

# Metro Pro Bono Advocate

*A publication of the Pro Bono Committee of The Bar Association of the City of Richmond*

Vol. 7, Issue 1

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## Housing Law program adds law student volunteers

The Pro Bono Housing Program, co-sponsored by the Bar Association of the City of Richmond and the Legal Aid Justice Center, offers legal advice and representation to low-income tenants involved in conflicts with their landlords. Some cases are resolved after a few client meetings in the form of advice to the client, while others require a telephone call to the client's landlord or even court appearances. Thanks to Professor Margaret Bacigal's involvement in the program, University of Richmond law students are paired with volunteer attorneys with whom the students attend meetings with clients at the Legal Aid Justice Center.

Through working with esteemed mem-

bers of our legal community, law student volunteers gain knowledge of substantive housing law and experience interviewing clients and observing attorneys in action. For instance, during one of the meetings I attended with John M. Oakey, Jr., the attorney with whom I was paired during my first year, I began to learn the art of understanding your client and responding to his/her unique situation. In another case, Mr. Oakey encouraged me to do investigative work to discover the true nature of a conflict between a tenant and her landlord. Few opportunities exist for first year law students to get hands-on experience, and even fewer are as rewarding as the Pro Bono Housing Pro-

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## New program increases resources for victims of violence

The Virginia Poverty Law Center, Inc. has begun an exciting new program to enhance and increase the pro bono civil legal resources for victims of domestic and sexual violence. VPLC created a fellowship in Domestic and Sexual Violence and hired a recent graduate from the University of Richmond School of Law to implement this program.

Through the program, VPLC will offer a free full-day training covering the legal and non-legal issues that surround domestic and sexual violence, such as the dynamics of domestic violence, protective orders, custody and visitation, immigration issues, and pursuing civil remedies for victims of sexual violence. Attorneys who attend the trainings will have the opportunity to represent domestic and sexual violence victims in the area of their choice. These areas will include protective orders; custody, visi-

tation and child support; spousal support and divorce; and immigration. VPLC will hold eleven trainings throughout the state. The first training will be held in Richmond on December 19, 2005 at the University of Richmond School of Law. CLE credit for the trainings, including ethics, and GAL credit are pending.

Volunteers can get involved in a number of ways. VPLC is not only looking for attorneys to provide pro bono services to victims, but also for experienced family law attorneys willing to act as mentors for the pro bono volunteers. Attorneys representing victims will be given referrals from the local legal aid society. Attorneys serving as mentors should be willing to be available for phone or email consultations.

For more information or to volunteer, please contact Sara Theile at (804) 782-9430 or sara@vplc.org.

## A letter from the Committee Chair

*By Charles G. Meyer, III, Chair  
Richmond Bar Association Pro Bono  
Committee*

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast last month serves as a stark reminder of our continued vulnerability to disaster, both natural and man-made, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Among the lessons learned includes the critical importance of effective and timely relief efforts by local, state, and federal authorities. For many, compassion delayed was compassion denied.

The Richmond Bar Association Pro Bono Committee ("RBA Pro Bono Committee") recognizes that it is not enough simply to care about the victims of disaster, disease, poverty, and crime. Compassion requires action. Recognizing the enormous challenges facing New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities, the RBA Pro Bono Committee has joined the Virginia Bar Association and the Virginia State Bar in recruiting volunteers for this VBA/VSB Disaster Relief training program for volunteer attorneys interested in offering pro bono disaster legal aid to victims of Hurricane Katrina. On September 23, 2005, over 80 attorney volunteers from Richmond gathered for training in pro bono disaster legal assistance. Many of these volunteer attorneys already are engaged in offering guidance and counsel to victims facing a host of legal concerns, ranging from insurance coverage and claims processing to housing and medical needs, wills and estate planning.

Closer to home, the RBA Pro Bono  
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# Training set for Domestic Violence Project

By John M. Oakey, Jr.

The VBA Domestic Violence Project has new leadership who will be revitalizing the program in the next few months. The VBA Young Lawyers leadership has appointed Robbi Gray of McGuireWoods and Alexis Fishel of Kaufmann & Canoles to lead the programs in the Richmond and Henrico areas.

This Project has been in existence for about five years but has been less active in the past few years. The program furnishes volunteer pro bono lawyers to represent victims of domestic violence. The lawyers involved actually have a very limited duration of representation. The attorney is appointed after the first hearing and represents the client through the final court appearance which must be held within fourteen days under the law. This requires the attorney to have a conference, usually by telephone, with the victim and to arrange for the appearance of witnesses if they exist and then appear and represent the victim at the hearing. The attorney does not normally represent the victim if the case is appealed but can do so if he or she desires.

