

# Executive Director's Message

by Karen A. Gould



## The Benefits of Membership: You and the VSB

VIRGINIA LAWYERS USUALLY think about the Virginia State Bar only in terms of what they are required to do: MCLE compliance and annual dues. The VSB is so much more than those regulatory functions, running the gamut from helping members practice ethically to providing online referrals to lawyers. In this 80th year, I would like to remind you of some of the things you and your peers make possible for Virginia lawyers.

Considering the amount of usage the Ethics Hotline gets, this has to be the most popular member benefit the VSB offers. The four ethics lawyers run a daily hotline to help Virginia's lawyers practice ethically. You may reach the Ethics Hotline to seek informal ethics or unauthorized practice of law advice by calling (804) 775-0564. Alternatively, you may also email the Ethics Hotline by going to [vsb.org/site/regulation/ethics-questions-form](http://vsb.org/site/regulation/ethics-questions-form). Depending on the complexity of your question, you will receive either an email response or a return phone call. The ethics staff strives to respond to your questions within the same day.

VSB.org, the VSB website (all 10,000 pages of it), the *Virginia Lawyer* magazine, the *Virginia Lawyer Register* (now part of the magazine), and the *News* (formerly call *E-News*) provide communications and education to our members. The VSB also publishes resources about law-related issues for Virginia's lawyers and citizens on its website at [vsb.org/site/publications/publications-home](http://vsb.org/site/publications/publications-home). You may ask to receive hard copies

by filling out the form, [vsb.org/docs/orderform.pdf](http://vsb.org/docs/orderform.pdf), linked below Topical Resources. You can then provide these helpful brochures to your clients. Publications include *The Bankruptcy Process*; *El Proceso de Bancarrota en español*; *Children & Divorce*; *Los Hijos y El Divorcio en español*; *Divorce in Virginia*; *Financial Issues in Divorce in Virginia*; *Health Care Decision Making and Virginia Advance Directives resources*; *Immigration Fraud - information and multilingual brochures*; *Before You Buy: HOA Legal Issues*; *Legal Handbook for Cancer Survivors*; *Marriage in Virginia*; *Minors, Alcohol and Virginia Law*; *Protecting Your Intellectual Property: Patents, Trademarks & Copyrights*; *Selecting and Working with a Lawyer*; *Spare the Child*; and *Wills in Virginia*.

VSB members have access to the Fastcase legal research tool from the member page. Fastcase is provided free to all VSB members, though the service ordinarily costs \$995 per year for subscribers. Fastcase is the most popular legal research service in the country, serving over 800,000 lawyers and twenty-seven state bar associations. Fastcase 7 includes enhanced Forecite, Tag Cloud, Authority Check, and Bad Law Bot, the first big data service to identify negative citations to judicial opinions. Fastcase 7 also offers more advanced search options, new results screen options, larger fonts, and easier reading and printing options.

The VSB offers a number of educational programs for its lawyers. New admittees have their choice of eight

Professionalism Courses to find the one that fits best with their schedule during their first year in practice. The annual VSB TECHSHOW keeps lawyers educated on the very latest in technology developments affecting the practice of law. The annual Leroy Rountree Hassell Sr. Indigent Criminal Defense Seminar educates approximately 1,000 public defenders and court-appointed attorneys free of charge each year. The CLSBA's Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum travels to smaller towns twice a year to reach solos and small firms in diverse areas of the state. The Annual Meeting in Virginia Beach (this year was our 80th!) offered eight hours of CLE, as well as an excellent opportunity for networking and celebrating the civic and pro bono accomplishments of Virginia lawyers.

The Senior Lawyers Conference, Diversity Conference, Conference of Local & Specialty Bar Associations, and the Young Lawyers Conference stage programs for their members and the public to educate and further the pursuit of justice, while enhancing the image of lawyers in the community through their tireless efforts.

The VSB also has a robust Access to Legal Services program. The mission of the Virginia State Bar is to regulate the legal profession of Virginia; to advance the availability and quality of legal services provided to the people of Virginia; and to assist in improving the legal profession and the judicial system. Access to legal services remains a core part of this mission.

The Director of Access to Legal Services is employed full time by the VSB to support pro bono endeavors and to work with the VSB Special Committee on Access to Legal Services. The Supreme Court of Virginia's recent order establishing voluntary pro bono reporting on the 2019 dues statement has focused VSB efforts on providing relevant CLE programs while directing attorneys to pro bono opportunities.

Virginia.freelegalanswers.org is a VSB program that can be helpful to members who want to render pro bono legal services in a limited way. Prospective clients log on to the site and are screened to determine if they meet the threshold income requirements. If they qualify, users may post questions about a civil legal issue. Questions are then placed in a queue according to the nature of the legal issue or type of problem (i.e., "Family/Divorce/Custody" or "Debts & Purchases"). More information about this program may be found at [vsb.org/site/pro\\_bono](http://vsb.org/site/pro_bono).

Virginia Lawyer Referral Service is a service of the VSB that matches members of the public who are seeking the counsel of a Virginia lawyer. Members of the public have a number of different ways to reach VLRS: online by going to <http://www.vsb.org/vlrs/>; by sending an email to [lawyerreferral@vsb.org](mailto:lawyerreferral@vsb.org); or by calling VLRS at (804) 775-0808 (metro Richmond) or (800) 552-7977 (state-wide and nationwide toll-free).

The Special Committee on the Resolution of Fee Disputes oversees the Fee Dispute Resolution Program to provide an avenue, other than litigation, for the expeditious and satisfactory resolution of fee disputes between attorneys and their clients through mediation and uniform arbitration proceedings; and to foster trust and communication among attorneys and clients. The committee has established twelve fee dispute resolution circuit committees and provides training sessions for those committees.

Additionally, the committee collects and records data regarding circuit committee activity; and develops and implements awareness strategies among the public and the legal profession.

The twenty sections of the Virginia State Bar are devoted to improving the practice of law in a particular substantive area or specialty practice. They publish newsletters, elect their own officers, and choose their own activities within the limits established by the Council. Dues that range from \$10 to \$35 support the sections, of which a percentage is paid to the VSB for administrative support. A total of 23,156 lawyers are enrolled in section memberships as of May 2018. Membership runs from a high of 3,235 in the Litigation Section to 204 in the Antitrust Section.

There are many opportunities for you to utilize VSB member benefits by attending one of our many educational programs, joining a section, signing up for the Lawyer Referral Service, following VSB news online or in the magazine, or by participating in Virginia.freelegalanswers.org. Your dues dollars have remained low over the years due to the constant vigilance of the VSB staff in keeping costs down.

In the next *Virginia Lawyer* magazine, my column will address volunteer opportunities for members to assist either with the VSB's regulatory mission or with member benefits. Do not hesitate to contact me at [gould@vsb.org](mailto:gould@vsb.org) if you have questions or concerns.

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