

SPECIAL LEGAL AID FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN TO BEGIN

Virginia lawyers soon will receive a letter asking them to support a special fundraising campaign to benefit legal aid for the poor throughout Virginia.

The money is needed by Legal Services Corporation of Virginia to keep local legal aid projects around the commonwealth afloat. Because of diminishing resources, especially from the IOLTA program during the current low interest rate environment, legal aid funds are unusually stretched. Waiting lists are getting longer, and people are going without representation in cases that critically affect their lives—housing, consumer law and domestic violence among them.

One proposal, discussed last fall by the VSB Council and during this year's General Assembly, was that a contribution box be added to the bar's dues statement, so that lawyers could make a voluntary contribution to legal aid when they renew their mandatory membership.

The bar declined to support that proposal, based in part on the belief that a mandatory dues statement is not an appropriate forum for voluntary fundraising.

The dues check-off bill was carried over to 2005 by the assembly after VSB leaders negotiated with legislators and other legal aid advocates and reached a compromise: They agreed that the VSB would work with the presidents of statewide voluntary bar groups to develop and support a special statewide fundraising campaign. Money raised through the campaign will be administered by LSCV to supplement revenues that legal aid programs receive through other sources.

It is the hope of the VSB leadership that lawyers will pitch in to support this special drive, even as they continue their longstanding contributions of time and money to their local legal aid programs.

The letter will be sent out in early-June. Please be on the lookout for it and lend your personal support to this important effort.