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## REINSTATEMENT PETITION

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*Pursuant to Part 6, Section IV, Paragraph 13I(9)(e) of the Rules of the Supreme Court of Virginia, **Bruce Charles Britton** petitioned the Court on May 9, 2007, for reinstatement of his license to practice law. The Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Board will hear the petition on June 27, 2008, at 9 a.m. in the General Assembly Building, 910 Capitol Street, House Room D, Richmond. After hearing evidence and oral argument, the Disciplinary Board will make factual findings and recommend to the Supreme Court whether the petition should be granted or denied.*

*The Disciplinary Board seeks information about Mr. Britton's fitness to practice law. Written comments or requests to testify at the hearing should be submitted to Barbara S. Lanier, Clerk of the Disciplinary System, 707 East Main Street, Suite 1500, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or by e-mail to [clerk@vsb.org](mailto:clerk@vsb.org), no later than June 10, 2008. Comments will become a matter of public record.*

### **Bruce Charles Britton**

On April 21, 1989, the Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Board suspended Mr. Britton's license to practice law for five years, effective May 21, 1989, for misconduct in three matters that involved representation of personal injury plaintiffs. The board found Mr. Britton communicated with, and later sued, his client's daughter, when he knew the daughter was represented by another lawyer; he instructed another client to deceive two treating physicians in connection with two matters for the client; and he was untruthful on two occasions when communicating settlement offers to a third client. Mr. Britton appealed, and the Supreme Court dismissed the appeal. On April 6, 1990, Mr. Britton was convicted in the General District Court of Fairfax County of practicing law after his license had been suspended. He appealed to the Circuit Court of Fairfax County where he was found guilty and fined \$1,000.

On December 13, 1991, a three-judge court in the Fairfax Circuit revoked Mr. Britton's license for the unauthorized practice of law and for trust account violations in his representation of a personal injury client. The court found he had failed to properly account for the settlement funds; he failed to maintain proper trust account records; and he gave the client inadequate and misleading accountings.

Mr. Britton filed his first petition for reinstatement on April 25, 1997. The Disciplinary Board recommended that Mr. Britton's license not be reinstated and the Supreme Court denied the petition. In its recommendation, the board noted that, during the reinstatement hearing, Mr. Britton conceded that he had handled more than one legal matter after his license was suspended. The Disciplinary Board further noted Mr. Britton was not forthright with a character witness in explaining the circumstances of his petition.

In his current reinstatement petition, Mr. Britton states he wants to return to practice as a solo practitioner to help clients who would otherwise lack the aid of an attorney. He states that since August 1, 1988, he has been employed at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington, D.C., first in the Regional Office and then, since 2005, in the Appeals Management Center. He further states he has been active in his church and community, has kept current with the law, and has otherwise satisfied all conditions required for reinstatement and is fit to practice law.

Copies of the board and Supreme Court orders regarding Mr. Britton's suspension and revocation are available from the clerk at [clerk@vsb.org](mailto:clerk@vsb.org) or (804) 775-0539.

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## PROPOSED SUPREME COURT RULE

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### **VIRGINIA STATE BAR COUNCIL TO REVIEW PROPOSED SUPREME COURT RULE REGARDING THE PROVISION OF LEGAL SERVICES FOLLOWING DETERMINATION OF MAJOR DISASTER**

On June 19, 2008, the Virginia State Bar Council ("Bar Council") will meet in Virginia Beach to consider a proposed Supreme Court Rule regarding the *Provision of Legal Services Following Determination of Major Disaster*.

This proposed rule was developed as a result of the ABA's actions to help address the problem of the provision of legal services following a disaster or emergency, such as existed following Katrina and Rita. Beyond the physical damage and devastation caused by those hurricanes, there was also a crippling effect on the legal systems in the affected states. In

response, the ABA formed a task force that advocated for the suspension of unauthorized practice of law rules in the various states impacted by these hurricanes because, while lawyers from other jurisdictions would have liked to help staff disaster assistance centers or otherwise advise hurricane victims, they were deterred from doing so because of a lack of clarity about whether they would be violating any unauthorized practice of law rules.

The task force recognized the need for a model rule that would allow out-of-state lawyers to provide pro bono legal services in an affected jurisdiction and that would allow lawyers in the affected jurisdiction whose legal practices had been disrupted by a major disaster to practice law on a temporary basis in an unaffected jurisdiction. Since both the highest court of a jurisdiction affected by the major disaster and the highest courts of jurisdictions not affected by the disaster could

implement the rule on an emergency basis, the ABA determined that this rule should be a Model Court Rule.

