



Access to Justice

Free and Low-Cost Legal Resources in Virginia

A guide for helping
low- and modest-income Virginians
obtain legal services



Facts about the Justice Gap

- The Justice Gap describes the distance between the amount of free legal assistance available and the amount necessary to meet the needs of the poor in America.
- Over 90 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income Americans go fully or partially unmet.
- In 75 percent of all court cases, at least one litigant is unrepresented.
- Individuals who are represented by counsel are twice as likely to have a favorable outcome versus those who are unrepresented.
- About 50 million Americans are eligible for free legal services from legal aid programs.
- There are not enough legal aid lawyers to provide legal representation for Virginia's low-income population—there are fewer than 240 legal aid lawyers out of a total of 32,492 active lawyers in the Commonwealth.
- In the face of this gap, Virginia lawyers across different areas of law reported completing over 320,000 pro bono hours during the 2021-22 Bar Year.

The Right to Counsel

The Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the rights of criminal defendants, including the right “to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.” Although the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) that there is a constitutional right to court appointed counsel for indigent defendants in criminal proceedings, there is no right to a free lawyer for low- and modest-income parties in civil actions. Such actions include:

- securing or maintaining custody of their children,
- maintaining safe and habitable housing,
- obtaining protection from abusive relationships,
- securing access to critical health care, and
- receiving disability payments.

Lawyers are not required to do pro bono work. Unfortunately, too often litigants are forced to represent themselves.

Options for Legal Assistance by Counsel

1 Licensed Legal Aid Organizations

There are nine legal aid programs in Virginia available for the public to call directly. These programs help low-income families and individuals maintain the basics of life: income, shelter, food, health care, education, and family stability and range in size from eight employees to 80. Volunteer lawyers also assist these organizations through pro bono programs. Please contact your local legal aid office for more information about the services offered and types of cases handled. You may also call **1-866-LEGLAID (1-866-534-5243)** to reach your local legal aid office.

- **Blue Ridge Legal Services** provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents of the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke Valley of Virginia; main office in Harrisonburg, offices in Winchester, Lexington, and Roanoke. — **(540) 433-1830** or **www.brls.org**.
- **Central Virginia Legal Aid Society** provides free civil legal assistance to low-income people who live in, or have legal problems arising in, Richmond, Petersburg, Hopewell, Colonial Heights, and Charlottesville and the counties of Albemarle, Charles City, Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Hanover, Henrico, Louisa, Nelson, New Kent, Powhatan, Prince George, and Surry; main office in Richmond, with offices in Petersburg and Charlottesville. — **(804) 648-1012**, **1-800-868-1012**, or apply online at **www.cvlas.org**.
- **Legal Aid Works** provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents; main office in Fredericksburg with additional offices in Culpeper and Tappahannock. — **(540) 371-1105** or **www.legalaidworks.org**.
- **Legal Aid Justice Center** provides legal services to low-income individuals and communities through zealous individual representation, group and class litigation, community organizing, policy advocacy, and media relations; main office in Charlottesville; offices in Richmond, Petersburg, and Falls Church. — **(434) 977-0553** or **www.justice4all.org**.
- **Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia** provides free civil legal services to low-income residents of Accomack, Chesapeake, Gloucester, Hampton, James City, Mathews, Middlesex, Newport News, Norfolk, Northampton, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg, and Yorktown; main offices are located in Norfolk and Hampton. — **(757) 627-5423** or **www.laseva.org**.

