

# A Survey by the VBA Pro Bono Council

by David Neumeyer

In January 2016, the VBA Pro Bono Council's Committee on Unmet Needs asked executive directors and program leaders of thirty-seven nonprofit legal providers in Virginia to take part in a survey. The survey sought to identify Virginia's top needs, by type of case, for pro bono assistance from the private bar.

Eight local direct-service legal aid programs and ten other nonprofit legal providers responded. They indicated that they had placed 5,202 cases in 2015, but could have placed 9,300 with more pro bono volunteers. This gap of 4,100 cases does not describe the total additional pro bono need in Virginia, just the number of additional cases that could have been placed by the current providers using current staff.

Some providers serve hundreds of clients with pro bono volunteers each year and would like to serve hundreds more, while some small providers serve dozens and would like to serve dozens more.

## Top 10 Statewide Pro Bono Needs

These case types received the most provider votes for "strong need."

1. Private landlord/tenant
2. Divorce/separation/annulment
3. Custody/visitation
4. Wills/estates
5. Advance directives/powers of attorney
6. Bankruptcy/debtor relief
7. Adult guardianship/conservator
8. Domestic abuse
9. Collections (including repossession/garnishment)
10. Support

Survey respondents rated the relative time needed to handle a matter and the complexity for each case type. Of the top ten needs, the time needed is low in all but these three categories: divorce and support were rated medium and custody was

rated high. The complexity level was rated as low in all but one category. Bankruptcy was rated medium in complexity. Private landlord tenant cases, for example, were the number one pro bono need, and they ranked medium in client demand but were desired by many providers; they were ranked low in time needed and in complexity. Divorce/separation/annulment cases were the number two pro bono need, and they ranked high in client demand, "varies" in complexity, and low in complexity. To view the complete list of statewide needs, for to [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.vba.org/resource/resmgr/Pro\\_Bono\\_Council/Statewide\\_needs\\_survey\\_2016.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.vba.org/resource/resmgr/Pro_Bono_Council/Statewide_needs_survey_2016.pdf)

## Program Needs

The committee also reported the strongest pro bono needs by providers that participated in the survey, including contact information and additional comments. Pro bono needs expressed by the eighteen individual programs responding varied. Some legal aid programs and independent providers like Rappahannock Legal Services and the Veterans Initiative listed many different types of cases in which they need pro bono help, while a few agencies like Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society and the Community Tax Law Project listed just a few subject areas for help.

The full report on the survey results is compiled at [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.vba.org/resource/resmgr/Pro\\_Bono\\_Council/Top\\_Pro\\_Bono\\_Needs\\_in\\_Virgin.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.vba.org/resource/resmgr/Pro_Bono_Council/Top_Pro_Bono_Needs_in_Virgin.pdf).



David Neumeyer is the executive director of the Virginia Legal Aid Society.

## Webinars *continued from page 35*

recordings may be viewed for informational purposes only and are not eligible for MCLE credit. Following the webinar, the registration information of the attendee is sent to the appropriate legal aid or pro bono provider organization to facilitate the case referral or collection of the attorney's financial contribution.

The webinars are, in a small way, making a difference. For example, "Uncontested Divorces: A Webinar for Pro Bono Lawyers in Northern Virginia" in 2015 was attended by forty-one attorneys who agreed to accept two uncontested divorce referrals from their choice of the jurisdictions served by Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV). Attendees heard presentations by Jennifer Fulmer, LSNV's Pro bono managing

attorney, and Laura O'Brien an attorney with Kelly Byrnes & Danker. Attendees were provided with a training manual and sample pleadings. Following the webinar, attorneys received their case assignments and, as a result of their pro bono efforts, were able to almost eliminate LSNV's sizeable backlog of uncontested divorce cases.

To date, the VSB has conducted twenty-seven pro bono programs that have been attended by 1,435 lawyers. Additionally, Access to Legal Services staff assisted the Virginia Lawyer Referral Service, Lawyers Helping Lawyers, the Virginia Indigent Defense Commission, the VSB Young Lawyers Conference, the Intellectual Property Section, and the VSB-VBA Joint ADR Committee to conduct CLE webinars.