

THE
RICHMOND
LAWYER



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE RICHMOND BAR ASSOCIATION
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**THE PROMISE AND PERILS OF
AI IN THE PRACTICE OF LAW**

By: Patrick Austin

RBA Administration
of Justice Committee
receives comments
from Chesterfield
County 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.



The Richmond Bar Association

Join Now. Pay Later.

Join for **free** during our
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- ✓ Leadership Opportunities at Every Career Stage



The RBA makes it more fun to be a lawyer. I've made lasting friendships with lawyers outside my firm who I look forward to seeing at RBA events, or even just when I walk to lunch downtown and see folks on the street.

-Reilly C. Moore



“Because my practice often takes me all over the Commonwealth, my Richmond Bar Association membership is cherished since it allows me to stay in touch with colleagues and the issues that important right here at home.”

-Terrence L. Graves



To the newer members of the bar, I strongly encourage you to become active members in the RBA. Through the RBA you will have the opportunity to find and build a network with mentors willing to share their hard earned wisdom as well as peers who face some of the same challenges that you may face as you build your legal career. Your investment in the RBA will pay dividends throughout your career and strengthen our legal community as a whole.

-Honorable Phillip L. Hairston (Ret.)



RBA members show up for one another and pay it forward. For law students looking to become connected, retirees looking to stay connected, and everyone in the middle, the RBA is a repository of wisdom and support. We leverage our varied ages, experiences, and perspectives, into valuable opportunities for mentorship at every stage of the profession.

-Taylor D. Brewer



Join during the Grace Period at
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RBA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL

- 2nd | Board of Directors Meeting | 12:30 PM | Hunton Andrews Kurth
- 7th | Bankruptcy Section Judges Roundtable | 4:00 PM | Hunton Andrews Kurth
- 15th | RBA Spring Cocktail Party & Annual Meeting | 5:30 PM | Lewis Ginter
- 23rd | Membership Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 23rd | Litigation Section CLE & Social | 4:30-6:30 PM | Spotts Fain
- 28th | Communications Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom

MAY

- 1st | Law Day Luncheon | 12:30 PM | Richmond Marriott
- 3rd | Executive Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 6th | Corporate Counsel Annual Meeting | 5:30 PM | Tazza Scotts Addition
- 6th | Senior Lawyers Annual Meeting | 4:00 PM | Laurel Hill House
- 7th | Board of Directors Meeting | 12:30 PM | Hunton Andrews Kurth
- 7th | Environmental & Energy Section Annual Meeting | 5:30-7:30 PM | Brambly Park
- 11th | Pro Bono Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 11th | Real Estate Section Annual Meeting & Clerk's Dinner | 5:00 PM | Commonwealth Club
- 13th | Business Law Section Annual Meeting | 6:00 PM | Shagbark
- 19th | Bankruptcy Section Annual Meeting | 4:00 PM | McGuireWoods
- 20th | Sponsors Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 21st | Programs Committee Meeting | 12:30 PM | Zoom
- 25th | RBA Office Closed
- 27th | Litigation Section Annual Meeting & Judges Reception | Shagbark
- 28th | Family Law Section Annual Meeting | Blue Bee Cider

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.

RBA HOSTS SECOND PRO BONO COURT WATCH DAY IN COLLABORATION WITH LEGAL AID JUSTICE CENTER AND RICHMOND CITY COURTS

The RBA is proud to have hosted the second Pro Bono Court Watch Day in March at the Richmond Courthouse. We appreciate the support and collaboration from our friends at the Legal Aid Justice Center, and the incredible staff and judges of Richmond City Courts.

Almost two dozen RBA members came together to hear from Senior Civil Court Clerk, Sheila Frye, about common issues she sees at the courthouse each day. Then, after watching Judge Shah's housing docket, they were able to have a Q&A session with the Judge on housing related and docket questions.



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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



The legal profession is changing faster than most of us anticipated. If you had asked me five years ago whether artificial intelligence would be drafting motions, assisting with due diligence, or helping predict litigation outcomes, I might have said "eventually." That eventually is now, and it is reshaping not just how we practice, but how we think about the profession itself.

What does the next generation of lawyers need to know? How are law schools preparing students to work alongside tools that barely existed when most of us were studying for the bar? And what does all of this mean for how we supervise junior attorneys, how we mentor young lawyers, and how we define competence going forward?

There are no clean answers, and I suspect the profession will be working through these questions for a long time. What I am confident about is this: bar associations exist precisely for moments of disruption

and transition. We convene difficult conversations and we build the relationships that help lawyers navigate change alongside their peers rather than in isolation. We give the profession a place to think out loud. That is what the Richmond Bar Association has done for 140 years, and it is what we will continue to do during another time of drastic change.

Closer to home, spring is shaping up to be a busy and rewarding few months for RBA members.

Our Spring Cocktail Party is on April 15th, and registration closes this Tuesday, April 8th, so if you haven't signed up yet, please don't wait. This is one of the most enjoyable events of the bar year- informal, collegial, and a genuine opportunity to connect with colleagues outside the usual professional settings. We hope to see a strong turnout.

