



THE
RICHMOND
LAWYER



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE RICHMOND BAR ASSOCIATION
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26

**WHERE (AND WHY) DEI
INITIATIVES GO WRONG—
AND WHAT'S YOUR PLAN "B"**

Sarah K. Knarzer

RBA Administration
of Justice Committee
receives comment
from the U.S.
Bankruptcy &
Richmond Courts

**THE BAR ASSOCIATION OF
THE CITY OF RICHMOND**

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EDITORIAL POLICY

The Richmond Lawyer, published by the Richmond Bar Association (RBA), holds the primary goal of keeping RBA members informed about the latest happenings, events, and developments within the organization. *The Richmond Lawyer's* mission is to provide timely and relevant information that supports the professional and personal growth of our members.

The Richmond Lawyer welcomes submissions of articles concerning legal topics of interest to Richmond legal professionals. Criteria for publication include the article's quality, its substantive value, its interest to Richmond lawyers, and the originality of its subject matter. Submissions that relate to cases pending before any court or agency will not be accepted.

The Richmond Lawyer maintains editorial independence to ensure unbiased reporting and to avoid conflicts of interest, with editorial decisions made without undue influence from external parties or RBA leadership. It is important to note that opinions expressed in articles do not necessarily represent the explicit opinions of the RBA. The Richmond Bar does not provide legal advice. The Richmond Bar staff does not perform independent research on submitted articles.

Any errors will be corrected promptly and transparently, with corrections clearly marked and published in the subsequent issue. The publication is committed to protecting the privacy of its members, ensuring personal information is not shared without consent and used solely for publication purposes.

By adhering to this editorial policy, *The Richmond Lawyer* aims to provide a high-quality, informative, and engaging publication that serves the needs of the Richmond Bar Association community.

Readers are encouraged to provide feedback and contribute to the publication, with feedback directed to aholland@richmondbar.org. *The Richmond Lawyer* accepts advertisements relevant to the legal profession, with all advertisements adhering to our ethical standards and subject to approval and payment.

Full Editorial Policy & Calendar available upon request

Articles for submission, feedback, and other communications regarding *The Richmond Lawyer* should be sent to Annie M. Holland, Executive Director via email at aholland@richmondbar.org or by mail sent to P.O. Box 1213, Richmond, Virginia, 23218.



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RBA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEBRUARY

- 2nd | Executive Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 3rd | Communications Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 5th | Board of Directors Meeting | 12:30 PM | Hunton Andrews Kurth
- 9th | Family Law Section Winter Social | 4:30-7:00 PM | Tazza Scotts Addition
- 12th | Membership Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 17th | Young Lawyers Section Winter Social | 6:00-8:00 PM | Hardywood RVA
- 18th | Sponsors Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 23rd | Bankruptcy CLE & Luncheon | 12:30-2:00 PM | Whiteford
- 25th | Lunch & Learn with Taylor Steffan, Navigator Counseling | 12:00 PM | Zoom
- 26th | Nominating Committee Meeting | 12:30-2:00 PM | RBA Office

MARCH

- 2nd | Executive Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 2nd | Awards & Honors Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 5th | Board of Directors Meeting | 12:30 PM | Hunton Andrews Kurth
- 9th | Pro Bono Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 19th | Programs Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 24th | Pro Bono Court Watch Day | 8:30 AM | LAJC & Richmond Courthouse
- 30th | Executive Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom

APRIL

- 2nd | Board of Directors Meeting | 12:30 PM | Hunton Andrews Kurth
- 8th | Sponsors Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 15th | Spring Cocktail Party | 5:30-8:00 PM | Lewis Ginter
- 23rd | Membership Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 28th | Communications Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom

IN THE NEWS

If you've recently landed a new job or promotion, share the good news with the Richmond Bar. Include your full name, your company's name and location, your new title and your areas of concentration in your email. Announcements can be e-mailed to aholland@richmondbar.org or mailed to Annie Holland, at P.O. Box 1213, Richmond, VA 23218.



Harman Clayton Corrigan & Wellman welcomes *Vincenzo Chiariello* to the firm's Richmond office as an Associate.

ThompsonMcMullan Civil Litigation attorneys *Rachel Adams* and *Peter Askin* have been promoted to Shareholder and Partner, respectively. Both started with the firm at the associate level and are an integral part of the firm's Civil Litigation practice group.



Rachel Adams



Peter Askin



ThompsonMcMullan litigation partner and firm president *Billy Tunner* has been appointed by the Virginia Bar Association (VBA) to the Board of Governors at this year's VBA Winter Meeting.

The **Virginia Law Foundation** has selected **ThompsonMcMullan** attorney *Cliona Mary Robb* as an inductee of their Fellows Class of 2026.



Byrne Canaan Law is pleased to announce new hire *Samantha R. Romano* as an Associate Attorney concentrating her practice in medical malpractice defense, and healthcare regulatory and administration matters.

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THE RBA PURPOSE

The purposes of the Bar Association of the City of Richmond are to:

- cultivate and advance the cause of jurisprudence;
- to facilitate and improve the administration of justice;
- to promote the delivery of legal services to the entire community;
- to promote an increased understanding by the public of the legal system and respect for the law;
- to inculcate and enhance the highest standards of ethical conduct, integrity, dignity and honor;
- to continue the legal education of its members; and
- to encourage courtesy among all members of the legal profession, including Bench and Bar.

OPENING STATEMENTS

FROM THE PRESIDENT Jennifer J. West



By February at the Richmond Bar Association, early planning conversations have begun to turn into real schedules, priorities, and opportunities to shape what the year ahead will look like. For the RBA, this is a moment to be both reflective and intentional as we move forward.

This issue of *The Richmond Lawyer* focuses on diversity in the legal profession. While this topic is highlighted here, it is not confined to a single issue or month. Diversity is fundamental to the strength and credibility of the Bar. It influences how we lead, how we serve, and how effectively we represent an increasingly diverse community. A profession that values a range of perspectives is better equipped to meet the demands of modern practice and to uphold the principles that define our work.

