

Virginia State Bar



Access to Justice

**Free and Low Cost
Legal Resources
in Virginia**

A guide for helping
low- and modest-income Virginians
obtain legal services

Facts about the Justice Gap in Virginia

- The *Justice Gap* has been defined as the difference between the level of legal assistance available and the level that is necessary to meet the needs of poor Americans.
- Over 80 percent of the civil legal needs of the poor in Virginia and nationwide go unmet.
- Individuals who are represented by counsel are twice as likely to have a favorable outcome versus those who are unrepresented.
- One in eight Virginians (approximately one million Virginians) is eligible for free legal services from Virginia's legal aid programs; however, there are not enough legal aid lawyers to provide representation – fewer than 140 legal aid lawyers.
- There is one legal aid lawyer per 7,237 poor people in Virginia vs. one lawyer per 349 Virginians.

The Right to Counsel

The Sixth Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees the rights of criminal defendants, including the right “to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.” Although the US Supreme Court held in *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) that there is a constitutional right to court appointed counsel for indigent defendants in criminal proceedings, there is no right to a free lawyer for low- and modest-income parties in civil actions. Such actions include:

- securing or maintaining custody of their children,
- maintaining safe and habitable housing,
- obtaining protection from abusive relationships,
- securing access to critical health care, and
- receiving disability payments.

Lawyers are not required to do pro bono work. Unfortunately, too often litigants are forced to represent themselves.

Options for Legal Assistance by Counsel

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Licensed Legal Aid Organizations

There are nine legal aid programs serving Virginia. These programs help low-income families and individuals maintain the basics of life: income, shelter, food, health care, education, and family stability and range in size from eight employees to eighty. Volunteer lawyers also assist these organizations through pro bono programs. Please contact your local legal aid office for more information about the services offered and types of cases handled. You may also call 1-866-LEGLAID (1-866-534-5243) to reach your local legal aid office.

- **Blue Ridge Legal Services** – (540) 433-1830. Provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents of the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke Valley of Virginia; main office in Harrisonburg, offices in Winchester, Lexington, and Roanoke.
- **Central Virginia Legal Aid Society** – (804) 200-6046 or (804) 648-1012. Provides free civil legal assistance to low-income people who live in, or have legal problems arising in, Richmond, Petersburg, Hopewell, Colonial Heights, and Charlottesville and the counties of Albemarle, Charles City, Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Hanover, Henrico, Louisa, Nelson, New Kent, Powhatan, Prince George, and Surry; main office in Richmond, offices in Petersburg and Charlottesville.
- **Legal Aid Works** (formerly Rappahannock Legal Services) – (540) 371-1105. Provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents; main office in Fredericksburg with additional offices in Culpeper and Tappahannock.
- **Legal Aid Justice Center** – (434) 977-0553. Provides assistance with critical legal problems for low-income individuals and communities through zealous individual representation, group and class litigation, community organizing, policy advocacy, and media relations; main office in Charlottesville, offices in Richmond, Petersburg, and Falls Church.
- **Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia** – (757) 627-5423. Provides free civil legal services to low-income residents of Accomack, Chesapeake, Gloucester, Hampton, James City, Mathews, Middlesex, Newport News, Norfolk, Northampton, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg, and Yorktown; main office in Norfolk, offices in Hampton, Virginia Beach, Belle Haven, and Williamsburg.
- **Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley** – (540) 344-2088. Provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents of the Roanoke Valley, including a full range of legal services in select cases; in Roanoke.

- **Legal Services of Northern Virginia** – (703) 778-6800. Provides free legal services to people living in the following cities and counties: Arlington County, Alexandria, Falls Church, Manassas, Fairfax County, Loudon County, Prince William County, Herndon, Manassas Park, Vienna, and limited legal services to low-income residents of Caroline, Culpeper, Essex, Fauquier, King & Queen, King William, Lancaster, Madison, Northumberland, Orange, Rappahannock, Richmond, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Westmoreland Counties; main office in Falls Church, with offices in Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Leesburg, and Manassas.
- **Southwest Virginia Legal Aid** – (888) 201-2772. Provides free civil legal services to low-income families in seventeen counties and four small cities in southwestern Virginia; main office in Marion, with offices in Castlewood and Christiansburg.
- **Virginia Legal Aid Society** – (434) 455-3080. Provides free civil legal services to low-income residents in twenty counties and six cities in Central, Southside, and Western Tidewater Virginia; main office in Lynchburg, offices in Danville, Farmville, and Suffolk.

