

Executive Director's Message

by Karen A. Gould



Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. Made Justice More Accessible

WHEN LEROY ROUNTREE HASSELL SR. became Virginia's Chief Justice in 2003, he said he wanted the Virginia State Bar — an agency of the Supreme Court — to be of greater service to its members.

He told me that when I was president of the bar in 2006–07, and again when I became executive director in 2008.

Now, as Chief Justice Hassell concludes his second term and hands administrative responsibilities over to Justice Cynthia D. Kinser, I can assure you that he accomplished that initiative, along with many others, during his tenure.

He encouraged the VSB to provide free online legal research to all its members — a service the bar now has in place, through Fastcase.

Working with the VSB's Bar Services Department, he established the annual Indigent Criminal Defense Seminar to train public defenders and court-appointed lawyers in advanced skills; 2011 will be the seminar's sixth year.

He appointed a committee, overseen by Justice Kinser, that worked with the Conference of Local Bar Associations and bar staff to hold Solo & Small-Firm Practitioners Forums and Town Hall Meetings in every pocket of Virginia. The forums offer continuing legal education credits on topics related to practice management.

And he called the VSB together with the statewide voluntary bar associations to address pro bono legal services for the poor.

Behind each of these changes was his desire to improve the practice of law and ensure that all Virginians would have access to high-quality legal representation, regardless of their economic standing.

THE VSB COUNCIL has recognized many of Chief Justice Hassell's achievements in the following resolution:

WHEREAS, Leroy Rountree Hassell, Sr., has served with honor and distinction as a member of the Supreme Court of Virginia since 1989, when he was appointed by Governor Gerald L. Baliles, and as Chief Justice since 2003, after being elected by his peers to become the first elected Chief Justice; and

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Hassell is a person of great energy and determination, with a passion for the judicial system as an equal branch of government, and has shown compassion for the indigent, the addicted, mentally ill persons, military service members and veterans, and youth; and

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Hassell's term coincided with the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*; the 400th anniversary of the founding

of Jamestown, and the 230th anniversary of Virginia's first Constitution. He observed those anniversaries by telling his own story as Virginia's first African American Chief Justice, and by requiring that committees and commissions under the purview of the Court reflect the geographical, religious, racial, and gender diversity of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, under Chief Justice Hassell's leadership, the General Assembly increased compensation paid to court-appointed criminal defense attorneys and public defenders, and he established an annual seminar to provide free continuing legal education to experienced practitioners of indigent criminal defense; and

WHEREAS, he encouraged Virginia's statewide bar associations and the Virginia State Bar to work together to expand pro bono legal services for indigent persons; and

WHEREAS, during challenging economic times, he championed and helped preserve drug courts; and

WHEREAS, based on recommendations of his Commission on Mental Health Law Reform, the General

Assembly amended the Code of Virginia to enhance consistency and introduce therapeutic elements to the involuntary commitment process, to ensure fairness and due process in commitment hearings, to develop a psychiatric advanced directive, and to improve availability of mental health treatment to jail inmates; and

WHEREAS, he established a Solo and Small-Firm Practitioner Forum under the leadership of Justice Cynthia D. Kinser, and personally hosted Town Hall Meetings to improve the practice management skills of lawyers and the quality of legal services, and his leadership made online legal research available without charge to all members of the Virginia State Bar; and

WHEREAS, based on recommendations by a committee he appointed and placed under the guidance of Justice Donald W. Lemons, the Court amended its appellate rules to make them fairer, more efficient, and easier to use; and

WHEREAS, he successfully worked for legislation that reformed the state's magistrate system by upgrading educational requirements and providing increased support and supervision through the Office of the Executive Secretary; and

WHEREAS, on his initiative, the General Assembly created the Courts Technology Fund, which supports ongoing improvement of the Supreme Court's information technology systems and makes

possible electronic access and online filing; and

WHEREAS, he established the Judicial Security Initiative, which, with grant monies from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, developed a program to assess courthouse security and recommend improvements in more than 100 courthouses around the Commonwealth; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, on behalf of the 45,000 members of the Virginia State Bar and the statewide bar organizations in the Commonwealth, we express our thanks and gratitude to Chief Justice Hassell for his service to the Commonwealth and its citizens; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution be incorporated in the permanent record of the Virginia State Bar and that a copy be presented to Chief Justice Hassell in testimony of our collective respect and admiration.

ADOPTED on this 15th day of October 2010, effective January 31, 2011.

Irving M. Blank
President, Virginia State Bar

We are proud to have been a small part of Chief Justice Hassell's work to make the justice system accessible to all Virginians. We look forward to continuing to work with him on the Supreme Court.