- **Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley** provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents of the Roanoke Valley and surrounding counties, including a full range of legal services in select cases. — (540) 344-2088 or www.lasrv.org.
- **Legal Services of Northern Virginia** (LSNV) provides a full range of free civil legal services to people living in the following counties and cities: Arlington, Fairfax, Prince William, Loudoun, Alexandria, Falls Church, Manassas, Manassas Park, Herndon, and Vienna; and a more limited range of services to residents of the City of Fredericksburg and the following counties: Caroline, Culpeper, Essex, Fauquier, King & Queen, King George, King William, Lancaster, Madison, Northumberland, Orange, Rappahannock, Richmond County, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Westmoreland. Main office is in Fairfax and branch offices are in Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Leesburg, Manassas, and Fredericksburg. Permanent outreach offices are along the Route One Corridor (Fairfax County) and inside the Fairfax County Courthouse. — (703) 778-6800 or www.lsnv.org.
- **Southwest Virginia Legal Aid** provides free civil legal services to low-income families in 17 counties and four small cities in southwestern Virginia; main office in Marion, with offices in Castlewood and Christiansburg. — (888) 201-2772 or www.svlas.org.
- **Virginia Legal Aid Society** provides free civil legal services to low-income residents in 20 counties and six cities in Central, Southside, and Western Tidewater Virginia; main office in Lynchburg, offices in Danville, Farmville, Martinsville, and Suffolk. — (434) 455-3080 or www.vlas.org.

2 Independent Pro Bono Legal Services Providers

- **CancerLINC** helps cancer patients (and their families) residing or being treated in the Greater Richmond Area overcome legal and financial obstacles when they need it the most. — (804) 562-0371 ext. 103 or www.cancerlinc.org.
- **Whitman-Walker Health** works with patients, people living with HIV, and members of the LGBTQI community. We can help with health insurance appeals, work disputes, discrimination, Social Security disability applications and appeals, public benefits appeals, immigration matters, powers of attorney and wills, elder issues, medical privacy, and identity documents for trans and gender-expansive clients, among other problems. — (202) 939-7630 or www.whitman-walker.org/legal-services/.
- **Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington's Hogar Immigrant Services, Legal** provides low-cost immigration legal services in a variety of family-based and humanitarian matters to clients throughout northern Virginia,

regardless of their race, religion, nationality, or ability to pay. Clients should visit Hogar’s website at www.cda.net/HogarLegal to read important information about our services and to schedule an appointment for a legal consultation with one of our immigration attorneys. — (703) 534-9805.

- **Just Neighbors** provides immigration legal services to low-income immigrants, asylees, and refugees in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Clients must make 200 percent or less of federal poverty guidelines and must live in our serving area. Just Neighbors has a main focus on humanitarian-based immigration cases and limited capacity for removal/deportation cases, asylum cases, and family-based petitions. Clients interested in their services may be screened by calling (703) 979-1240, Tuesday–Friday, 9 am–5 pm, or by filling out an intake form on our website: <https://www.justneighbors.org/gethelp/>. There is a one-time fee of \$100 for individuals and \$200 for families if an appointment is scheduled.
- **CAIR Coalition** (Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights) provides legal assistance for detained immigrants—both adults and children—in the D.C. metropolitan area, as well as training and support for immigrant advocacy groups and service providers. — (202) 331-3320 or www.caircoalition.org.
- **The Community Tax Law Project** (CTLP) is a low income taxpayer clinic providing free legal advice and representation to Virginia’s low and moderate income taxpayers with IRS and/or Virginia income tax disputes. CTLP also educates taxpayers and their service providers regarding taxpayer rights and responsibilities and advocates for issues that impact lower income taxpayers. — (804) 358-5855 or www.ctlp.org.
- **Fairfax Law Foundation** (Northern Virginia Pro Bono Law Center) assists residents of Fairfax Co. and Northern Virginia nonprofits. — (703) 246-2740.
- **Good Samaritan Advocates** (GSA) is a faith-based legal aid organization providing free legal advice to low-income individuals in the suburban Washington, D.C., area. GSA offers legal advice on most non-criminal matters, including landlord/tenant, family law (custody and support), consumer law, and employment issues. To set up an appointment, go to www.gsadvocates.org. — (571) 357-2702.
- **Greater Richmond Bar Foundation** seeks to expand public access to the justice system in central Virginia by facilitating the delivery of pro bono legal services and service projects. Through its programs, GRBF helps the Central Virginia region with its priority needs for pro bono services and helps connect lawyers with pro bono clients. Two of GRBF’s pro bono programs are JusticeServer, a case management and referral system that enables private attorneys to accept and work on pro bono cases from their own computers, and the Pro Bono Clearinghouse, a referral service linking volunteer attorneys with Virginia 501(c)(3) nonprofits in need of legal

representation on a variety of transactional matters. — **(804) 780-2600** or **info@grbf.org**.

