

# General Assembly Has Judicial Performance Data Evaluation Program Is Under New Leadership

When it convenes on January 14, 2009, the Virginia General Assembly will have in hand, for the first time, judicial performance survey data about seven district judges who are up for reelection.

The data is something the legislators say they have wanted for years — objective information to help them decide whether a judge should receive another term on the bench.

After three years of conducting anonymous surveys of Virginia's lawyers, the Judicial Performance Evaluation (JPE) Program has expanded to include jurors and — in juvenile and domestic relations court — social services workers and Court Services Unit employees. They are asked to rate a judge's patience, courtesy, fairness to all parties, and efficiency, among other qualities.

The questionnaires are sent out and collected and the data tabulated by a contractor — the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University. Feedback is provided only to the judge being evaluated, a retired judge who serves as an observer-facilitator, and — when the judge is up for re-election — the General Assembly.

(For more details of how the JPE Program works, see "General Assembly Will Have Judicial Performance Survey

Data for 2009 Session" in the February 2008 issue of *Virginia Lawyer*. [http://www.vsb.org/docs/valawyer magazine/vl0208\\_news.pdf](http://www.vsb.org/docs/valawyer magazine/vl0208_news.pdf).)

Meanwhile, the program, housed in the Supreme Court of Virginia's Office of the Executive Secretary, has moved to its second generation of leadership. The JPE Program oversees the contractor and provides outreach to the many groups whose goodwill is needed for the data collection to work — groups that include attorneys, court clerks, commonwealth's attorneys, public defenders, and the public.

That day-to-day nurturing is now the responsibility of Patricia G. Davis, who in mid-October took over as director of the JPE Program.

The first director, retired General District Judge Suzanne K. Fulton, left the program in June and is now sitting as a substitute general district judge in the twenty-ninth district.

Davis came to the JPE Program from Chesterfield County Circuit Court, where she was administrator of judicial operations. She formerly was clerk of the Virginia Court of Appeals.

The leadership of the JPE Commission, the body responsible for the development of the JPE Program, also has changed. Its new chair is Justice

Lawrence L. Koontz Jr., who succeeded Justice Barbara Milano Keenan. Keenan led the development of JPE since 2000, when the JPE



Davis

Task Force was constituted to study the creation of a JPE program.

The program evaluated 119 judges in 2008. It expects to conduct 141 evaluations and send forty-three to the General Assembly for the 2010 session, Davis said.

"I thank the attorneys who have participated in the evaluation process and encourage them to continue their valuable contribution to the program," she said. "We would not be able to carry out the purposes of the program without the cooperation of many individuals. I recognize the efforts of the clerks of court, as their support is critical. Likewise, the members of the bar have been very supportive of the program by signing the courtroom appearance sheets and providing prompt responses to the surveys."

## Professional Guidelines and Rules of Professional Conduct

The 2008–09 *Professional Guidelines* were mailed to active members of the VSB accompanying the October issue of *Virginia Lawyer*.

They are available online at <http://www.vsb.org/site/regulation/guidelines/>

## Local Bar Elections

### Charlottesville-Albemarle Bar Association

John Walter Zunka, President  
James Pedin Cox III, President-elect  
Julia Elizabeth Sexton, Secretary-Treasurer

### Hispanic Bar Association of Virginia

Manuel Enrique Leiva Jr., President  
Dennis Adrian Somech, Vice President  
Erika Marlene Serrano, Secretary  
Carlos Enrique Wall, Treasurer