

Vermont Bar Association
Friday, January 16, 2026, 11AM
Westin Hotel Montreal and via Zoom

Present: Justin Brown, Jessica Bullock, Lisa Champion, Josh Diamond, Kate Lamson, Jordana Levine, Ryan Long, Liz Miller, Keith Roberts, Collette Schmidt, Tim Tomasi, Matt Valerio, Alfonso Villegas, Brenna Weaver, Kathy Zhou.

VBA Staff: Lisa Maxfield, Bob Paolini, Kim Velk, Mary Ashcroft.

1. Call to Order: President Josh Diamond called the meeting to order at 11:06AM.

2. Minutes: Upon motion made by Alfonso, seconded by Kate, the minutes of the December 4, 2025, VBA Board meeting were approved as printed. There were no opposing votes and no abstentions.

3. Treasurer's Report: Lisa Maxfield reported that the membership renewal campaign has ended. There were just under 200 former VBA members who did not renew, which is about average. Staff will continue to work on this. Lisa anticipates that some of the lapsed members will renew in May and June in order to get reduced rates for CLEs needed for relicensing. Lisa also reported that the LRS budget is on track, having received a \$18,000 check in Nov. and another one recently. The CLE anticipated income is down this year because there will be no revenue from notary training as none will occur this year. Lisa also reported that we are caught up with grant income.

4. Emerging Issue:

None. ☒

5. Reports: ☒

A. Board Committee Reports:

- i. Member Services: Did not meet
- ii. Operations: Bob said that the Committee had met by email to discuss transition and revising the budget a bit. He will cover this more in the executive session.
- iii. Workforce Development: Did not meet
- iv. Access to Justice: Did not meet
- v. Executive Committee: Did not meet

B. President's Report: Josh Diamond reported that the Access to Justice Coalition had met to discuss restructuring the Coalition. Bob gave a good historical perspective on leadership of the Coalition, including the VBA's leadership in the past. Josh said that the Coalition agreed that the VBA should resume leadership, with the VBA President or

designee as chair. Josh noted that there are competing interests among members of the Coalition, as each looks out for its own funding needs. He feels that the VBA can be an honest broker as we represent lawyers. VBA can own that into the future. The Vermont Judiciary will still be involved, but will not be chairing. Josh is presently chair, and Jordana will likely assume the chair after Josh concludes his time as VBA Board president.

Josh also reported on the Judiciary's Legal Deserts Study. This report will be compiled by October. Josh chairs the subcommittee studying what the VBA can/should do re: workforce development and access to justice services, with emphasis on the former. This subcommittee report should be ready by June. Mary Ashcroft is also on this subcommittee and presented a summary of existing VBA programs; she also provided information on the VBA/VLGS Incubator Program at Justice Eaton's subcommittee which is focusing on VLGS. Ryan Long noted that there is also an overlap with his subcommittee, too. Josh expressed concern that recommendations for the VBA do not become mandates. He is pleased that the VBA is housing the A2J Coalition.

Josh also said that Justice Eaton had contacted him about operating clinics for elders in nursing homes. These would be free clinics with lawyers helping with wills, powers of attorney and Advance Directives, and possibly DNRs. The VBA's support would be needed. Other similar programs were mentioned as models—one in NY state for those diagnosed with cancer, another JAG program to do simple wills. It was noted that 95% of litigants in our probate courts are pro se. Keith Roberts said that elders may have something in place already but may be unclear what that is. The Board discussed the capacity issue, as not only will attorneys need to be recruited and possibly trained, but prep work will need to be done with nursing home staff. Logistics will need to be worked out, possibly with a steering committee of seasoned probate attorneys and possibly a probate judge.

C. Executive Director's Report: Bob Paolini reported that he also attended the A2J Coalition meeting, and that it needs reform. The Legislative session is only 2 weeks old, but Bob has been monitoring progress of 2 bills of interest to the VBA—one on family law, another on probate law. Bob is assisting Vermont Legal Aid in their efforts to get a funding increase in the state budget, as they have had to drop 9 attorneys (and LSV lost 2) due to federal funding cuts. VLA's poverty law funding comes from a line for AHS in the general budget.

Bob is assisting incoming VBA leaders to get to the annual ABA leadership training; this will include Jordana, Kate, and Kim. This is a very good training program. Bob and Lisa are also working on transition within VBA staff. Bob's last board meeting as Executive Director is today.

D. Division & Section Reports:

i. YLD: Ryan Long noted that we are at The Thaw, so all of the YLD's organizing efforts have come to fruition. The YLD will regroup after this weekend, get feedback and begin to plan for next year. The YLD also wants to reach out to other areas of the state. Ryan said

that 5 attorneys took advantage of the scholarships to attend the Thaw. Altogether 208 people are attending this weekend event.

ii. Women's Division: No report. Breanna is coming back from maternity leave and will start up again trying to rebuild a bridge with VLGS with a revived mentorship program.

iii. Government and Non-Profit Section: No report.