The ABA then asked that each state consider the adoption of this or an equivalent rule. In response, the Virginia State Bar formed an Emergency Legal Services Task Force (“ELS Task Force”) to study this model court rule. After deliberations the ELS Task Force agreed that a similar court rule should be adopted in Virginia with minor amendments.

The rule provides that the Virginia Supreme Court shall determine when, as a result of a disaster, an emergency affecting the justice system has occurred in Virginia that would trigger the provisions of this rule. Additionally, if that emergency extends to another jurisdiction the determination of the existence of a major disaster will be made in conjunction with the highest court of that jurisdiction. Under this rule, the Court may allow:

1. Out-of-state lawyers to provide pro bono legal services to the citizens of Virginia within certain constraints described in the model rule, and;
2. Displaced lawyers from an affected state can provide legal services in Virginia on a temporary basis if these services are reasonably related to the lawyer’s practice in the affected jurisdiction.

Specifically, the ELS Task Force reviewed the ABA rule and agreed to the following revisions. The last sentence in paragraph (b), *Temporary practice in this jurisdiction following a major disaster*, should read as follows:

Such legal services shall be assigned and supervised through an established bar association pro bono program, not-for-profit bar association, ~~or an approved legal services program assistance organization, a public defender’s office,~~ or through such organization(s) specifically designated by this Court.

In paragraph (d), regarding the duration of authority for temporary practice, the ELS Task Force agreed the model rule language needed to be revised to clarify that a lawyer shall not accept new unrelated matters for an existing client when practicing under the authority granted in this rule. This revision is reflected in the second to last sentence of paragraph (d).

In Comment [1], second to last sentence, the ELS Task Force clarified that lawyers from unaffected jurisdictions may offer to provide these legal services either by traveling to the affected jurisdiction or from their own offices or both, provided the legal services are provided on a *pro bono* basis through “entities authorized by this Rule.”

In Comment [3], the ELS Task Force verified that the reference to the emeritus rule complies with Virginia’s definition of an emeritus lawyer.

In Comment [4], the reference to Rule 5.5 Comment [14] was deleted because the ABA’s Rule 5.5 Comment [14] has not been adopted in Virginia.

In Comment [5], the ELS Task Force agreed to delete the last sentence regarding the time period limitation on the authority created in paragraph (c), as it is addressed in paragraph (d) of the rule.

**Inspection and Comment**

The proposed rule may be inspected at the office of the Virginia State Bar, 707 East Main Street, Suite 1500, Richmond, Virginia 23219-2800, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Copies of the proposed rule can be obtained from the offices of the Virginia State Bar by contacting the Office of Ethics Counsel at (804) 775-0557, or can be found at the Virginia State Bar’s Web site at <http://www.vsb.org>.

Any individual, business or other entity may file or submit written comments in support of, or in opposition to, the proposed rule by filing ten copies with Karen A. Gould, the Executive Director of the Virginia State Bar, not later than **April 14, 2008**.

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**Virginia State Bar - Emergency Legal Services Task Force**  
*Proposed SC Rule on Provision of Legal Services Following Determination of Major Disaster*

**(DRAFT – February 28, 2008)**

Rule \_\_\_\_\_. Provision of Legal Services Following Determination of Major Disaster

- (a) *Determination of existence of major disaster.* Solely for purposes of this Rule, this Court shall determine when an emergency affecting the justice system, as a result of a natural or other major disaster, has occurred in:
  - (1) this jurisdiction and whether the emergency caused by the major disaster affects the entirety or only a part of this jurisdiction, or
  - (2) another jurisdiction but only after such a determination and its geographical scope have been made by the highest court of that jurisdiction. The authority to engage in the temporary practice of law in this jurisdiction pursuant to paragraph (c) shall extend only to lawyers who principally practice in the area of such other jurisdiction determined to have suffered a major disaster causing an emergency affecting the justice system and the provision of legal services.
- (b) *Temporary practice in this jurisdiction following major disaster.* Following the determination of an emergency affecting the justice system in this jurisdiction pursuant to paragraph (a) of this Rule, or a determination that persons displaced by a major disaster in another jurisdiction and residing in this jurisdiction are in need of pro bono services and the assistance of lawyers from outside of this jurisdiction is required to help provide such assistance, a lawyer authorized to practice law in another United States jurisdiction, and not disbarred, suspended from practice or otherwise restricted from practice in any jurisdiction, may provide legal services in this jurisdiction on a temporary basis. Such legal services must be provided on a *pro bono* basis without compensation, expectation of compensation or other direct or indirect pecuniary gain to the lawyer. Such legal services shall be assigned and supervised through an established bar association pro bono program, not-for-profit bar

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## PROPOSED SUPREME COURT RULE

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association, ~~or an approved legal services program assistance organization, a public defender's office,~~ or through such organization(s) specifically designated by this Court.