I have personally participated in the program in Richmond since its inception and would recommend any lawyer interested in doing pro bono work to participate. It is one of the most worthwhile tasks

that a pro bono attorney can perform.

I remember one case where the victim would not have gone into the court room unless I had been there to stand between her and the abuser. She even refused to look at the Judge because then she could see the abuser out of the corner of her eye. Most of the clients are so upset about what has occurred that without a lawyer, they do not make very effective witnesses. The only problem I have had is that some of the victims want to forgive their abuser and go back to live with him. Even in these cases the lawyer serves a good purpose in explaining to them why this is a mistake, and the dangers they will encounter in the future.

Robbi and Alexis have scheduled a training for anyone interested in participating in the program on the second floor of One James Center at the offices of McGuireWoods LLP for November 10, 2005 from 4:00 to 6:00 PM. The program will be available for two hours of CLE credit. This session will be videotaped and available for participants who are unable to attend to view later.

Anyone interested in the training or participating in the program should contact either Robbi Gray at 775-1227 or Alexis Fishel at 771-5765.

# Law students assist in housing program

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gram. Further opportunities are available for more experienced students, particularly those with third-year practice certificates. Experience aside, students and attorneys in this program have the opportunity to discover the true value inherent in pro bono work and the valuable rewards it offers for them and their clients.

Any law student who is interested in volunteering, or who would simply like more information on the Program, may contact Margaret Bacigal at 289-8950 or mbacigal@richmond.edu.

*(The above article was written by University of Richmond law student*

*Lauran Glassman, who served as one of the first law student volunteers for the Richmond Bar Association's Pro Bono Housing Law Program. Last school year marked the first time that UR law students served the Program as assistants to the volunteer attorneys who handle the intakes and representation of pro bono housing clients. The law student volunteers have provided excellent support work, and the initiative to include the students has been a big success. The Housing Program is currently recruiting volunteer attorneys, and anyone interested in the Program should contact Ben Pace at 783.6932 or wpace@williamsmullen.com.)*

# News from the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation

The Foundation is proud to announce that the following 14 attorneys have agreed to serve on their recently established Advisory Board:

Ralph L. Axselle, Jr.  
Gary D. LeClair  
Gerald L. Baliles  
James W. Morris, III  
David B. Beach  
Russell V. Palmore  
Lewis T. Booker  
James C. Roberts  
William G. Broaduss  
Alexander H. Slaughter  
Craig S. Cooley  
Michael W. Smith  
Robert J. Grey  
Anne Marie Whittemore

The Pro Bono Clearinghouse, which is the signature program of the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation recently reached a milestone when it made its 200<sup>th</sup> match. The Clearinghouse links local non-profit organizations needing legal assistance with volunteer attorneys and has provided more than \$375,000 in legal services through this program.

# Pro Bono Committee Members:

Charles G. Meyer III, Chair  
Hon. Joi J. Taylor  
Hon. Robert A. Pustilnik  
Tara L. Casey  
David N. Anthony  
Peter A. Gilbert  
John M. Oakey, Jr.  
Margaret I. Bacigal  
Marilynn Goss  
W. Benjamin Pace  
Maya M. Eckstein  
James W. Speer  
Marcellinus L. M. B. Slag  
Charles K. Seyfarth  
Mary W. Martelino  
Timothy S. Baird  
Sangeeta J. Darji  
Douglas D. Callaway  
Gregory F. Holland

## Pro Se education project prepares for third pamphlet

Over three years ago, the Bar Association of the City of Richmond embarked upon an exciting project to address the special needs of the ever-growing pro se litigant population. In response to this complex situation, the Richmond Bar Association created the Pro Se Education Project to find a solution that assists the judiciary and litigants alike. The Project responded to this need by creating educational pamphlets to aid pro se litigants, regardless of their respective positions in litigation.

Since the Project's creation, judges, attorneys, and community advocates have all stepped up and lent their respective talents to this endeavor. In 2003, the Project rolled out its inaugural pamphlet, "Your Guide to Civil Litigation in General District Court," and, in 2004, the Project launched its second pamphlet, "Your Guide to Landlord/Tenant Litigation." In 2005, the Project created a Spanish version of its inaugural pamphlet and is in the process of securing funding for its distribution. All of these pamphlets provide information to pro se litigants about the basic procedures of civil litigation, in a fair and balanced fashion that enables all parties to negotiate themselves through the legal system and better protect their interests. With the financial support from the Vir-

ginia Law Foundation and the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation, the Project has distributed approximately ten thousand pamphlets to courts and legal services organizations since 2003, free of charge.