As the month begins, the RBA is once again fully active. Sections are reconnecting through winter gatherings and beginning to plan their annual meetings. Committees are meeting, setting priorities, and shaping the direction of the organization. This work often happens quietly, but its impact is lasting. Much of what members experience from the RBA, its programs, initiatives, and culture, is the direct result of committee engagement and volunteer leadership.

The months ahead include many of the programs that have long anchored the life of the Richmond Bar Association. From the Spring Cocktail Party to the Law Day Luncheon and beyond, these events are opportunities to connect across practice areas, career stages, and perspectives. They reflect not only tradition, but the continued relevance of a Bar that brings its members together.

The strength of the RBA ultimately depends on participation. That participation can take many forms: encouraging a colleague to join, becoming more involved through a section or committee, or sharing feedback through [the membership involvement survey](#). Each of these actions helps ensure that the Bar reflects the priorities, needs, and values of its members.

I encourage you to consider what you want from your local Bar, and how you might help make that vision a reality. The Richmond Bar Association is shaped by those who engage, and its future is strongest when that engagement is broad, thoughtful, and inclusive. Thank you for your continued commitment to the RBA and to the profession we share.

“ Diversity is fundamental to the strength and credibility of the Bar. It influences how we lead, how we serve, and how effectively we represent an increasingly diverse community. ”

- Jennifer J. West

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Annie M. Holland

There is a real question that seems to surface every February: how long is it acceptable to keep writing “Happy New Year” at the top of an email? By now, most of us have retired it entirely, which feels like an appropriate marker that the year is officially underway. At the Richmond Bar Association, February is when things move from planning mode to full execution, and that is always an exciting shift in momentum.

This issue of The Richmond Lawyer focuses on diversity in the legal profession. While this feature has a dedicated place in this issue, diversity is not limited to one month on the calendar. It is a year-round consideration that informs our programming, leadership development, mentorship efforts, and overall approach to building a Bar that reflects the profession you serve. A diverse and inclusive legal community strengthens not only our organization, but the practice of law itself.



“ [Diversity] is a year-round consideration that informs our programming, leadership development, mentorship efforts, and overall approach to building a Bar that reflects the profession you serve. ”

By February, the RBA typically has much of the year mapped out, and this year is no exception. From the Spring Cocktail Party in April to the Holiday Cocktail Party at the end of the year, with Law Day, the Summer Associate Breakfast, section events, CLEs, and networking opportunities in between, the calendar is full in the best possible way. Seeing that full arc of programming come together is one of the most energizing parts of my role, because it reflects just how much is happening across the organization.

This is also a particularly good time to talk about membership. Beginning March 1 through May 31, the RBA’s annual grace period allows new members to join without paying dues until June 1. If you have colleagues who have been meaning to join (or who just need a nudge), this is the moment. A personal invitation remains the most effective way to grow our membership, and the spring calendar offers plenty of opportunities to show what the RBA experience really looks like.

In addition to member engagement, we are also seeing strong interest in sponsorship opportunities. From social events and law firm sponsorships to visibility in The Richmond Lawyer, there are numerous ways for firms and organizations to support the RBA while increasing their presence within the legal community. These partnerships play a critical role in making our programs possible, and we are always happy to explore creative ways to align sponsorships with organizational goals.

As the calendar year gains momentum, the energy around the RBA is palpable. Sections are active, new initiatives like the Mentoring Program are taking shape, and the months ahead are filled with opportunities to connect, contribute, and engage. February may be short, but it sets the tone for a very full and promising year.

- Annie M. Holland

NOTICE: COMPOSITION OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The membership is hereby notified that the Nominating Committee is composed of the following members:

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Deanna H. Hathaway, Chair | Michael A. Montgomery |
| Julie M. Cillo | Melanie A. Friend |
| R. Braxton Hill, IV | Cullen D. Seltzer |
| Joel R. McClellan | |

To be elected at the Annual Meeting of the Association, scheduled to take place on Wednesday, April 15, 2026 at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens beginning at 5:30 PM, are a President-Elect, a Vice President, an Honorary Vice President, a Secretary-Treasurer, and three new at-large members of the Board of Directors, and such other at-large members of the Board of Directors, if any, as may be necessary to fill any vacancies. The Committee will receive and review recommendations for all available positions.

Nominations for any position should be in writing and emailed to Executive Director, Annie M. Holland at aholland@richmondbar.org or mailed to her at the RBA office- P.O. Box 1213, Richmond, VA 23218.

All nominations must be received by 12:00 noon on February 20, 2026.

The RBA seeks insights from members on RBA programs, offerings, and general events - fill out the anonymous survey!



The survey above will provide the RBA staff and leadership feedback as they begin to plan the upcoming bar year.

RICHMOND BAR COMMITTEE UPDATES

Awards & Honors Committee

The RBA is currently soliciting nominations for the Liberty Bell Award. This award is awarded to a non-lawyer, or lawyer who is no longer practicing, who has driven the legal community forward in some way. For full details and to submit a nomination, please visit the RBA website.

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee continues to publish materials in The Richmond Lawyer and on the Richmond Bar social media accounts.

Continuing Legal Education Committee

The CLE Committee is actively looking for new members! The only Committee to follow the calendar year, the CLE Committee is soliciting volunteers for a two-year term, expiring December 31, 2027.

Interested parties should contact Annie Holland at aholland@richmondbar.org.

Judiciary Committee

The Judiciary Committee has had a busy end to the calendar year, holding interviews for Chesterfield Circuit Court, Chesterfield General District Court, and Chesterfield Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court over just a few months. The Committee continues to monitor the needs of the legislature and will convene again if necessary this bar year.