- (c) *Temporary practice in this jurisdiction following major disaster in another jurisdiction.* Following the determination of a major disaster in another United States jurisdiction, a lawyer who is authorized to practice law and who principally practices in that affected jurisdiction, and who is not disbarred, suspended from practice or otherwise restricted from practice in any jurisdiction, may provide legal services in this jurisdiction on a temporary basis. Those legal services must arise out of and be reasonably related to that lawyer's practice of law in the jurisdiction, or area of such other jurisdiction, where the major disaster occurred.
- (d) *Duration of authority for temporary practice.* The authority to practice law in this jurisdiction granted by paragraph (b) of this Rule shall end when this Court determines that the conditions caused by the major disaster in this jurisdiction have ended except that a lawyer then representing clients in this jurisdiction pursuant to paragraph (b) is authorized to continue the provision of legal services for such time as is reasonably necessary to complete the representation, but the lawyer shall not thereafter accept new clients or new unrelated matters for an existing client. The authority to practice law in this jurisdiction granted by paragraph (c) of this Rule shall end [60] days after this Court declares that the conditions caused by the major disaster in the affected jurisdiction have ended.
- (e) *Court appearances.* The authority granted by this Rule does not include appearances in court except:
- (1) pursuant to that court's *pro hac vice* admission rule and, if such authority is granted, any fees for such admission shall be waived; or
  - (2) if this Court, in any determination made under paragraph (a), grants blanket permission to appear in all or designated courts of this jurisdiction to lawyers providing legal services pursuant to paragraph (b). If such an authorization is included, any *pro hac vice* admission fees shall be waived.
- (f) *Disciplinary authority and registration requirement.* Lawyers providing legal services in this jurisdiction pursuant to paragraphs (b) or (c) are subject to this Court's disciplinary authority and the *Rules of Professional Conduct* of this jurisdiction as provided in Rule 8.5 of the *Rules of Professional Conduct*. Lawyers providing legal services in this jurisdiction under paragraphs (b) or (c) shall, within 30 days from the commencement of the provision of legal services, file a registration statement with the Clerk of this Court. The registration statement shall be in a form prescribed by this Court. Any lawyer who provides legal services pursuant to this Rule shall not be considered to be engaged in the unlawful practice of law in this jurisdiction.
- (g) *Notification to clients.* Lawyers authorized to practice law in another United States jurisdiction who provide legal services pursuant to this Rule shall inform clients in this jurisdiction of the jurisdiction in which they are authorized to practice law, any limits of that authorization, and that they are not authorized to practice law in

this jurisdiction except as permitted by this Rule. They shall not state or imply to any person that they are otherwise authorized to practice law in this jurisdiction.

### Comment

- [1] A major disaster in this or another jurisdiction may cause an emergency affecting the justice system with respect to the provision of legal services for a sustained period of time interfering with the ability of lawyers admitted and practicing in the affected jurisdiction to continue to represent clients until the disaster has ended. When this happens, lawyers from the affected jurisdiction may need to provide legal services to their clients, on a temporary basis, from an office outside their home jurisdiction. In addition, lawyers in an unaffected jurisdiction may be willing to serve residents of the affected jurisdiction who have unmet legal needs as a result of the disaster or, though independent of the disaster, whose legal needs temporarily are unmet because of disruption to the practices of local lawyers. Lawyers from unaffected jurisdictions may offer to provide these legal services either by traveling to the affected jurisdiction or from their own offices or both, provided the legal services are provided on a *pro bono* basis through entities authorized by this Rule. ~~an authorized not-for-profit entity or such other organization(s) specifically designated by this Court.~~ A major disaster includes, for example, a hurricane, earthquake, flood, wildfire, tornado, public health emergency or an event caused by terrorists or acts of war.
- [2] Under paragraph (a)(1), this Court shall determine whether a major disaster causing an emergency affecting the justice system has occurred in this jurisdiction, or in a part of this jurisdiction, for purposes of triggering paragraph (b) of this Rule. This Court may, for example, determine that the entirety of this jurisdiction has suffered a disruption in the provision of legal services or that only certain areas have suffered such an event. The authority granted by paragraph (b) shall extend only to lawyers authorized to practice law and not disbarred, suspended from practice or otherwise restricted from practice in any other manner in any other jurisdiction.
- [3] Paragraph (b) permits lawyers authorized to practice law in an unaffected-jurisdiction, and not disbarred, suspended from practice or otherwise restricted from practicing law in any other manner in any other jurisdiction, to provide *pro bono* legal services to residents of the affected jurisdiction following determination of an emergency caused by a major disaster; notwithstanding that they are not otherwise authorized to practice law in the affected jurisdiction. Other restrictions on a lawyer's license to practice law that would prohibit that lawyer from providing legal services pursuant to this Rule include, but are not limited to, probation, inactive status, disability inactive status or a non-disciplinary administrative suspension for failure to complete continuing legal education or other requirements. Lawyers on probation may be subject to monitoring and specific limitations on their practices. Lawyers on inactive status, despite being characterized in many jurisdictions as being "in good standing," and lawyers on disability inactive status are not permitted to practice law. Public protection warrants exclusion of these lawyers from the authority to provide legal services as defined in this Rule. Lawyers permitted to provide legal services pursuant to this Rule must do so without fee or other

