

VBA Annual Report 2021-2022

By Bob Paolini, Esq, VBA Executive Director, and Lisa M. Maxfield, Associate Director

The VBA Annual Report covers VBA activities during the period September 1, 2021 – August 31, 2022 time-frame.

There have been some changes at the VBA Office! We welcomed Kim Velk as our new Director of Education and Communication and welcomed Tom Barrett as our new Lawyer Referral and Membership Coordinator. VBA Executive Director Teri Corsones was appointed as Vermont State Court Administrator in early July. Former Executive Director Bob Paolini returned to the VBA as Interim Director.

The VBA COVID-19 Committee continued its monthly meetings to ensure the interests of lawyers were well-represented during the Judiciary's many amendments to AO 49 and courthouse safety protocols. The committee served as a liaison and provided input and feedback to the Judiciary and Executive Branch. The VBA Board of Managers voted to disband the COVID-19 committee at its September 2022 board meeting as the COVID-19 Pandemic has wound down considerably and the Vermont Judiciary has ended its declaration of judicial emergency pursuant to Administrative Directive TC-1 (as amended 9/27/2022).

The monthly Section/Division Chairs and County Bar Presidents Conference Calls have continued; those participating provided invaluable input for ACCD guidelines and the Judiciary's emergency orders, and emergency legislation. The monthly meetings provide an opportunity to share information between the VBA and County Bars.

We continue to offer a wide range of CLEs through Zoom, many of which are recorded for viewing in our digital library. We were also finally able to get back to in-person meetings for our Mid-Year Meeting in March and our Annual Meeting in September 2021. The Trial Academy was back in person in July at Vermont Law School and the Young Lawyer's Division managed to host the Mid-Winter Thaw when things were well and properly thawed in Montreal – in April. The VBA also continued to provide necessary programming for first-year requirements for newly admitted attorneys. Thank you to our member attorneys and those judges who have been willing to share their expertise for these programs.

The Workforce Development Committee continues its efforts to recruit and retain lawyers and has led the way to create a Mentor and Advice Program, which pairs seasoned attorneys with newly admitted members in a six-month mentorship program. Many of the requests for mentors come from lawyers that are not yet in Vermont. The committee is also working on a request to the VBA Board of Bar Managers for funding to restart a loan repayment assistance program (LRAP) that was once funded by the Vermont Bar Foundation. At the VBA's recent 2022 Annual Meeting, held September 30, the membership authorized use of some excess funds held in the Client Security Fund for programs that advance the mission of the association.

VBA Access to Justice initiatives have proven invaluable to disadvantaged Vermonters especially during the time of the pandemic. Our projects use grant funds to pay private attorneys to represent low-income Vermonters and crime victims in certain cases. Legal Access Coordinator Mary Ashcroft has

placed more than 400 cases with the more than 150 attorneys who participate on our low bono referral panel. Our thanks go to all of them, and we ask more of our colleagues to join the effort. Please contact Mary Ashcroft at mashcroft@vtbar.org for more information. The pro bono committee is chaired by Bar Counsel Mike Kennedy. The committee was active this year planning for an in-person Pro Bono Conference for October 2022, the first since the pandemic, and in succession planning for Mary's retirement, which she announced this year.

The Court Users' Group continued to meet. The group includes attorneys from a variety of geographic and practice areas, trial court operations staff, the court administrator's office, and at least one trial court judge. Members carry concerns from the bar and other court users to the judiciary in an effort to help the judiciary understand issues that users experience with filing. Going forward, the Court Users Group will act as a consultative body to the Change Advisory Board. The Court Users Group will continue to act as a conduit for court users and other external stakeholders to provide input to the judiciary about Odyssey issues.

The VBA Lawyer Referral Service continues to assist clients in need of Vermont counsel. The VBA fields over 500 calls per month and the program has earned more than \$1 million in LRS revenue for our 125 LRS panel members.

The VBA continued its focus in the arena of public education by co-hosting the annual Constitution Day with the Vermont Law and Graduate School as well as organizing the Young Lawyers Division and Diversity Section's annual Martin Luther King Poster Essay Contest for middle-school students.

The VBA continues to partner with the Vermont Law and Graduate School in the VBA/VLS Incubator Project. This project assists new lawyers starting solo practices in underserved legal and geographic areas of Vermont. The VBA/VLS teams provides day-to-day mentoring and weekly check-ins, review of business plans, smart start-up grants, referral of low bono and pro bono cases.

The VBA Sections and Divisions chairs and members have been working hard to facilitate legislative initiatives, CLE programming, contributions to the Vermont Bar Journal, and much more. We thank all of you for what you do. Please take a moment to read about their accomplishments and remember to utilize our online community platform, VBA Connect, to join sections and divisions of your choosing to stay informed and network with your peers.