Law Day is May 1st, and we are excited to hear from the Honorable M. Hannah Lauck, Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court-EDVA. Law Day is a moment for the legal community to pause, reflect on our role in upholding the rule of law, and celebrate the public service that so many of our members provide every day. It is also a wonderful occasion to bring a colleague, a client, or a law student who is just beginning to find their place in the profession.

Throughout May, our sections will hold their Annual Meetings. If you have been meaning to get more engaged with your section, or if you are simply curious about what a particular section does, Annual Meetings are an ideal entry point. Attendance is open to all members, and section leadership genuinely welcomes new faces and fresh perspectives.

The profession is evolving in ways that are exciting, challenging, and at times uncertain. The RBA is here to help our members navigate all of it. I look forward to seeing many of you this spring.

- Jennifer J. West

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Annie M. Holland

Artificial intelligence is everywhere right now, and the legal profession is no exception. Attorneys are navigating questions about how AI affects their practice, their clients, and their ethical obligations. Law schools are rethinking curricula. Firms are adopting new tools and, in some cases, still figuring out their policies around them. It is a genuinely interesting moment to be a professional.

At the RBA, we are thinking about it too. This issue of The Richmond Lawyer takes a look at where the profession is headed and what the next generation of attorneys needs to be prepared for. We hope the perspectives in these pages are useful, whether you are deep in the weeds on AI adoption at your firm or still forming your own views.

I will be transparent about one small way we use AI here at the RBA: proofreading. Before each issue of The Richmond Lawyer goes out, I run the pages through an AI tool to catch spelling errors, grammatical issues, and formatting inconsistencies. Things like whether the pages are numbered correctly and whether each page reflects the right month and year in the header. It is a quality control step, and it catches things that are easy to miss after you have looked at the same document for the forty-third time. The content, the editorial decisions, and everything else remain very much a human endeavor.

Beyond that, the RBA's job is the same as it has always been- to serve this community and give Richmond's legal professionals a place to connect, learn, and engage. And this spring, there is a **lot** going on.

If you have not yet registered for the Spring Cocktail Party on April 15th, registration closes this Wednesday. Do not miss it! It is a great evening and one of the most well-attended social events of the bar year.

Looking ahead to May, our Law Day Luncheon is on May 1st. Law Day is a meaningful occasion for our profession, and the luncheon is always a highlight. We would love to see strong attendance, so mark your calendar and plan to bring a colleague.

Also throughout May, each of our sections will hold its Annual Meeting. These are open to all members and a great way to get more connected with the areas of law that matter most to you. Watch your inbox for details on your section's specific date, or take a look at the RBA website!

Finally, if you have been thinking about joining the RBA, now is the right time. We are in our membership grace period, which means you can join today and not owe any dues until June 1st. You get full access to everything happening this spring with no immediate cost. Reach out to Membership Director Sharon Potter at spotter@richmondbar.org to get started.

It is a good time to be part of this community. I hope to see you soon!



- Annie M. Holland

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE COMMITTEE RECEIVES COMMENTS FROM **CHESTERFIELD COURTS**

The Honorable Jayne A. Pemberton *Chesterfield County Circuit Court*

Judge Pemberton is **grateful for the civility and professionalism of the attorneys who appear before her**. Attorneys are, on the whole, courteous and well prepared for court and display respect for both the court as well as their opposing counsel and opposing parties. Litigation can be difficult and contentious, but civility and courtesy between opposing parties and counsel go a long way. Attorneys should extend the same civility and courtesy to court administration, staff, and law clerks. These individuals play a vital role in the court system, which could not function without them.

Attorneys should also feel free to contact court staff and law clerks if they have questions about the status of a particular case or matter pending before the Court. Court staff and law clerks are there not only to assist the Court, but also those who appear before it.

New lawyers (and returning lawyers) should introduce themselves to the Court when they appear at a hearing. Judge Pemberton wants to be able to refer to attorneys by name during hearings, as do many other judges in Chesterfield County and other localities. This courtesy not only builds connection with the judges, but also can further client relationships, as clients may be impressed when they hear the judge refer to you by name during a hearing.

One thing that sets Chesterfield Circuit Court apart from many other circuits is the presence of a certified courthouse comfort dog, Mitz. Mitz is a friendly black lab who was trained by St. Francis Service Dogs, a nonprofit organization in Roanoke. Mitz lives with his handler, Judge Minton, who attended the training with him.

Mitz can attend meetings, hearings, or trials to provide comfort to vulnerable individuals when they have to attend or testify in court or speak to a judge in chambers.

Judge Pemberton encourages attorneys, when filing motions or briefs, to provide courtesy copies to chambers, especially if the pleading is filed shortly before the hearing. Original copies still need to be filed with the Clerk's Office, but courtesy copies will ensure that the presiding judge has the materials in advance of the hearing. Attorneys should check with the judge's judicial assistant or law clerk to find out whether the judge prefers paper or electronic copies.