compensation, or expectation thereof. Their service must be provided through an established not-for-profit organization that is authorized to provide legal services either in its own name or that provides representation of clients through employed or cooperating lawyers. Alternatively or in addition, this court may ~~instead~~ designate other specific organization(s) through which these legal services may be rendered. Under paragraph (b), an *emeritus* lawyer from another United States jurisdiction may provide *pro bono* legal services on a temporary basis in this jurisdiction provided that the *emeritus* lawyer is authorized to provide *pro bono* legal services in that jurisdiction pursuant to that jurisdiction's *emeritus* or *pro bono* practice rule. Lawyers may also be authorized to provide legal services in this jurisdiction on a temporary basis pursuant to Part 6 § I (C) of the Rules of Virginia Supreme Court. ~~under Rule 5.5(e) of the Rules of Professional Conduct.~~

- [4] Lawyers authorized to practice law in another jurisdiction, who principally practice in the area of such other jurisdiction determined by this Court to have suffered a major disaster, and whose practices are disrupted by a major disaster there, and who are not disbarred, suspended from practice or otherwise restricted from practicing law in any other manner in any other jurisdiction, are authorized under paragraph (c) to provide legal services on a temporary basis in this jurisdiction. Those legal services must arise out of and be reasonably related to the lawyer's practice of law in the affected jurisdiction. For purposes of this Rule, the determination of a major disaster in another jurisdiction should first be made by the highest court of appellate jurisdiction in that jurisdiction. ~~For the meaning of "arise out of and reasonably related to," see Rule 5.5 Comment [14] Rules of Professional Conduct.~~
- [5] Emergency conditions created by major disasters end, and when they do, the authority created by paragraphs (b) and (c) also ends with appropriate notice to enable lawyers to plan and to complete pending legal matters. Under paragraph (d), this Court determines

when those conditions end only for purposes of this Rule. The authority granted under paragraph (b) shall end upon such determination except that lawyers assisting residents of this jurisdiction under paragraph (b) may continue to do so for such longer period as is reasonably necessary to complete the representation. ~~The authority created by paragraph (c) will end [60] days after this Court makes such a determination with regard to an affected jurisdiction.~~

- [6] Paragraphs (b) and (c) do not authorize lawyers to appear in the courts of this jurisdiction. Court appearances are subject to the *pro hac vice* admission rules of the particular court. This Court may, in a determination made under paragraph (e)(2), include authorization for lawyers who provide legal services in this jurisdiction under paragraph (b) to appear in all or designated courts of this jurisdiction without need for such *pro hac vice* admission. If such an authorization is included, any *pro hac vice* admission fees shall be waived. A lawyer who has appeared in the courts of this jurisdiction pursuant to paragraph (e) may continue to appear in any such matter notwithstanding a declaration under paragraph (d) that the conditions created by major disaster have ended. Furthermore, withdrawal from a court appearance is subject to Rule 1.16 of the *Rules of Professional Conduct*.
- [7] Authorization to practice law as a foreign legal consultant or in-house counsel in a United States jurisdiction offers lawyers a limited scope of permitted practice and may therefore restrict that person's ability to provide legal services under this Rule.
- ~~[8] The ABA National Lawyer Regulatory Data Bank is available to help determine whether any lawyer seeking to practice in this jurisdiction pursuant to paragraphs (b) or (c) of this Rule is disbarred, suspended from practice or otherwise subject to a public disciplinary sanction that would restrict the lawyer's ability to practice law in any other jurisdiction.~~