Membership Committee

The Membership Committee is excited to begin planning the 2026 Summer Associate Breakfast, and is still encouraging lawyers and law students in the Richmond area to join the RBA. The Membership Committee also stresses that the upcoming membership grace period is a fantastic time to join - join the RBA between March 1- May 31 and pay no membership dues until June 1.

Programs Committee

The Programs Committee is hard at work creating engaging and valuable events for RBA members. The Committee is asking all members to take a moment to fill out the [membership involvement survey](#) to help guide the programming and events of the Richmond Bar in 2026.

Pro Bono Committee

The Pro Bono Committee is excited to host the second Pro Bono Housing Court Watch Day with Judge Shah at the Richmond Courthouse. The Court Watch Day will be on March 24th at 8:30AM and feature coffee at LAJC, Q&A with the administrative staff at the courthouse, a housing docket watch, and Q&A with Judge Shah after her docket. Space is limited- sign up by emailing Annie Holland at aholland@richmondbar.org. No cost.

Sponsors Committee

The Sponsors Committee is excited to continue their efforts to create a valuable return for current and potential Select and Individual Event sponsors. There are plenty of visibility opportunities in the upcoming bar year!

RICHMOND BAR SECTION UPDATES

BANKRUPTCY SECTION

The Bankruptcy Section hosted their annual Holiday Party in December. The Section will host a CLE & Luncheon titled "Not a Loan (Wink): Merchant Cash Advances on Trial in Bankruptcy" on February 23rd ([REGISTER HERE](#)).

The Section is also looking to host a spring event and their annual meeting, more details coming soon.

CORPORATE COUNSEL SECTION

The Corporate Counsel Section has been collaborating with the Young Lawyers Section on their upcoming Winter Social ([REGISTER HERE](#)). While it is a YLS social, all RBA members are welcome to attend and learn about the new RBA Mentoring Program, which Ken Stout, Section Chair, has been leading over the last few months.

FAMILY LAW SECTION

The Family Law Section held a coffee meet-up at CoCo + Hazel and is looking forward to their next social- February 9th at Tazza (Scotts Addition) from 4:30-7:00. You can register for this event by emailing Sharon Potter at spotter@richmondbar.org. Free for Section members, \$25 for nonmembers.

REAL ESTATE SECTION

The Real Estate Section has been hard at work coordinating a CLE and social, more details coming soon!

The Section is also planning a Clerk's Dinner and their Annual Meeting.

YOUNG LAWYERS SECTION

The Young Lawyers Section is excited to hold their winter social on February 17th from 6:00-8:00 at Hardywood Richmond ([REGISTER HERE](#)). This event will also feature a collaboration from the Corporate Counsel Section to highlight the new RBA Mentoring Program. The Section is also planning their Annual Meeting for May.

BUSINESS LAW SECTION

The Business Law Section is hard at work putting together a social for the Section as well as the Annual Meeting in May.

ENVIRONMENTAL & ENERGY SECTION

The Environmental and Energy Law Section held a holiday social in December and is currently in the planning process for a spring social at Hotel Greene, as well as their annual meeting in May.

LITIGATION SECTION

The Litigation Section is currently planning a spring social as well as their annual Judges' Reception and Annual Meeting at the end of the bar year.

SENIOR LAWYERS SECTION

The Senior Lawyers Section held a CLE on Elder Fraud recently, which was a huge success. The Section is planning a social for this winter or spring, and their Annual Meeting in May.

The Richmond Bar Association

Mentoring PROGRAM

About the Program

The goal of the RBA Mentoring Program is simple: to connect experienced attorneys with RBA members who are looking for guidance, perspective, and support as they build their careers.

Mentor/mentee matches will be made based on:

1. Practice area and focus
2. Years in practice
3. Mentee preferences
(including, where possible, gender and practice focus)

Who Can Be a Mentee?

- RBA members seeking guidance, perspective, and support as they begin or develop their legal careers.



Sign up to be a Mentee

Help shape the future of Richmond's legal community.

Complete the Mentee Interest Form [HERE](#)

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE COMMITTEE RECEIVES COMMENTS FROM U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT AND RICHMOND JUDGES

**The Honorable Kevin R. Huennekens & The
Honorable Keith L. Phillips**

*United States Bankruptcy Court for the
Eastern District of Virginia*

This has been a year of transition for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. As previously announced, Judge Kevin R. Huennekens retired from his position as an active Judge, leaving Judge Keith L. Phillips as the sole Eastern District Judge based in the Richmond Division, and leaving the Eastern District with only five active bankruptcy judges. Although Judge Huennekens' vacancy has not been filled, Judge Huennekens was recalled by the Fourth Circuit in 2025 and has been recalled again to retain a limited case load in 2026. Additionally, Judge Huennekens' docket has been divided among and reassigned to Chief Judge Brian F. Kenney and Judges Klinette H. Kindred and Frank J. Santoro, who alternate traveling to Richmond to cover the Wednesday motions and Chapter 13 dockets.

December also marks the one-year anniversary of Judge Kenney's appointment as Chief Judge of the Eastern District Bankruptcy Court and Charri S. Stewart's appointment as Clerk of Court for the Bankruptcy Court. Both Chief Judge Kenney and Ms. Stewart are handling their new positions well and implementing positive changes for the Court. Longtime Chapter 13 Trustee Carl Bates has also announced his retirement as Chapter 13 Trustee at the end of 2025, and the Court extends a warm welcome to Richmond's newest Chapter 13 Trustee, Michael Jones, who is set to begin in January of 2026.

From October to November of last year, the Court experienced the longest government shutdown in the country's history.

Luckily, the Court had sufficient funding for most of the shutdown period and managed the remainder of the shutdown efficiently on limited funding before returning to a normal schedule in November. The shutdown also impacted the Office of the United States Trustee, which already experienced cutbacks related to the efforts of the Department of Government Efficiency. The budget will come up for review again in January 2026.

