

VBA ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Bob Paolini, VBA Executive Director

The VBA Annual Report covers VBA activities during the period Sept. 1, 2023 –Aug. 31, 2024.

Let me begin by acknowledging the outstanding staff that support the membership every day. One of the first things I did in the summer of 2022 when I returned to the Executive Director post at the VBA was to name Lisa Maxfield as Associate Executive Director. Lisa, formerly our CFO, earned that promotion after nearly 30 years of service to the VBA.

Laura Welcome remains our Program Coordinator and has served in that role for about 15 years. Kim Velk, Esq. has been our Director of Education and Communication for almost three years and, working with Laura, has produced great programming for our members. I am constantly impressed by her energy and ability to research current trends in the law and seek out educational opportunities to keep VBA members informed and up to date. Tom Barrett, our Lawyer Referral Coordinator, also with the office for almost three years, has shown great skill in managing that service which benefits not only Vermonters seeking legal help but our members as well. Mary Ashcroft, Esq. our Legal Access Coordinator, who was planning on retiring, has decided to extend her time at the VBA after 16 years of service. We are very grateful that she made that choice. Our newest staff member is Caitlin Janus our Office Administrator,

who's been with us for about seven months but who has already gotten into the flow of work and fits in perfectly with the team.

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

Keeping Vermont lawyers informed about developments in the law, assisting with their licensing requirements, and increasing coping skills within the legal profession is at the heart of the VBA's mission. During the last fiscal year, we sponsored 102 educational programs including the in-person Annual, Mid-Year, and Mid-Winter Thaw meetings hosted by the Young Lawyer's Division and 99 Zoom CLEs.

The total attendance was 5,104 and 139.25 credit hours were available through live programming. First-year licensees are required to take 15 hours of specially approved CLE on Vermont Practice and Procedure. Nine of these credits must be live, in-person programs. (Six hours can be earned via recordings). Last year we offered

14 qualifying live courses totaling 70.25 qualifying credits.

At the VBA, we rely almost completely on volunteers to teach these CLEs. The success of our CLE program is as is directly correlated to the commitment that our members have to serving the profession and the public, so thanks to all of you who taught and attended our CLEs in 2023-2024.

VBA's BROWN BAG LAW STUDY PROGRAM HAS COVERED ALL UBE SUBJECTS

Last year we also completed an ambitious effort to offer an overview of each subject tested on the Uniform Bar Exam. Vermont is one of the few states that continues to

offer a path to attorney licensing through an apprenticeship program. Vermont's venerable law office study (LOS) program is run by the Vermont Judiciary. Qualified participants study 25 hours a week for four years with a Vermont attorney or a judge and then complete the bar exam. The parameters and requirements of the program are set out in Rule 7 of the Rules of Admission to the Bar of the Vermont Supreme Court. Currently there are 51 students registered in Vermont's LOS program.

In most cases, LOS participants get detailed training in the areas of law in which their sponsor practices. It is unlikely, however, that most will get an introduction to, much less an actual course of study in, those areas in which the sponsor doesn't practice.

To fill this gap, in Feb. 2023, the VBA launched the "Brown Bag Law Program." The sessions, which carried CLE credit and were also open to licensed attorneys looking for a refresher, provided instruction on each of the 12 subject areas covered in the Uniform Bar Exam. The Brown Bag program was not designed to replace law school courses, or even to stand in for bar review courses. Rather, the goal of the program was to provide students with an introduction to the key terminology and concepts in each of the subject areas. Volunteer presenters, all experienced practitioners or faculty members of Vermont Law and Graduate School, offered one or two zoom webinars each month covering all twelve topics tested in the UBE. We completed the topics in April 2024. The sessions were all recorded and are maintained in the VBA digital library to be shared with future LOS students.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The second year of the legislative biennium got underway in January and the VBA was active in offering testimony on housing issues and homelessness, access to justice funding, property law issues, the Vermont Parentage Act, and Uniform Trust Laws.

This is the first time the VBA has led the Access to Justice Coalition in a legislative ask for funding for our Vermont Bar Foundation (VBF) for civil legal needs. The Coalition is made up of not only the VBA and the VBF, but also the Vermont Law and Graduate School (Vermont's only law school), Vermont Legal Aid, Legal Services Vermont, and the Vermont Supreme Court. I provided testimony to both Judiciary Committees as well as both Appropriations Committees and met individually with representatives and senators serving on those committees. The challenge to keeping the focus on civil legal needs was the financial picture the state now faces. Although the House funded the request of the Coalition, it did so in a tax revenue enhancement package the Senate refused to go along with. While the House passed a justice system spending package of just over \$22 million, the Senate's version was only \$8.5 million. What was safe in these discussions, however, is the addition of three new Superior Court Judgeships which are sorely needed. But our access to justice proposal died at the end of the session.

SUCCESSION AND TRANSITION PLANNING

The VBA has provided continuing legal education programming for our members on succession planning and other issues involved in planning retirement or transition out of the practice of law. The VBA also conducted a survey of its membership on succession planning. Almost 400 members took the time to answer the survey and the responses were mixed. Almost 40% of respondents were ages 63+ while the remaining 60% were

20 to 62 years of age. About 50% have been in practice for more than 30 years. Not surprisingly about 79% of respondents have thought about retiring from the practice of law, half of whom have started actively planning their next move. Most would like to begin their transition by working part-time. However, 35% said they were not interested in mentoring a new or young attorney in their area in developing a practice, while 30% said they would be and 35% said they were unsure. 62% of respondents were not interested in learning about ways to connect with new or younger attorneys and 73% were not interested in supervising an apprentice in the Law Office Study Program. Only 24% have made plans for succession or passing on their practice. These are just a few of the highlights of our survey results. We can make a copy of the full results available to anyone who would like to see it.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

An important initiative for us this year is outreach to the wider community beyond members of the bar, particularly Vermont school students. We want to inspire the next generation of legal professionals and the pipeline into a legal career begins in school. As part of this initiative, attorneys and other legal professionals throughout the state are engaging with educators to sponsor Law Day events. Law Day is officially May 1, but we have had a full season of "Law Day" events with more to come. A team of volunteers in Washington County led Law Day events on First Amendment issues at U-32 and Montpelier High School. VBA members have sponsored Law Day events at Burlington High School and South Burlington High School, and another group is working with students served by the Burlington Boys and Girls Club to plan an event. The Rutland

County Bar held a trial featuring Barbie, Ken, and perhaps Allan, for younger students, and other Law Day events will be held in Bennington County.