during the bar's annual meeting in Virginia Beach where Virginia pro bono attorney Nora Raum (also of National Public Radio) was the guest speaker.

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Members wish to extend their deep appreciation to John Keith for making pro bono publico service a priority during his year as VSB president and to the Conference of Local Bar Associations for including Committee Vice-chair John Whitfield as a presenter at the BLI. They would also like to cite the VSB Young Lawyers Conference for coordinating with legal aid on several important projects designed to educate lawyers, businesses and the public about representation and social service options when domestic violence is a concern. ❁