

VaLegalAid.org Launched by Virginia Poverty Law Center and Virginia's Legal Aid Programs

by Sarah Jane Wyatt, community outreach coordinator,
Virginia Poverty Law Center

The Virginia Poverty Law Center, Blue Ridge Legal Services and a consortium of Virginia's legal aid programs announce the launching of a free online legal resource Web site, www.VaLegalAid.org.

The site is designed to provide poverty law issues in an interactive and easily accessible format to low-income people, legal aid and pro bono attorneys, advocates and other providers of services to legal aid's traditional client base.

Features include links to housing, elder law, social security and SSI, temporary aid to needy families, food stamps, family law, consumer law, debtor's rights and a catalog of public forms. Legal aid attorneys throughout the state provide the legal information.

Information on migrant and other employment issues and health and tax law will be added, along with a listing of legal aid offices and pro bono programs in Virginia.

A partnership of various organizations, from legal aid offices to advocacy groups,

created Virginia's civil legal information Web site with each agency or organization having the ability to manage and update its legal information. Other groups and organizations will be invited to assist with its expansion.

"VaLegalAid.org promises to be an extremely useful platform upon which Virginia's legal aid programs will be able to provide easy access to important legal information to low-income Virginians. It will provide crucial referral information to human services organizations and facilitate the sharing of expertise among our staff and pro bono attorneys across the state," said John Whitfield, executive director of Blue Ridge Legal Services.

Using the template, legal aid programs in Virginia can design their own site and link statewide. Legal Services of Northern Virginia was one of the first programs in the country to use this program and has been instrumental in its development. Its Web site, www.LSNV.org, will be launched simultaneously, as will Web sites from

other programs, such as Virginia Legal Aid Society and Central Virginia Legal Aid.

In the next year, a second component for advocates will be added—accessible only to attorneys who handle legal aid and pro bono cases. It will include substantive information on areas of poverty law as well as news and other information relevant to public interest law organizations.

The technology for the Web site was made possible through a Technology Initiative Grant by the Legal Services Corporation and was developed by probono.net. Probono.net is a unique collaboration among various parts of the public interest legal community, organized primarily in New York City. Continued support is provided by probono.net for administration of the site.

For further information on this project, or to join the effort, please contact Sarah Jane Wyatt at the Virginia Poverty Law Center, (804) 782-9430.

Copies of the September, 2002 ABA Report entitled *Virginia: An Assessment of Access to Counsel and Quality of Representation in Delinquency Proceedings* are available from the Virginia Indigent Defense Coalition (VIDC). The report was funded in part through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. DOJ.

Contact Betsy Wells Edwards, Director, VIDC, at 700 East Main Street, Suite 1510, Richmond, 23219;
Phone (804) 343-1712; bedwards@vidcoalition.org.

Del. Bryant Receives Scales of Justice Award

Delegate L. Preston Bryant received the Scales of Justice Award from the Virginia Legal Aid Society, Inc.

A reception honoring Del. Bryant was held on November 21, 2002, in Lynchburg. Delegate William J. Howell, chair of the House Courts of Justice Committee, was the guest speaker.

The award recognized Del. Bryant's patronage of a bill in the general assembly that increased resources available to low-income clients in Virginia.

To support legal aid, the commonwealth provides a mixture of general revenue appropriations, interest on lawyers' trust accounts and a portion of civil filing fees in Virginia courts.

Due to the legislation, the filing fee portion increased the legal aid portion of the filing fee by \$1, from \$3. This increased funds available to help low-income persons by approximately \$800,000.

Past recipients of the award were Judge Harry Lawson of Appomattox, Nancy Turner of Emporia, Herman and Marian Benn of Suffolk, Judge Joel Cunningham of Halifax and Nancy Vanhoozer of Martinsville.

Visit the Pro Bono page on the VSB Web site for free and low-cost pro bono trainings and volunteer opportunities listed at www.vsb.org/probono/.

Oakey Receives Richmond Bar Association Award

John M. Oakey, Jr., received the Richmond Bar Association's John C. Kenny Pro Bono Award at the association's meeting on Thursday, January 16, 2003. The award is presented annually to an individual or law firm that demonstrates extraordinary dedication to furthering the delivery of pro bono legal services to the poor and underserved in the Richmond metropolitan area.



Legal Aid Justice Center Advances on Capital Goal; Receives Pro Bono Help Toward New Office Purchase

The Legal Aid Justice Center (formerly the Charlottesville-Albemarle Legal Aid Society) has raised \$1,625,000 toward its capital campaign goal of \$1,850,000. The funds will help the center purchase and renovate a building for its new offices in Charlottesville.

The Legal Aid Justice Center recently received two grants toward the campaign: a challenge grant of \$275,000 from The Kresge Foundation of Troy, Michigan, and a matching grant of \$100,000 from the Perry Foundation. According to The Legal Aid Justice Center Executive Director Alex Gulotta, the funds will be used to purchase the property on 1000 Preston Avenue to house the offices of the center, with enough space to lease to the Piedmont office of Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, the Public Housing Association of Residents and the Charlottesville City Schools Adult Learning Center.

In March of 2002, John O'Neil and Jim Sanderson of Hunton & Williams closed on a tax-exempt bond to finance the center. According to Joey Conover, development coordinator at the center, other pro bono assistance on the purchase and closing was given by Rick Richmond of Richmond & Fishburne; Jim Cox of Michie, Hamlett, Lowery, Rasmussen & Tweel; and Cathy Womack of Feil, Pettit & Williams.

The Legal Aid Justice Center offers free civil (non-criminal) services to low-income families throughout central Virginia.



The VSB Special Committee on Access to Legal Services
invites you to
mark your calendar for the

13TH ANNUAL
nominal fee
VSB PRO BONO CONFERENCE
Thursday, May 8, 2003

The University of Richmond School of Law, Richmond

Afternoon CLEs and Evening Award Ceremony & Reception

will be held in conjunction with

**The Virginia Public Defender Commission's
Juvenile Law & Education Seminar, all-day, Friday May 9, 2003**

Important *Cross-over CLE Topics including Ethics for Defense Attorneys and GALs
(child **and** incapacitated adult-certified)
will be addressed by the piggy-backed conference agendas*

Look for Details

- in future issues of the *Virginia Lawyer* and *Virginia Lawyer Register*,
- or call VSB Pro Bono at (804) 775-0548 or 0522,
- or visit the Bar's Web site at www.vsb.org/probono

