

Conference to Shine Light on Assisted Living Facilities

William T. Wilson, 2005–2006 Senior Lawyers Conference Chair



I am happy to report to you that the Senior Lawyers Conference's bar year is off to a good start. At our last meeting on September 22, 2005, we voted unanimously to urge every local bar association to conduct a Senior Citizens Law Day. This program, as I mentioned in previous columns, was a big success in Covington on May 24, 2005, when the Allegheny-Bath-Highland Bar Association initiated it. A panel of eight lawyers, including one judge, hosted about one hundred senior citizens, and we used the *Senior Citizens Handbook* as our teaching tool. Each of the attendees was given a copy of the book. Now, the senior lawyers have agreed to spread this program throughout the commonwealth. Packages outlining the Allegheny-Bath-Highland Bar's preparation for the seminar have been sent out to the presidents of each bar association and some of the specialty bar associations. Anyone interested in putting on such a program may contact Patricia Sliger at the Virginia State Bar at (804) 775-0576.

In addition to the Senior Citizens Law Day Program, the Senior Lawyers Conference is interested in doing things to improve nursing homes and assisted living facilities. At the next meeting of the SLC Board of Governors, we will hear from Virginia Senator Emmett W. Hanger Jr., chair of the Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee. He will tell us what is going on at the General Assembly regarding these institutions and give us suggestions as to what we can do to help.

The SLC also plans to shine a spotlight on these institutions during a program at the Annual Meeting of the Virginia State Bar on June 15, 2006. We hope to include legislators and representatives from the Virginia Department of Health, which regulates nursing homes, and the Virginia Department of Social Services, which regulates assisted living facilities. We will also include on the panel attorneys who have been involved in elder law and in litigation involving these facilities. We hope all these efforts will improve the care given to our senior citizens.

I also want to applaud Robert J. Grey Jr., past president of the American Bar Association, for his efforts to protect and preserve the right to trial by jury. The figures I have seen indicate that jury trials are fast going the way of the dinosaur. I hope that is not true, but the signs are not good. I urge the Senior Lawyers Conference to take an active and vocal role in preserving that great institution. America's founding fathers thought that the right to trial by jury was a basic part of what our democracy is all about, and I agree. Unfortunately, with the increasing complexity and cost of litigation, jury trials are becoming less popular. This situation should be studied continuously so we can preserve and protect that right.

Two other programs of the Senior Lawyers Conference are worth mentioning: We will continue to produce, in cooperation with the Young Lawyers Conference, *the Senior Citizens Handbook*. This has become one of the most popular publications of the Virginia State Bar. I also want to brag about our own Frank Overton Brown Jr., former chair of the Senior Lawyers Conference, who continues to stump the state talking to lawyers about the need for planning for disability and death. Frank is moving lawyers in the right direction on this issue. Too few lawyers are planning for the possibility of death and disability as far as their law practices are concerned. Hopefully, through Frank's influence, more lawyers will plan better in that regard. ☞