

Executive Director's Message

by Karen A. Gould



Our Budget Challenge: Cut Member Services?

THE VIRGINIA STATE BAR'S BUDGET continues to be a focus of the officers and staff. Current projections suggest that we will spend \$400,000 from the VSB reserve fund in fiscal year 2008–09. Should we cut programs and services in order to match expenses to revenue? If so, which ones should be cut? Every program has its advocates, with some programs, meetings, or services reaching “sacred cow” status.

Approximately 60 percent of the bar's revenue is spent on the disciplinary system, fulfilling the bar's mission of protecting the public from unethical attorneys. Approximately 25 percent of bar revenue is spent on expenses related to membership obligations, including administration of the mandatory continuing legal education requirement. The remaining 15 percent goes to fulfill the bar's mission of providing access to justice for all Virginians and enhancing the competence of Virginia's lawyers. A review of activities over the last year highlights many of the services the bar provides to its members, largely through the assistance of its volunteer lawyers. This list is not exhaustive and does not include the programs and expenses that the bar incurs for client protection and to serve the public.¹

Admission & Orientation

Ceremony: The Young Lawyers Conference of the VSB hosts Virginia's new lawyers twice a year at the Admission & Orientation Ceremony.

Bar Leaders Institute: The VSB's Conference of Local Bar Associations holds a Bar Leaders Institute to help new local and statewide bar officers plan their bar year. The BLI was held this year at George Mason University's

Prince William Campus on May 16, 2008.

Celebration of Women and Minorities in the Legal Profession

Bench-Bar Dinner: Hosted by the VSB's Young Lawyers Conference, this dinner serves to highlight the accomplishments of women and minorities in our profession.

Docket Call: The Young Lawyers Conference publishes a newsletter for its 9,655 members to keep them posted on what the conference is doing.

Fastcase: The bar continues to offer the online legal research program, Fastcase, free to its members. To access the program, simply log in to <https://member.vsb.org/vsbportal/> with your member number and password and click on the Fastcase logo. In May 2008, 2,421 VSB members used Fastcase 11,603 times, with 28,464 searches and 45,581 documents viewed.

Fee Dispute Resolution Program: This voluntary program helps attorneys and clients resolve disputes over fees and costs paid, charged, or claimed for legal services. The VSB Committee on the Resolution of Fee Disputes administers panels across the state to mediate or arbitrate these disputes.

Indigent Defense Training Program: Sponsored by the Supreme Court of Virginia and the VSB, this training is held once a year to promote excellence in defense of the indigent in criminal cases. Lawyers who take court-appointed cases attend without charge.

Legal Ethics Hotline: The Legal Ethics Hotline, (804) 775-0564, is monitored during business hours by one of four ethics counsel. The hotline receives more than four thousand calls

per year from lawyers seeking advice on how to comply with the ethical rules. Information disclosed and advice provided is strictly confidential and is not disclosed to anyone without the written permission of the inquiring lawyer.

Legal Ethics Opinions: Legal ethics opinions, which are required by Court rule, are another source of help. The Standing Committee on Legal Ethics issues opinions responsive to hypothetical questions submitted by lawyers. These opinions are drafted by an individual member of the committee, then debated and revised by the Ethics Committee before being issued.

Minority Pre-Law Conference: The VSB's Young Lawyers Conference held two Minority Pre-Law Conferences during the 2007–08 fiscal year: one in November 2007 at the Washington and Lee School of Law; and the second in February 2008 at the George Mason School of Law. These excellent programs serve to further the bar's diversity initiative to encourage minorities to attend law school.

Planning Ahead: Protecting Your Clients' Interest in the Event of Your Disability or Death: The VSB's Senior Lawyers Conference promotes a program given through local bar groups by Richmond lawyer Frank O. Brown Jr. that educates lawyers on the need for succession planning in the event of death or disability. Approved for two hours of CLE credit, the program is free.

Pro Bono Conference: The VSB's Access to Justice Committee sponsors a yearly Pro Bono Conference, which was held this year on May 22–23, 2008, at

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Washington and Lee School of Law. This year's program featured a day of CLE programming related to supervising and mentoring law students, economic development, and the housing crisis. There was also a ceremony honoring Phyllis C. Katz with the 2008 Lewis F. Powell Jr. Pro Bono Award, and Ashley R. Brott with the 2008 Oliver White Hill Law Student Pro Bono Award.

Risk Management Services: The VSB has a risk management service funded by its endorsed legal malpractice insurance carrier, ALPS. John J. Brandt, an attorney in private practice, provides this service. He can be reached at (800) 215-7854 for free consultation regarding matters of malpractice prevention, law office management, claims repair, and liability insurance.

Senior Citizens Handbook and Program: The VSB's Senior Lawyers Conference publishes a *Senior Citizens Handbook* to help Virginians navigate through the many issues that affect them late in life. In addition, the conference offers local bars a template for sponsoring a community Senior Law Day.

Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum: The VSB's Conference of Local Bar Associations held its Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum in Richmond on May 1, 2008. This free CLE program was well-attended, with approximately two hundred lawyers registered from all over the state. At its conclusion, Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. hosted a town hall meeting during which he responded to the audience's questions and concerns.

Virginia Lawyer Referral Service: Lawyers can register with the VSB's Lawyer Referral Service and get referrals from callers seeking legal advice.

The VLRS takes a prepayment of \$35, which entitles the caller to consult with an attorney for one-half hour. A caller who requires additional time and work is required to pay additional fees.

Virginia Lawyer, Virginia Lawyer Register, and Professional Guidelines: These publications keep our members informed about disciplinary actions, and changes to the *Rules of Professional Conduct*. They provide essential information about the courts and the bar, and features substantive law articles by VSB practice sections.

THE BAR LEADERSHIP HAS SUPPORTED these programs over the years as essential to the bar's mission. As the budget gets tighter, we need input from our members to determine the continuing value of the programs to the practicing lawyer and to the public. What we decide may shape the legal profession

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in the future. Keeping this in mind, what would you cut?

Let us know what you think. My email address is gould@vsb.org. ■

Endnote:

- 1 Lawyers Helping Lawyers (LHL) is not included in this list. The bar contributes to LHL — a nonprofit program independent of the VSB — as part of the public protection mission. LHL helps lawyers recover from mental health problems and substance abuse.