- **Drive-To-Work** assists qualifying low-income or previously incarcerated persons to restore driving privileges so they can drive to work and hold a job. Legal and other services are provided by attorneys. Clients pay an administrative fee to cover part of the cost. — **(804) 358-6727; (877) 358-6727 (Toll Free)**.
- **Hunton Andrew Kurth's George Hettrick Community Law Center in Church Hill** provides pro bono services to financially-limited persons who meet office eligibility guidelines. For a modest fee, which the firm donates to charity, the Church Hill office offers legal services in family law (uncontested divorce, adoptions, name changes), housing and real estate (landlord-tenant and housing issues), and guardianships. — **(804) 775-2248**.

For information about other independent pro bono legal services providers, please visit the Pro Bono/Access to Legal Services pages on the Virginia State Bar website, **http://www.vsb.org/site/pro_bono/resources-for-the-public**.

3 **Virginia Lawyer Referral Service**

The Virginia Lawyer Referral Service (VLRs) is operated by the Virginia State Bar and is a consumer service that connects the public with Virginia lawyers. All VLRs attorneys are vetted by the Virginia State Bar before they are approved to take referrals. The VLRs attorneys handle cases that match their legal practice experience and sign up to serve specific geographic areas of Virginia. If you have a concern that may require the services of a lawyer, please call the VLRs at **(800) 552-7977**, nationwide and Canada; **(804) 775-0808**, Richmond Metropolitan Area, or you may go online to **<https://vlrs.community.lawyer>** for self-referrals. There is a \$35 non-refundable fee for the referral, which guarantees an initial, scheduled consultation for up to 30-minutes, during which you may obtain information on your legal matter and discuss terms for possible representation. The VLRs is not a pro bono or free service and the attorneys taking referrals through VLRs will charge for their services.

4 **Virginia.freelegalanswers.org**

<https://Virginia.freelegalanswers.org> is an online pro bono question and answer website where low- and modest-income Virginians may post a civil law question and receive an e-mail response from a Virginia lawyer. Users have convenient, 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-per-year access to lawyers from anywhere they have web access, such as their smartphone or a public library.

5

The Virginia Poverty Law Center's Eviction Legal Helpline

The Virginia Poverty Law Center's Eviction Legal Helpline provides legal information and situation-specific, self-help materials for residential tenants in Virginia facing potential eviction or lease termination. Staff attorneys also offer direct legal advice to a limited number of tenants in some situations. — www.evictionhelpline.org or **1-833-NoEvict** (663-8428).

Options for Self-Represented Litigants

- **Virginia Judicial System Court Self-Help Website** provides neutral legal information in topical areas commonly sought by self-represented litigants, such as traffic tickets, divorce, and landlord and tenant issues. At each topic, the reader will see a brief description of the area of law in a question and answer format. This information is not intended to replace advice from a Virginia licensed attorney but rather to provide basic information about the topic as well as links to other sources of helpful, reliable information, including state agency websites and legal services organizations' websites. — <http://selfhelp.vacourts.gov/>.
- **VALegalAid.org** is a website that helps people find civil legal information, including forms, and answers to legal questions in matters involving consumers, debtor rights, elder law, employment, family and domestic/sexual violence, housing, education, benefits, health, immigration, social security, tax, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and veterans/military. — www.VALegalAid.org.
- **VA Law Help 2 Go** is a mobile-friendly platform that provides legal information in video format to the public. This project is unique because it allows users to select the desired legal content via SMS text messaging and view brief, informational videos (in English or Spanish) optimized for mobile devices. These videos provide information about common topics in the area of family, consumer, and housing law. A link at the end of each video directs the viewer to the Virginia statewide website for more information and to connect them with the appropriate legal aid provider in their area. — www.valawhelp2go.org.
- **Virginia Military and Veteran Legal Resource Guide** is a tool to help Virginia servicemembers, military families, and veterans understand the unique legal protections, rights, and resources available to them under the law. — <https://www.oag.state.va.us/programs-initiatives/veterans-assistance-resources/military-and-veteran-legal-resource-guide>.



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