Not wishing to rest upon its laurels, the Project has decided to tackle a burgeoning issue in our society with its third pamphlet. Specifically, the Project plans to create a pamphlet that addresses the rights of creditors and debtors under state law. In order to prepare this pamphlet, however, the Project needs your support. Please consider volunteering to serve on the editorial review board for the Pamphlet; the Project is especially interested in attorneys whose practice encompasses this subject matter.

The Richmond Bar Association is proud of this cooperative project and the assistance it will provide to the pro se litigant. Members and the public are encouraged to view both pamphlets online at [http://www.richmondbar.org/legal\\_resources.htm](http://www.richmondbar.org/legal_resources.htm). Although these pamphlets cannot replace legal representation, the Project hopes that they will educate and empower those who stand alone before the court. If you are interested in volunteering with the Project, or simply would like more information, please contact Tara Casey at 819-5506 or [tara.casey@usdoj.gov](mailto:tara.casey@usdoj.gov).

## Choose to make a difference - give to the GRBF

Your donations of volunteer time, financial support or a combination of both can help the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation make a difference in our community. There are several ways you can help.

Ukrop's recently announced its new charitable giving partner, Benevolink. Benevolink offers nonprofits a simple means of year-round fundraising. This revised program thanks customers for buying Ukrop's family of products by linking these purchases to charitable giving. Please visit [www.ukrops.com](http://www.ukrops.com) and click on the Ukrop's Golden Gift

powered by Benevolink icon. Choose the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation to be the recipient of your gifts. Then simply buy Ukrop's products and a portion will be donated to the Foundation.

The Foundation is also an approved charitable organization in the United Way program. When you make your annual pledge to the United Way, please designate the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation as the recipient of your gift.

Tax-deductible donations may also be mailed to: Greater Richmond Bar Foundation, P. O. Box 1213, Richmond, VA 23218-1213.

## Letter from the Chair

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Committee continues to offer a wide range of pro bono services throughout the Richmond area. The Housing Law Program, which is operated in conjunction with the Legal Aid Justice Center, now offers expanded service both to Richmond and Petersburg and includes law student volunteers from the T.C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond. Other programs include the Pro Bono Clearinghouse for pro bono transactional service to non-profit corporations throughout Virginia; the Domestic Violence Project, which offers critical representation to victims of domestic violence; and the Pro Se Education Project, which offers educational literature to unrepresented persons. The Pro Bono Committee also is coordinating with Central Virginia Legal Aid Society to provide volunteers for the No Fault Divorce Program to assist with processing no-fault divorces. In addition, the Pro Bono Committee is providing education and training to senior attorneys interested in maintaining Active Bar status for purposes of rendering pro bono services rendered under the State Bar's newly adopted Emeritus Rule.

From helping victims of domestic violence to assisting non-profits and indigent tenants facing housing law litigation, the RBA Pro Bono Committee offers members of the Richmond Bar Association myriad opportunities to serve the public. While Richmond fortunately was spared the devastation left by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we continue to face the daily challenges of poverty and crime in our community every day. Although not the subject of national media attention, the need for pro bono service in our city is just as real. Make the choice to help and consider volunteering for any one of the many programs sponsored by the Pro Bono Committee.

## RICHMOND METRO PRO BONO SAMPLER

Attorneys, please refer to the list below to learn more about the activity that interests you.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Contact Person</u>	<u>Telephone</u>
Appeal Bond Fund	Marcel Slag	648-1086
Community Tax Law Project	Elaine Javonovich	358-5855
LAJC Housing Law	Marcel Slag	648-1086
CVLAS Wills Program	Kathy Brigman	862-1100
Henrico Bar Association Pro Bono Volunteers	Christopher H. Macturk	762-9500
Hunton & Williams - Church Hill office	George Hettrick	775-2248
VBA-YLD Central VA Pro Bono Hotline	Coburn Beck, Agustin Rodriguez	788-8576, 274-5731
Pro Bono Clearinghouse (www.grbf.org)	Carol Murray	780-2600
Legal Information Network for Cancer (LINC)	Sushella Varky	662-5462
Virginia Poverty Law Center	Steve Myers	782-9430
Richmond Domestic Violence Project	Robbi Gray/Alexis Fishel	775-1227/771-5765
VBA-YLD Legal Services for the Mentally Ill	John Phelps	662-7242
VSB Young Lawyers Board Match	Beth Hungate-Noland	783-6913
Refugee and Immigration Services - Catholic Diocese of Richmond	Marilyn Breslow	355-4559

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