

VIRGINIA ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

Quarterly Report to the Supreme Court of Virginia

September 29, 2014

The Virginia Access to Justice Commission submits this report in accordance with the order entered by the Supreme Court of Virginia on September 13, 2013 establishing the Commission. That order requires quarterly reports on Commission progress during the first two years of the Commission's existence.

During this quarter, the third meeting of the Commission was held on September 12, 2014 at the Virginia Supreme Court building. A quorum of the Commission was present.

At the September 12 meeting, members discussed the role of the Commission in setting direction and operating through its committees to improve access to justice in civil cases. National trends in limited scope representation, or unbundled legal services, were discussed. The Commission also addressed expiring first terms of several members, adopted amendments to its rules of operation, and received reports from its four committees.

Each committee met at least once during this past quarter, and several new committee members were added. Each Committee presented a report at the September 12 meeting.

The Pro Se Litigant/Court Access Committee has explored the availability of resources and mediation for self-represented litigants. A survey, designed to gather more information from trial judges about pro se litigants who appear before them, has been developed. The Commission endorsed submitting the survey to Virginia trial judges upon approval by the Chief Justice. The Commission also approved changing the committee's name to the Committee on Access for Self-Represented Litigants. The Honorable Gino W. Williams, Chief Judge of the 27th Judicial District, and Susan J. Stoney, Deputy Director, Legal Services of Northern Virginia, have joined this committee.

The Pro Bono Committee has considered and will continue to explore the pros and cons of mandatory reporting of pro bono activity. It recommends increasing pro bono participation through local Bench-Bar pilot programs, the "Firms in Service" model, and recognition awards for major pro bono contributors.

Members of the Public Relations Committee plan outreach campaigns to corporate counsel, young lawyers, and civic associations. Access to justice will be promoted using talking points and media resources developed by the Committee, and possibly a specialty license plate. Henry I. Willett, III, Esq. of Christian & Barton is a new member of this committee.

The Judicial Education Committee has arranged for a presentation on procedural fairness to General District Court Judges at the upcoming mandatory conference. Additionally, practice pointers for cases involving self-represented litigants are being developed for inclusion in the District Judges' Benchbook and other educational resources. An invitation has been extended to Christine E. Marra, Esq., of the Virginia Poverty Law Center, to join this committee. The next Commission meeting will be held on December 5, 2014 at the Virginia Supreme Court Building. The Commission's calendar is set for 2015 with meetings scheduled on March 30, June 5, September 18, and December 10.