In light of the adjustments to the Court's procedures since Judge Huennekens retired and inconveniences caused by the government shutdown, the Court expresses its gratitude and appreciation for the bar's professionalism and efforts over the past year. The Court also appreciates the efforts of its dedicated Chapter 7, Chapter 13, and Subchapter V Trustees and the Clerk's Office.

Filings in the Eastern District of Virginia have generally increased over the last year, with the increase primarily in consumer cases and, to a lesser extent, Subchapter V cases. Subchapter V cases have become more popular among debtors who fall within the debt limits and have done well in the Eastern District of Virginia. Pending legislation would increase the Subchapter V debt limit to allow more small-business debtors to take advantage of the Subchapter V reorganization process.

There have been minor changes to the Eastern District's local rules this year to mirror changes to the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure. For those with comments on the Court's current procedures or rules, Ms. Stewart is working to revitalize the Court's Bankruptcy Bar Liaison and Rules Committees, and the Court encourages the bar to become active with those committees.

The Honorable Jacqueline S. McClenney
Richmond Circuit Court

Chief Judge McClenney expressed **her gratitude for the Richmond Bar Association, commending its members for their continued commitment to collegiality and professionalism.**

She addressed the recent changes to courthouse policy regarding electronic devices. A new Standing Order on Electronic Devices, effective October 1, 2025, consolidates prior directives and introduces key updates. Members of the public may now bring cell phones and other electronic devices into the courthouse, provided they are powered off and secured in locked Yondr pouches. Individuals with hearing impairments or medical conditions requiring access to their devices will be provided with specialized pouches to accommodate their needs. Attorneys may continue to bring cell phones into the courthouse without using Yondr pouches. However, Judge McClenney emphasized that this is a professional privilege and should not be misused. Cell phone use should be limited to court-related functions such as calendar access. She also reminded everyone that recording hearings or trials via cell phone or other devices is strictly prohibited without express judicial permission.

Regarding technology in general, Judge McClenney noted the ongoing expansion of the courthouse's free public WiFi network. She reminded practitioners that large-screen televisions with device connectivity are available for use during hearings and trials and can be reserved in advance. Attorneys are encouraged to consult the Court's website for recommended technology practices. Judge McClenney did not believe that Artificial Intelligence (AI) was presenting any current problems among lawyers practicing in her Court, but she has started to see obvious indications that AI was being used extensively in filings of pro se litigants.

She noted that this has led to some filings riddled with errors that attorneys would likely have caught. She wanted to reiterate that as AI technology advances and its use becomes more widespread, all parties should recognize its fallibility. She wants everyone, lawyers and parties, to understand that they are ultimately responsible for the finished product that they file with the Court.

On the topic of maintaining good communication with the Court concerning case activity, Judge McClenney had a few important considerations. She urged attorneys to promptly notify the Court of any changes in case status, including cancellation of hearings and trials. Given the high volume of cases and limited availability of hearing and trial dates, timely communication is essential. Leaving resolved matters on the docket unnecessarily prevents other litigants from having their cases heard and is considered unprofessional. She asked that practitioners promptly submit proposed dismissal orders following removal of matters from the trial docket. Judge McClenney also reminded counsel that substantive legal arguments or inquiries regarding how a judge may rule on a pending matter should not be conducted via email with law clerks. She further requested that attorneys provide accurate time estimates for hearings to assist with docket management and submit proposed orders promptly following proceedings.

Judge McClenney discussed the cost of litigation and that the Rules of Supreme Court of Virginia do have a mechanism for limiting the scope of discovery based on the needs of the case. She noted that the Court does not generally apply discovery limitations available under Rule 4:1(b) sua sponte and that litigants who wish to see such limitations applied must move for a protective order under Rule 4:1(c).

Finally, Judge McClenney expressed her **sincere appreciation for the Richmond Bar Association's continued support as her office works with the City on the development of a new courthouse.** The current facility presents significant health and safety concerns that require immediate action.

She encouraged the Bar to remain actively engaged in advocating for this project to ensure it remains a top priority. She is hopeful that with the current momentum a new courthouse will become a reality within the next five years.

The Honorable Mansi Shah
Richmond General District Court

Judge Shah **commended the Richmond Bar Association and its members for their impressive work over the past year. Judge Shah appreciates practitioners' professionalism and respect for each other.**

Judge Shah noted that there are no significant recent policy changes relating to the civil docket in the Richmond General District Court. The Court holds a general civil docket every day at 10:00 a.m. The Court schedules civil trials and pretrial motions requiring less than 30 minutes at 9:00 a.m. For all other civil trials and contested motions, the Court schedules hearings at 11:00 a.m.

Judge Shah addressed the recently adopted City of Richmond Circuit Court Local Rule on Artificial Intelligence ("AI"), which was issued on January 13, 2026. While the General District Court has not adopted a formal rule regarding attorney and pro se use of AI in court filings and during hearings, Judge Shah reminded attorneys of their ethical duties of candor to the Court. General District Court judges do not have law clerks or judicial assistants and rely upon the representations of counsel. As a best practice, Judge Shah encourages parties to bring copies of cases and statutes to Court, with a copy for the other side, to provide judges the opportunity to review and deliver a decision without taking the matter under advisement.

Judge Shah would like to remind practitioners appearing in Court to be prepared with documents they plan on referencing. For example, practitioners seeking attorneys' fees in Court should be prepared to discuss and reference the contract or statute that entitles them to attorneys' fees and costs. Judge Shah also would like to remind practitioners to ensure that their file reflects the Court's file. Parties are always welcome to stop by the Clerk's Office and look at what is in the Court's file prior to a hearing. As a courtesy to the Court, Judge Shah impressed upon practitioners that if a case settles, counsel must inform the Court before the trial date. Too often, parties fail to inform the Court that a matter is resolved, imposing an administrative burden on judges and the Clerk's Office to follow-up with counsel telephonically. Finally, Judge Shah noted that the Court will permit parties to appear remotely via WebEx; however, counsel must consent to the remote appearance and provide the Court with ample notice to ensure technology needs are arranged.

