

# Executive Director's Message

by Karen A. Gould



## A Little Ammunition for the Coming Fight

IN JUST A COUPLE OF WEEKS the members of the Virginia General Assembly will be taking their seats at the Capitol for the 2012 legislative sessions.

Once again, if the news media reports are correct, the state government will be facing a budget shortfall. That, of course, means that the Governor and the General Assembly will be looking for ways to cut expenses and increase revenue, probably without raising taxes or fees.

We all know that in the very recent past the Governor looked closely at the VSB's funds, and we certainly hope this won't happen again. As current VSB President George Warren Shanks has been telling bar groups, this is lawyers' money, not general fund money and not taxpayer money. It was paid by lawyers to operate the VSB and regulate the profession. The staff at the VSB works to ensure that the money is used wisely and judiciously for those purposes.

In an effort to provide our members with some information they might find useful in those uncomfortable discussions about money, we've used the American Bar Association's survey of mandatory bars to compile some comparisons.

Or, to paraphrase Billy Joel: Here's what you get for your money.

In 2010, the year of the ABA survey, Virginia had the fifth largest mandatory bar in the country, with 44,000 members. Despite that, we had the fifth LOWEST dues of mandatory bars, at \$275. As we all know, the dues have since been reduced to \$250, which if all other state bar dues remained unchanged, would put us second lowest (tied with West Virginia and just above D.C., now \$248).

With a professional staff of 92, our member-to-staff ratio is 478 to one. That is 22nd on the list. West Virginia, for example, is 33rd and has a ratio of 1,166 per staffer. Arizona's ratio, which is first, is 158 to one. That tells me we're getting a lot of representation and support for our members for our money.

Our budget in 2010 was seventh largest, which is pretty much in line with the size of our membership. But

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doing the comparison another way tells another story. Our budget comes out to \$279 per member, or 28th smallest on the list.

What the public gets for its money is a state bar that protects them, provides access to justice for all Virginians, and helps lawyers be the best they can be.

What lawyers get, among other things, is dispute resolution services, an ethics hotline, online legal research, solo and small firm forums, indigent defense training seminars, lawyer referral service, and the bar leaders' institute.

The state bar closest in size to Virginia's is Georgia's, which has about 1,000 fewer members. Their dues last year were \$536, the highest in the country among mandatory bars.

So, if the VSB comes up this year during the General Assembly's annual haggling over money, you now have some ammo.