

New Policy Set for Court Vouchers and Payment Requests

Vouchers and payment requests for services provided to Virginia courts now must be submitted within thirty days after the service is completed, under a new policy by the Supreme Court of Virginia's Office of the Executive Secretary (OES).

For court-appointed counsel, the thirty-day period begins when all proceedings have been completed in the court for which the request is submitted.

For requests submitted after the thirty days, the OES may require a writ-

ten explanation of the delay and other documentation. Requests older than two years after the service is completed will be denied.

Questions about the policy should be directed to John Rickman, director of fiscal services for the OES, at (804) 786-6455. The policy is posted at http://www.courts.state.va.us/courtadmin/aoc/fiscal/scv_pol_voucher_pymt_requ.pdf.

2010 High School Essay Contest Questions School Control Over Students' Online Communications

Does a student who criticizes his or her school on Facebook lose First Amendment protection of free speech? Should a school be able to discipline the student by barring sports, candidacy for student government, performance in a play, or another school activity? Does the fact that Facebook publishes the comments to an audience outside the school make a difference?

Virginia high school students are invited to submit essays that address those issues, for a chance of winning prize money and a trip to Virginia Beach, paid for by the Virginia State Bar and its Litigation Section. The deadline for submissions is February 8, 2010.

All Virginia students aged 19 or younger and enrolled in grades 9-12 or a home-school equivalent are eligible to submit an essay that addresses the contest hypothetical: "Free Speech: Can a School Limit Students' Online Communications?" The hypothetical is posted at <http://www.vsb.org/site/public/law-in-society-hypothetical>.

Essays are limited to 1,000 words, and are judged on how well they demonstrate the student's understanding of the role and value of the legal system in everyday life. Entries will be judged by attorneys, judges, and educators. The purpose of the contest is to awaken an interest in law and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution.

The first place winner will receive \$1,750 cash and an expense-paid trip for the winner and his or her family to the Virginia State Bar Annual Meeting in Virginia Beach in June 2010 for presentation of the award. The winning essay will be published on the VSB website. Other awards include \$1,500 cash (second place), \$1,250 cash (third place), and honorable mentions of \$100 cash. All winners receive a plaque and copy of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*. Awards will be presented in May at the winners' schools.

More information, including contest rules and last year's winning essay, is posted at <http://www.vsb.org/site/public/law-in-society/>.