COMING SOON

RBA Grace Period

New members can join the Richmond Bar Association from March 1-May 31 and pay no membership dues until June 1!

MEET ME
at the
RICHMOND



BAR

MOCKTAIL OF THE MONTH

Love Blossoms



½ cup raspberries
1 tsp honey (optional)
1 oz. lemon juice
2-3 oz. raspberry lemonade
4 oz. sparkling rosé (non-alcoholic) or plain sparkling water

- 1** Muddle raspberries and honey in a shaker
- 2** Add lemon juice, raspberry lemonade, and a handful of ice. Shake well.
- 3** Strain into a glass filled with fresh ice.
- 4** Top with non-alcoholic sparkling rosé (or sparkling water).

Judge Shah stated that there are no significant recent policy changes for the criminal docket either. The Court has seen a trend of increased volume in the traffic docket post-COVID. The Court will continue to monitor that trend and accommodate the dockets as needed. Judge Shah highlighted the great work of the Court's Behavioral Health Docket, which meets every Monday at 1:30 p.m. Through the leadership and regular interaction of presiding judges, and through voluntary offender participation, the Behavioral Health Docket is structured to address offenders with serious mental illness and substance use disorders. Judge Shah noted the program's success in reducing recidivism rates for participants. The program hosts three to four alumni celebrations per year, where participants are recognized by judges and community leaders.

Judge Shah **thanks the Richmond Bar for its hard work and dedication to the practice of law. She encourages all attorneys to continue to be involved in the Richmond Bar Association, including the RBA Pro Bono Committee's Watch Days in General District Court. She commended Sarah Bennett Bures, Max So, and the other members of the Pro Bono Committee for their dedication to meeting the pro bono service needs of the City of Richmond. Judge Shah appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the legal community and looks forward to another successful year.**

The Honorable Brice E. Lambert

Richmond Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court

Chief Judge Lambert of the Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court highlighted anticipated renovations to the Oliver Hill Courts Building, including new equipment and technology to make evidence sharing easier and more user-friendly. The renovations are expected to be completed in Summer 2027. The Court has also recently hired a full-time interpreter and is in

the process of translating its forms into Spanish to improve access to and administration of justice. In the past year, the Court participated in a state-wide pilot survey program. For about three weeks, courthouse visitors received a QR code to scan and provide anonymous feedback on courthouse facilities, operations, and users' overall experience. Ten courts were selected to participate in the program.

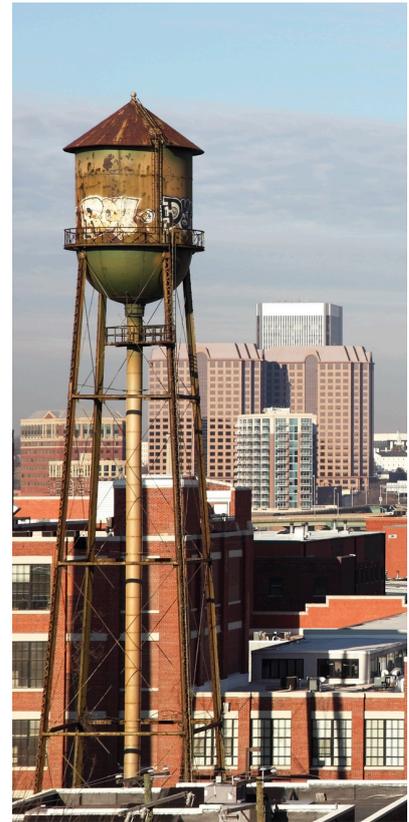
Judge Lambert praised the collaborative and problem-solving approach taken by Richmond Courts and Sheriff's Office staff during the January 2025 water crisis. During the outage, all three City of Richmond Courts—Circuit, General District, and Juvenile and Domestic Relations—operated at the Richmond City Jail, which never lost water during the crisis. The transfer and coordination of courthouse operations to the Jail was a tremendous effort that entailed setting up computer hardware, networks, and security, and allowed the Courts to continue to hear arraignments and other time-sensitive matters during the water outage.

The Court has experienced an uptick in cases involving firearms, including firearm possession, shootings, and homicides and is exploring a violence prevention program targeted towards juveniles. The Court has also noticed an increase in the number of Spanish-speaking individuals who miss court dates out of immigration-related concerns. The Court currently maintains two special dockets—the mental health docket, which diverts juveniles with a mental health issue to treatment rather than court proceedings, and the truancy docket, which aims to address the root causes of truancy by working with families to connect them with resources and service providers. The truancy docket is managed by Judge Langer at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School.

Judge Lambert advises new practitioners to observe court to gain familiarity with court procedures, learn effective advocacy, and reduce apprehension before appearing in court to handle their own cases. The Court welcomes applicants to the court-appointed list, which has

dwindled since the pandemic. Attorneys can apply to serve on the Court’s list by writing a letter to the Chief Judge explaining interest and relevant experience.

Judge Lambert encourages attorneys not to wait until the day of court and to make proactive efforts in advance to attempt to resolve their cases. Day-of-hearing negotiations often lead to delays or inconvenience other litigants, as attorneys spend scheduled hearing time discussing their cases but then expect their full allotted time in court when no agreement is reached. Judge Lambert additionally notes the Court prefers to hear parents’ desired outcomes in custody cases and that effective lawyers can be of great service to their clients by helping them understand what a court is likely to do and narrowing issues to the extent possible before a court date. Judge Lambert complimented the Office of the Commonwealth’s Attorney for the City of Richmond and the Richmond Public Defender’s Officer, whose attorneys are prepared, knowledgeable, and doing a great job.