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Independent Pro Bono Legal Services Providers

- **Legal Information Network for Cancer (LINC)** provides legal, financial, and community resources to individuals confronted with issues arising from the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. (804) 562-0371 ext 101
- **Virginia Bar Association (VBA)** assists Virginia service members getting ready to deploy or returning from deployment find an attorney to assist with their legal services needs on a pro bono or reduced fee basis. (804) 644-0041
- **Whitman-Walker Health** provides free legal services to people living with HIV/AIDS and members of the LGBT community with public benefits, immigration, wills/powers of attorney/healthcare directives, and debt collection matters. (202) 939-7627
- **Hogar Immigrant Services** offers immigration legal assistance at a reduced rate. Hogar also hosts naturalization workshops every month. At each workshop, members of the Hogar legal team, as well as trained attorneys and non-attorney volunteers, assist eligible legal permanent residents (LPRs) with naturalization applications. (703) 534-9805 or (571) 208-1572
- **Just Neighbors** provides immigration legal services to low-income immigrants in the northern Virginia area. Clients must make 200 percent or less of federal poverty guidelines and must live in northern Virginia to qualify for services. Just Neighbors has a special emphasis on humanitarian-based immigration cases and does not handle: removal/deportation cases, asylum cases, and family-based petitions. Clients interested in their services may be screened by calling (703) 979-1240, Tuesday – Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

- **CAIR Coalition** (Capital Area Immigrants' Rights) provides legal assistance for detained immigrants – both adults and children – in the DC metropolitan area, as well as training and support for immigrant advocacy groups and service providers. (202) 331-3320
- **Community Tax Law Project** provides free legal help to low-wage families and individuals with tax issues. (804) 358-5855
- **Fairfax Law Foundation** (Northern Virginia Pro Bono Law Center) assists residents of Fairfax County and Northern Virginia nonprofits.
- **Good Samaritan Advocates** is a faith-based legal aid organization providing free legal assistance to low-income individuals in the greater Washington, DC, area. (703) 534-5740, ext. 524 (Fairfax County) and (703) 404-5034 (Loudon County)
- **Greater Richmond Bar Foundation** seeks to expand public access to the justice system in central Virginia by facilitating the delivery of pro bono legal services and service projects. Through its programs, GRBF helps the Central Virginia region with its priority needs for pro bono services and helps connect lawyers with pro bono clients. Two of GRBF's pro bono programs are Justice Server, a case management and referral system that enables private attorneys to accept and work on pro bono cases from their own computers, and the Pro Bono Clearinghouse, a referral service linking volunteer attorneys with nonprofit organizations in need of legal representation on a variety of transactional matters. (804) 780-2600
- **Drive to Work** assists qualifying low-income and previously incarcerated persons to restore driving privileges so they can drive to work and hold a job. Legal and other services are provided by attorneys. Clients pay an administrative fee to cover part of the cost. (804) 358-6727; (877) 358-6727 (Toll Free)
- **Hunton & Williams Church Hill Richmond Office** provides pro bono services to financially limited persons. For a modest fee, which the firm donates to charity, the Church Hill office offers legal services in family law (uncontested divorce, adoptions, name changes), housing and real estate (landlord-tenant and housing issues), and guardianships. (804) 775-2248
- **Hunton & Williams Charlottesville Office** provides free legal services to low-income Charlottesville area victims of domestic violence and to immigrants seeking asylum from persecution in their country of origin. (434) 220-3111

For information about other independent pro bono legal services providers, please visit the Pro Bono/Access to Legal Services pages on the Virginia State Bar website, http://www.vsb.org/site/pro_bono/resources-for-the-public.

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Virginia Lawyer Referral Service

The Virginia Lawyer Referral Service, or VLRS, is the Virginia State Bar's consumer service department that connects the public with Virginia lawyers based on specific practice of law and geographic Virginia locations. If you have a concern that may require the services of a lawyer, please call the VLRS. There is a \$35 fee for the initial, thirty-minute consultation, during which you may obtain information on your legal options and discuss terms for possible representation. (800) 552-7977, nationwide and Canada; (804) 775-0808, Richmond Metropolitan Area; (804) 775-0502 Telecommunications Device for the Hearing Impaired.

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Virginia.freelegalanswers.org

<https://Virginia.freelegalanswers.org>, is an online pro bono question and answer website where low- and modest-income Virginians may post a civil law question and receive an e-mail response from a Virginia lawyer. Users have convenient, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year access to lawyers from anywhere they have web access, such as their smartphone or a public library.

Options for Self-Represented Litigants

- **Virginia Judicial System Self-Help Website**, <http://selfhelp.vacourts.gov/>, provides neutral legal information in topical areas commonly sought by self-represented litigants, such as traffic tickets, divorce, and landlord and tenant issues. At each topic, the reader will see a brief description of the area of law in a question and answer format. This information is not intended to replace advice from a Virginia licensed attorney but rather to provide basic information about the topic as well as links to other sources of helpful, reliable information, including state agency websites and legal services organizations' websites.
- **VALegalAid.org**, www.VALegalAid.org, is a website that helps people find civil legal information, including forms, and answers to legal questions in matters involving consumers, debtor rights, elder law, employment, family and domestic/sexual violence, housing, education, benefits, health, immigration, social security, tax, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and veterans/military.
- **VA Law Help 2 Go**, (703) 293-5544 or www.valawhelp2go.org, is a mobile-friendly platform that provides legal information in video format to the public. This project is unique because it allows users to select the desired legal content via SMS text messaging and view brief, informational videos (in English or Spanish) optimized for mobile devices. These videos provide information about common topics in the area of family, consumer, and housing law. A link at the end of each video directs the viewer to the Virginia statewide website for more information and to connect them with the appropriate legal aid provider in their area.

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