

President's Message

by Edward L. Weiner



The Value of Membership

IN PREPARING THIS LAST of my columns, I'm reflecting back on my term as VSB president thus far. It is going by far more quickly than I could have imagined.

One privilege of being VSB president is the opportunity to meet not only leaders from many of our local and specialty bars in the commonwealth, but also leaders from state bars across the country. During roundtable discussions, bar presidents and executive directors raise issues of concern within their states and brainstorm solutions. The issues are remarkably similar: the unauthorized practice of law, the independence of the judiciary, technology in the practice of law, and access to legal services.

Other hot topics of bar leaders are bar dues and member benefits. In July 2015, VSB dues were increased for the first time since 2000.¹ According to the ABA's *2015 Membership, Administration and Finance Report*, twenty-seven states or territories have mandatory bars that perform regulatory functions. Of those, Virginia's dues are among the lowest. (see chart 1)

Even when looking at states whose mandatory bars do not perform regulatory functions, VSB dues remain among the lowest. (see chart 2)

Again, VSB dues have been at or below \$250 per year for the past sixteen years.

When VSB members ask me, "What do my dues do for me?" I could expound (and often do) on the many value-rich programs of the VSB. Here are four, which continue to benefit VSB members.

Ethics Hotline

The VSB Ethics Hotline receives approximately 650 calls each month from attorneys seeking advice on a wide range of issues in their practice. The most common include:

Conflict of Interest Screening;
Withdrawal of Representation (When must I withdraw? When can I? Client hasn't paid. Disruptive client.); File Maintenance (How long must I maintain client files? How much must be maintained? Client has hired new counsel, must I keep a copy? Do I need a signed receipt, when files are turned over?); Dissolution and Formation of Law Firms/Attorneys Leaving a Practice.

Jim McCauley and his superb team have answered my questions and helped me get a better night's sleep on many occasions. The hotline can be reached at (804-775-0564).

Fastcase

Since 2006, every VSB member receives a free subscription to Fastcase, a leading legal research service. Fastcase's libraries have primary law from all fifty states, as well as federal coverage. Fastcase includes cases, statutes, regulations, court rules, and constitutions, as well as access to a newspaper archive, legal forms, and a one-stop PACER search of federal filings. Founded in 1999 by a VSB member, Fastcase has more than 800,000 subscribers around the world.

Lawyer Referral Service

The Virginia Lawyer Referral Service has helped people obtain effective and high-quality legal assistance since 1977. In 2015, the VLRS answered more than 14,000 calls and made 4,490 paid

chart 1

MANDATORY STATE BARS THAT PERFORM REGULATORY FUNCTIONS	TOTAL BAR DUES/ FEES TO PRACTICE
Alaska	\$660
Oregon	\$537
Texas	\$500
Virgin Islands	\$500
Arizona	\$475
Nevada	\$450
Idaho	\$445
Louisiana	\$435
California	\$430
South Carolina	\$430
Utah	\$430
South Dakota	\$415
Montana	\$395
North Carolina	\$361
Washington	\$355
Wyoming	\$355
Mississippi	\$335
Alabama	\$325
Georgia	\$323
Kentucky	\$310
Michigan	\$285
District of Columbia	\$280
Oklahoma	\$275
Florida	\$265
Virginia	\$250
West Virginia	\$250
Nebraska	\$98

referrals to the active 500 attorney panel members. The knowledgeable VLRS staff prescreens the callers to ensure their matter is of a legal nature that requires the assistance of an attorney. If it is determined — with discussion between caller and referral specialist — a referral for consult for up to thirty-minutes is made for a pre-paid fee of \$35. For more information on panel membership in the Virginia Lawyer Referral Service please visit www.vlrs.net.

Lawyers Helping Lawyers

Lawyers Helping Lawyers provides free, confidential, nondisciplinary assistance to members of the legal profession who are professionally impaired by substance abuse or mental health issues. Assistance is provided through a statewide network of volunteers and a professional staff. LHL offers assistance designed to avoid disciplinary problems, protect clients and the public, support the impaired person's family and associates, and strengthen

our profession. Individuals may call for confidential help: (877) LHL-INVA; www.valhl.org.

These are but a sample of the benefits of VSB membership. Many more are described on the VSB's website (www.vsb.org). The VSB staff is as committed to serving you, our 49,000 members, as you are to serving your clients. It has been an honor to serve as the 77th president of this great organization. Thank you!

Endnote:

- 1 The 2015 increase was \$25 for active members (\$12.50 for associate members). In 2011, dues were decreased from \$250 to \$225 for active members (\$125 to \$112.50 for associate members).

chart 2

MANDATORY STATE BARS THAT DO NOT PERFORM REGULATORY FUNCTIONS	TOTAL BAR DUES/ FEES TO PRACTICE
New Hampshire	\$545
Hawaii	\$524
Wisconsin	\$490
Rhode Island	\$450
Missouri	\$410
New Mexico	\$410
North Dakota	\$380

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* Virginia first-time test takers as defined by the Virginia Board of Bar Examiners
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