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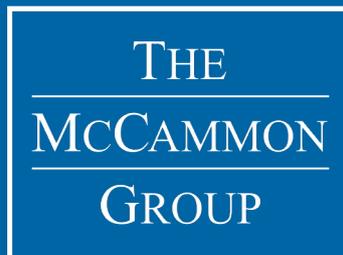
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MEMBER HIGHLIGHT**RACHEL YATES**
YATES APPELLATE LAW**FAVORITE THING ABOUT PRACTICING IN RICHMOND?**

The camaraderie. I love our collegial bar. At the appellate level, there are a small number of attorneys and we know and respect one another. If a colleague needs an extension, we are understanding. But we zealously advocate for our clients every time. I count myself lucky to be in practice with so many excellent attorneys to learn from and to have as mentors.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

For me, the clear answer is how challenging it is. I would never be happy in an easy job. There is always more to do, more to learn, and more preparation to be done. Researching and writing is my favorite part of appellate advocacy.

This also makes this the most challenging part of my job—that my work is never done and it is hard to do well. Any piece of writing could be improved. I could spend more time preparing for oral argument. And I could always do more research and planning. But I am so fortunate to be able to do such interesting work and I am genuinely grateful for the referrals I've received from colleagues that allow me to continue.

**WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?**

To always start with the basics and never assume someone else knows something more than you do simply because of their age, confidence, or experience. When I was a law clerk, I learned to begin with the relevant authority and work my way backward.

Many times attorneys take certain concepts for granted because things have traditionally been done a certain way. Starting with these first principles can help you look at cases in a different way and help you develop new or interesting issues for your client. I'm grateful for that advice because not only did it make me a better lawyer, it makes practicing much more fun!

IF YOU COULD TELL YOUR LAW-STUDENT-SELF ONE THING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

My advice is to do something outside of your comfort zone. When I was in law school, I truly never imagined I would do appellate work. I believed I would be a trial lawyer. Life has a way of surprising you. In retrospect, though, this was such a great fit for my personality type. I love researching and writing and digging deep into hard questions. I love thinking on my feet. I now tell law students to take at least one class and do an internship in an area of law they think they would never want to do—just in case.

WHAT DOES YOUR PERFECT WEEKEND OFF LOOK LIKE?

I am in a house surrounded by boys: my two young children, my dog, and my husband. So I am tempted to say that my ideal weekend would be getting to sit somewhere in silence reading a nice book with a glass of wine. Otherwise, it would be spending time with my family at the pool or a local brewery, going to a nice restaurant, and maybe doing a little painting again (something I did before I had children).

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PRO BONO BULLETIN

The Central Virginia legal community's guide to Pro Bono opportunities throughout the area.

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Virginia Free Legal Answers - American Bar Association

Who: Attorneys **When:** Any time **Where:** Virtual

ABA Free Legal Answers is a project of the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service. The purpose of the website is to increase access to advice and information about non-criminal legal matters for those who cannot afford it. Attorneys eligible under certain criteria will be authorized to use the system and to respond to user's requests. You will only answer questions you choose to answer.

The Triage Project - Central VA Legal Aid Society & Greater Richmond Bar Foundation

Who: Attorneys **When:** Varies **Where:** Case dependent

This innovative Private Bar led pro bono project identifies "Triage Champions" in critical substantive law areas where CVLAS lacked the resources to provide full representation. These Triage Champions recruit and train like-minded pro bono volunteers to join their virtual law firms in their respective practice areas. Cases are managed on JusticeServer – a volunteer portal.

If you would like to volunteer for one of our Triage practice areas, please contact Lisa Bennett, CVLAS Triage Coordinator, at lisa@cvlas.org or Vera Thoms at admin@grbf.org.

Community Tax Law Project

Who: Attorneys, Accountants, Enrolled Agents **When:** Ongoing **Where:** Virtual

CTLP handles approximately 800 represented and brief advice cases each year. We have a critical need for volunteers to assist with our very large caseload. If you are interested in becoming a member of CTLP's Pro Bono Panel, please take a moment to complete the attached Pro Bono Survey for [attorneys](#) or [accountants and enrolled agents](#). For more information, please call (804) 358-5855 or email info@ctlp.org.

CancerLINC

Who: Attorneys **When:** Varies **Where:** Varies

CancerLINC is a local non-profit that LINC's cancer patients and their families to legal resources to solve the non-medical obstacles that arise with a cancer diagnosis. Common legal issues include: wills, trusts, uncontested guardianship & custody, public benefits denials, employment, housing & landlord/tenant issues, and bankruptcy.

Pro Bono Housing Unit - Legal Aid Justice Center

Who: Attorneys **When:** Varies **Where:** Virtual

As a volunteer for the LAJC Pro Bono Housing Unit, you will provide remote legal advice to low-income Richmond tenants at risk of eviction. LAJC provides trainings, sample pleadings, and manuals for volunteers. For more information, email Lauren King, Esq. at laurenking@justice4all.org.

Looking for more Pro Bono opportunities? Check out JusticeServer.org.

JusticeServer is a tool that enables attorneys to easily volunteer their time for pro bono cases from one or more legal services providers. And more importantly, it allows them to connect with clients in need of their legal expertise where they can have the greatest impact.

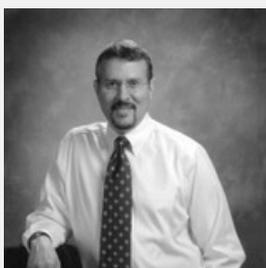
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WHERE (AND WHY) DEI INITIATIVES GO WRONG—AND WHAT’S YOUR PLAN “B”

By: Sarah K. Knarzer, Christian & Barton

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives can be a controversial topic. It certainly dominates social media, leadership meetings, political debates, and even, sometimes, our dinner tables. But despite all of the time, thought, conversations, and literally billions^[1] of dollars, many firms struggle with composing and implementing DEI Initiatives with any tangible effect. The investment is not wasted, per se, and there have been improvements on the national level,^[2] but some firms struggle to feel the impact which unfortunately results in a cynicism—and sometimes even outright disdain—for DEI Initiatives.