E. Staff Reports:

Kim Velk gave kudos to the YLD and to Laura Welcome for setting up the Thaw. Kim reminded the Board that the VBA is offering an AI mastermind course with 6 sessions and homework. This has a hefty price tag but it is very comprehensive. If anyone has ideas for CLE programming, there are still some slots available for panels at the Mid-year meeting on March 27. She noted that non-profit attorneys want to do a pro bono or low bono project. The VBA's annual meeting will be at Lake Morey, and programs are needed then, too. There are many CLE offerings coming up, especially in May and June to meet licensing requirements. The winter Bar Journal is online and will soon be out in print. The Martin Luther King Jr. poster and essay contest has finished; winning posters are displayed upstairs.

Mary Ashcroft reported that The Incubator Project just graduated 2 attorneys; we now have 6 in the project, and a process is underway to interview new candidates for the 18-month program. The Supreme Court's Legal Deserts study set up a subcommittee chaired by Josh to examine what the VBA can/should do to improve legal access. Mary joined that group and has reported on the VBA's efforts in the Incubator Project, Low Bono programs, LRAP, the Law Office Study Program, the bi-annual Pro Bono Conference, and the Lawyer Referral Service. Mary was also invited to brief Justice Eaton's VLGS subcommittee on our partnership on the Incubator Project and Small Business Project.

Mary noted that quarterly and half year grant reports are due for the VBA's low bono projects, and she is working on these, along with grant applications for the VBF-funded programs. The VOCA grant quarter report was approved, so federal funding continues to come through for crime victims. The VBA just received from the VBF the pass-through check for the \$8,000 CATIC Foundation grant, and \$25,000 for one half year of the coordinator grant.

The VBA Board's A2J Committee needs to meet to consider nominations for the VBA's Pro Bono Award to recommend names to the full Board in time for its Feb. 20 meeting. The A2J Committee also needs to start planning for the Pro Bono Conference in October.

F. VBF Report: No report.

6. Action Items

A. Enrollments: Upon motion made, seconded and unanimously approved, the following were enrolled as VBA members: Legal Members Clara Alley, Jonathan Bailie,

Lauren Carita, Nicole Chamberlain, James Dunne, Aaron Franklin, William Juan, Parker Malman, Ryan Mazalatis, Tracy Mutchler, David Newland, Daniel Ryan, Fallon Ryan, Kelly Ryan, Tiffany Troy and Kiana Zygowicz; Law Student Associate Members Sofia Aviles and Brett Monson.

B. Support for VLA: Upon motion made, seconded and unanimously approved, the VBA Board supports increased legislative funding for Vermont Legal Aid as outlined in the materials in the VBA Board packet.

7. New business: Keith Roberts commented on the VT Digger article about Attorney Michael Drescher's nomination for Vt Supreme Court. Keith noted the public's lack of understanding about the role of an attorney representing a client. People are conflating the position of a client with the personal beliefs of an attorney. Keith proposed that the VBA provide some education/clarity to the Senate Judiciary committee about the role of attorney. As a career prosecutor, Mike Drescher can't "fire" an individual client. He has one client only. He can only quit his job, which is asking too much. Debate ensued about the proposal to write an official VBA letter to the Judiciary Committee of the Vermont Senate explaining role of attorneys. Debate ensued. Points made included that while the letter could say it is not an endorsement, it will be seen as one; the discussion about this nomination is polarized and this could do more harm than good; it could take the VBA a year to recover, as has happened in the past with such VBA positions on abortion, mandatory pro bono and the death penalty; public defenders and criminal defense attorneys aren't routinely appointed to bench as people identify them with their clients, and now the same is happening with a prosecutor being identified with his client.

After much discussion, Keith Roberts withdrew his request for a VBA formal letter and urged individual lawyers to write to the Senate Judiciary Committee on this nomination, without attribution to the VBA.

8. Old Business: None.

9. Executive Session: Upon motion made, seconded and unanimously agreed to, the VBA Board went into Executive Session at 12:10 to discuss personnel and compensation matters. The Board came out of Executive Session at 1:10PM. Josh announced that the Board had unanimously approved the selection of Kim Velk as the new VBA Executive Director. Bob Paolini will continue as our legislative liaison through the session expected to conclude in May of 2026.

9. Adjourn: There being no further business to discuss, on motion made, seconded and unanimously approved; the meeting was adjourned at 1:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted: VBA Staff