



Students Visit Capitol to Witness Legislative Process in Action

The Virginia State Bar Young Lawyers Conference Public Education Committee was created to provide information to the public about the legal system and to seek to improve the public's perception of the legal profession, our system of justice, and the democratic process. In early 2000, the committee, chaired by Charlotte P. Hodges and Shepelle Watkins-White, implemented a project that accomplished all these goals by bringing middle school students to Richmond to teach them about the legislative process where it occurs, in sessions of the General Assembly.

In this pilot program, five middle schools, including three from Richmond, one from Hampton, and one from Charles City County, sent groups of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students to downtown Richmond for a day filled with events. Because many of the students, even those from Richmond, were unfamiliar with important sites in the Capital City, the committee arranged tours of the Capitol, the Library of Virginia and the Supreme Court of Virginia. Each group of 35 to 70 students visited two of the three sites, where they learned about the history of the Capital, political life in Virginia, and the judicial appeals system.

After lunch, the student groups met with legislators and participated in question-and-answer sessions in which

the students had the opportunity to learn about the legislative process directly from their own representatives. Participating legislators included Delegates Anne G. "Panny" Rhodes, A. Donald McEachin, Harry B. Blevins, and William K. Barlow, and Senator Henry L. Marsh.

The highlight of the day came in the early afternoon, when the student groups observed the General Assembly in session. The students watched the proceedings from the House and Senate galleries, and when space was short, on large screen televisions in adjacent House rooms. The students were warmly welcomed by their local legislators, who also provided the students with information packets about the legislative process, an historical guide to the General Assembly, a glossary guide, an age-appropriate workbook, and a souvenir pencil and sticker.

Young lawyer volunteers from the Young Lawyers Conference and the Richmond Chapter of the Old Dominion Bar Association worked with legislative aides to ensure that the students had a memorable visit. The students, legislators and volunteers all gave high marks to this new program and plans are underway to expand the program in 2001. If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact Charlotte Hodges at the Virginia State Bar office. [↗](#)

Child Victim Waiting Rooms

It is an unfortunate reality that many children who are testifying in court are forced to interact with their perpetrators and other stressed adults in the formal confines of the courtroom waiting area.

Too often the agony of the wait to testify is extended for long hours before an intense and emotionally draining trial. It would appear obvious that children in court need a safe place away from their perpetrators, where they're not re-victimized by unrealistic expectations of prolonged superlative behavior. Yet the rooms are simply not there.

Young lawyers across the country and in Virginia, in particular, have been at the forefront of an effort to provide such a "safe place" in child-victim waiting rooms. Even in rural jurisdictions where there is no physical space for such a room, circuit reps have been able to provide a discreet box of age-appropriate toys to provide a "zone of normalcy" for stressed or terrified child witnesses.

To find more about a courthouse Safe Place, contact the Children & the Law Liaison, Barry G. Logsdon, (757) 873-0873, Fax (757) 873-0717, lawgs@juno.com. [↗](#)