There are many external factors that make implementing DEI Initiatives a challenge—political rhetoric, burnout, systemic racism/sexism/ageism/ableism, etc., the list goes on and on. However, the reasons these policies tend to flounder is usually internal.^[3] DEI is often treated as a one-time initiative rather than an integrated and evolving strategy. Even with the best intentions, all the meetings, trainings, and meticulously revised policy pamphlets may fade to black.

But if the shoe doesn’t fit, that doesn’t mean you stop wearing shoes. It just means it’s time to try on a different pair.

DEI Initiatives are not one-size fits all. They aren’t just a committee that can be disbanded, a policy to collect dust on the corner of a desk, or a CLE session on a Friday afternoon during lunch right before the deadline. In fact, some of the most successful DEI Initiatives and polices are the ones that you really don’t have to think about very

“DEI Initiatives are not one-size fits all. They aren’t just a committee that can be disbanded, a policy to collect dust on the corner of a desk, or a CLE session on a Friday afternoon during lunch right before the deadline.”



Sarah K. Knarzer
Christian & Barton

Sarah Knarzer is an associate with Christian & Barton’s Litigation practice group, where she works on a variety of civil litigation matters, including contract and business tort disputes, personal injury, and general liability claims. Her interest in diversity in the legal profession began as a student at the American University Washington College of Law, where she served as the Chair of the DEI Committee of the Administrative Law Review, and has followed her throughout her professional career. She is particularly thankful to her husband and family for their support, and to all her professional mentors, who have been so incredibly generous with their time and guidance.

[1] [3 Ideas To Measure The ROI Of DEI Training](#)

[2] [The diversity numbers are much higher for law firm associates.](#)

[3] [Three reasons why companies fail at Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) (noting most common pitfalls of DEI Initiatives are a lack of genuine commitment to education and change, accountability, and integration into the core business strategy)

[4] [Embracing the “B” in DEIB](#)

[5] [What is DEIB \(diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging\)?](#)

much at all—they are just integrated into a firm’s environment and embedded into its attorneys’ mindset.

One issue is that while diversity, equity, and inclusion have technical definitions, they are, as a goal, vague. How diverse is perfectly diverse? Equity is almost exclusively limited to firm policy—pay equity, fair hiring practices, promotion based on merit. Can inclusion be objectively measured? In response, over the last couple of years,^[4] DEI programs have added a new concept to add to the acronym: B, for Belonging.

Belonging is the positive feeling associated with being not only accepted by one’s peers, not also an important and valued part of the team.^[5] To some, the term “Belonging” is ambiguous and maybe even facetious. But reframing the goal of a DEI policy from that of statistics and external optics to a sense of community that can be felt by all employees has many benefits.

First, it makes it accessible to those who associate a negative connotation with “DEI” discussions. Most people would agree that they want to feel like they belong in their workplace, and most would want the same for their co-workers—it’s just the way that those goals are implemented that are contentious. Second, it is flexible. Chances are, as a firm becomes more diverse, the type of initiatives needed to promote these values will also evolve.

And lastly, it is empowering. Every employee can take part in making their peers feel a sense of belonging—either in small, subtle ways or in more visible methods. It focuses not on how employees think, but instead on how they act, and invites all co-workers into the process, instead of relying on a small committee or designated employee to do the legwork. Instead of “How do we get more applications from diverse applicants?” Belonging asks: “How do we encourage young attorneys or attorneys of color to be involved in the firm? Is the sole female equity partner being taken seriously as a part of the team? Can we make our office more accessible to clients with reduced mobility?”

This is not to say that diversity, equity, and inclusion—and the research that goes into it—should be ignored. Collecting and analyzing data and documenting your firm’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is necessary to hold institutions accountable. Adding the “B” to “DEIB” merely adds a personal element and encourages participation on a firm-wide scale.

What might that look like? Well, instead of mandatory bias trainings, try offering an optional workshop that is enticing to employees—perhaps as a working lunch, or by allowing the time spent participating to contribute to a billable hour requirement. Compulsory attendance is likely to invite distractions or debate, while voluntary participation fosters honest, deep, and intentional conversations. Incentivize involvement, instead of compelling it.

Every employee can take part in making their peers feel a sense of belonging—either in small, subtle ways or in more visible methods.

Instead of framing DEIB as a regulation that needs to be complied with, frame DEIB as a part of the firm’s culture. This looks like cross-training and mentoring young attorneys or sponsoring opportunities for education and discussion on difficult topics. Reward and promote—both socially and professionally—attorneys who demonstrate these values; make it clear, both internally and externally, that the firm endorses DEIB ideals through its employees and is committed to being a role model in this space.

Instead of quarterly or annual DEIB Committee Meetings—or perhaps, in addition to—encourage members to have informal discussions regarding firm-specific barriers or different proposals for how to invite others to participate in the initiatives. If the “work” is limited to the designated meeting times, it is not likely that people will do more than the bare minimum. Additionally, these more personal conversations likely inspire a positive association with this type of work, versus what might otherwise just feel like more work.^[6] One-on-one or small group meetings also foster more trust in reporting adverse experiences, which helps hold employees accountable for any mistreatment.

Again, these suggestions are not meant to be one size fits all. However, if your firm is struggling with getting its DEI Initiatives off the ground, it might be time to try a Plan “B”—and integrate Belonging as not only an aspect of your DEIB policy, but as one of the benefits and aspects of your firm’s culture and workplace environment.



[6] [Diversity Matters Winter 2025 Edition](#)



THE RICHMOND BAR WELLNESS DOCKET

*A new feature in each issue of The Richmond Lawyer
Featuring insights from:*



***Taylor Steffan, JD, LCSW
Navigator Counseling***



***Parke Sterling, LPC
Therapy for Men RVA***

LAWYER MENTAL HEALTH IS A DIVERSITY ISSUE

Taylor Steffan, JD, LCSW

Lawyers are no strangers to conversations about mental health. Burnout, anxiety, depression, and substance misuse are now widely recognized as pervasive in the legal profession, and many firms and bar organizations have responded with wellness initiatives designed to help lawyers cope. These efforts have helped many lawyers notice warning signs, develop coping skills, and navigate available resources. Despite this progress, however, a familiar pattern persists: many lawyers benefit from existing mental health programming, but others do not. Still others decline to seek help at all.



Why do some existing mental health initiatives work for some lawyers but not others? Put simply, mental health outcomes are shaped less by individual resilience than by chronic exposure to stressors. While all lawyers contend with a baseline level of professional stress, the practice of law does not impose the same psychological demands on every attorney. Lawyers face unequal burdens even within the same workplace, in addition to widely varying demands outside of it.

Several features of legal practice account for this difference:

1. Multiple Sources of Stress – First, the profession often treats stress as though it arises solely from workload, but other areas of life contribute. Many attorneys manage significant responsibilities outside of work that directly affect their capacity to metabolize professional stress. These include caregiving for children, aging parents, or other relatives; substantial student loan debt or other financial burdens; chronic health conditions or physical disabilities; and other constraints that limit flexibility, time, and energy. When professional expectations are layered on top of these responsibilities, stress becomes cumulative rather than episodic. Wellness efforts that focus narrowly on in-office coping strategies fail to account for this broader context.

2. Identity and Background Stressors –Second, some attorneys carry an added psychological load related to identity and background. Attorneys of color, women, first-generation professionals, and those from nontraditional educational or financial backgrounds often spend more energy managing how they are perceived by colleagues, clients, or judges. This includes heightened attention to tone, credibility, assertiveness, and professionalism, as well as increased concern about making mistakes or being misunderstood. Over time, this sustained self-monitoring draws on cognitive and emotional resources and increases vulnerability to burnout, even when performance remains strong.

3. Structural Barriers – Third, the profession's emphasis on individual resilience can obscure structural barriers to seeking help. Lawyers are trained to manage risk, and many conclude that disclosing distress carries professional consequences. Concerns about reputation, advancement, licensing, or being perceived as unreliable discourage early intervention. As a result, distress is frequently managed privately until it escalates. Wellness initiatives that rely on voluntary participation or self-identification often miss the lawyers most affected by these dynamics. None of this requires assigning blame. Legal institutions developed around long-standing professional norms, many of which were never designed with a wide range of experiences in mind.



Acknowledging this context, however, is necessary if mental health initiatives are to be effective rather than symbolic.

In practical terms, what would help close the effectiveness gap in current mental health efforts? Firm-wide wellness programming is a meaningful and necessary starting point, but it is most effective when it is paired with structural and cultural changes that address how stress is distributed and experienced. The following recommendations are intended to complement, not replace, existing efforts.

1. First, attorney well-being is best understood as a systems issue, not solely an individual one. Confidential access to individualized mental health care, clear separation between support services and disciplinary processes, and leadership that openly normalizes help-seeking can reduce barriers for lawyers who might otherwise remain silent or isolated.

2. Second, supervisors and firm leaders benefit from recognizing that burnout does not always present as declining performance. It may instead appear as withdrawal, perfectionism, or difficulty setting boundaries. Earlier recognition of these patterns allows for more constructive intervention.

3. Finally, expanding how the profession defines wellness matters. Supporting mental health includes examining workload distribution, evaluation criteria, and informal expectations around availability and professionalism. These are practical concerns, particularly for a profession facing high rates of attrition and ongoing challenges with retention.

These proposals reflect the reality that attorneys bring different experiences to the same demanding environment. Mental health initiatives are most effective when they account for those differences rather than assume a single baseline experience.

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A TOOL: TAKING MENTAL INVENTORY

By Parke Sterling, LPC



Parke Sterling, LPC
Therapy for Men, RVA

Parke Sterling is a Licensed Professional Counselor based in Richmond, Virginia, and the owner of Therapy for Men RVA, a small group practice that specializes in working with stressed, anxious, and high-performing men. They offer walk-and-talk therapy along the James River as well as virtual sessions for clients throughout Virginia. Learn more at www.richmondanxiety.com.

Our minds tend to behave in similar ways.

When we're mentally or emotionally suffering, there's almost always a story running in the background. Thoughts get tinted by whatever emotion is present: anxiety, depression, envy. As a result, the voice in our head starts explaining why things are about to go wrong, how we screwed up, or why we deserve better.

Here's a simple tool.

When you notice yourself mentally spinning, stop. Pull out a piece of paper or open a Word doc. At the top, write:

What is the story this voice in my head is telling me right now?

Then list it all. Nothing is sacred. Get it out of your head and onto the page or screen.

"These new partners are going to eat into my billable hours."

"I'll be replaced by AI any day now."

"I don't know what I'm doing, and they're going to see it."

Once it's written down, something important happens. You can see these are not facts. They're hypotheses. Predictions.

The brain is a "don't get killed" machine. Its job is to protect the organism, largely by predicting the future and overestimating threats. That's its superpower. It kept our ancestors alive for millennia, which is why I'm typing this and you're reading it.

If we blindly believe these predictions and look from them, they become our reality. And that's a scary world to live in.

But if we pull them out, put them on paper, and look at them, we get choice.

We don't choose whether these thoughts arise. We choose whether they should be believed, obeyed, or acted on.

We sift through them, like a gold miner, and ask:

- Is there evidence of truth here?
- Is any of this useful to the person I want to be?
- Is there anything here I can act on, or are these purely "what if" stories?

If not, it's just the mind doing what minds do. Then we can simply "name it to tame it."

"The story is arising that I'll never make partner and they don't respect me."

We thank the mind for that suggestion and move on.

Reflection: Is this story actually helping me right now?

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