Finally, the judges of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit seek applicants for appointment as Commissioner of Accounts. The Court invites interested persons to send a letter, curriculum vitae, and three references with contact information to Teresa Ryan, Administrator of Judicial Operations. Additional information is available at the Clerk's website.

The Honorable Matthew D. Nelson *Chesterfield County General District Court*

Judge Nelson was appointed as Chief Judge this year after the retirement of Judge O'Connell this summer. With Judge O'Connell's retirement, there are now four full-time General District Court judges in Chesterfield, with the County's fifth position covered by substitute judges until it is filled. Virginia's Committee on District Courts has also approved a sixth judgeship for Chesterfield General District Court, subject to the General Assembly funding the position and appointing judges to fill the open positions.

Judge Nelson reports that the Court has been busier this year both on the civil and criminal/traffic sides of the docket. In an effort to avoid long civil dockets, the Court has split its Thursday civil docket across two courtrooms, which has helped get members of the public in and out of court faster. With respect to the Court's criminal docket, Judge Nelson suggested that if the parties reach an agreement that includes an amendment to a warrant, the Court generally does not have any objection to having the amendment made and endorsed before the Judges take the bench. He hopes that taking these steps will streamline the Court's docket and reduce the amount of time that the public and members of the bar spend in court.

Splitting the Court's civil docket has also allowed the Judges to resume hearing debtor interrogatories. The Court previously required that Commissioners in Chancery preside over debtor interrogatories to alleviate some of the strain on the Court's civil docket, but comments from the civil bar prompted the Court to resume hearing those cases. Judge Nelson appreciates the comments from the bar and hopes that allowing debtor interrogatories to proceed before the Court will promote the public's access to justice and reduce the potential cost of these proceedings.

Judge Nelson praised the attorneys who regularly appear in Chesterfield General District Court, saying that **the Court is "blessed" with attorneys who are communicative and highly professional**. He asked that more experienced counsel take the opportunity to mentor less-experienced attorneys and wanted to remind younger attorneys that it is good practice to introduce themselves when they appear before the Court. Although he does not often see disrespectful behavior and has high regard for the bar in Chesterfield, he wanted to remind attorneys that they have a duty of civility in their interactions with the Court and members of the bar and public and that maintaining civility helps promote the public's trust and respect for the judicial system.

The Honorable Tara D. Hatcher
*Chesterfield County Juvenile & Domestic
Relations Court*

Judge Hatcher reports that the Chesterfield County Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court continues to maintain full dockets of civil and criminal cases and has experienced significant growth in its caseload alongside the region's increase in population over the past several years. Significant renovations are planned for the Chesterfield JDR Courthouse to accommodate a seventh judge and courtroom. The renovations will make better use of space in the courthouse and are expected to begin in the next couple of months. Judge Hatcher requested patience and understanding with scheduling as the Clerk's Office manages its normal duties during construction-related disruption.

Judge Hatcher complimented the Chesterfield JDR Clerk's Office and the Bar on their patience and good communication as the Clerk's Office managed a recent period of high turnover and transition. The Clerk's Office did a terrific job of maintaining an excellent level of service during this time and is now fully staffed. Judge Hatcher encouraged the use of a new continuance form available on the Court's website, which is intended to ensure that parties provide all information necessary when requesting a continuance. The Chesterfield JDR Court hears civil cases Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and criminal cases Tuesday and Thursday; parties are requested to keep that schedule in mind when providing availability for a continued court appearance.

Judge Hatcher noted that, like many courts in the area, the Chesterfield and Colonial Heights JDR Courts need more lawyers to serve as court appointed counsel and guardians ad litem. Chesterfield JDR has experienced an uptick in protective order cases, especially arising out of disagreements between minors at school, which requires two guardians, one for each juvenile. The Court would also welcome more attorneys qualified to handle abuse and neglect cases, which require three attorneys on short notice.

Retired lawyers and law students with their third-year practice certificates are encouraged to serve and can contact Angela Phillips, the JDR Judges' assistant, to be added to the court appointed or guardian ad litem list.

Judge Hatcher congratulated Judge Scott Landry on his pending retirement from the Chesterfield and Colonial Heights JDR Courts, effective November 30, 2026, and highlighted Judge Landry's tremendous service and contributions to the children, citizens and families of Chesterfield and Colonial Heights. Judge Hatcher also congratulated the two newly elected judges who will serve in Chesterfield and Colonial Heights: Judge-Elect Terrica Taylor, whose term begins July 1, 2026, and Judge-Elect Lisa Piper, whose term begins December 1, 2026.

Judge Hatcher complimented the professional and collegial atmosphere the Richmond Bar Association cultivates and is grateful for the RBA's ongoing support.

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"As a young lawyer, I remember attending my very first RBA Holiday Party. I met a law school classmate there, and I think she was the only person I knew in the room. We watched the room and saw the strong network of attorneys and friendship. We wondered if that would ever be us.

Years later, I am still thankful for attending that event. For pushing myself out of my comfort zone and taking the first steps to build my network and make new relationships. I cherish the friendships I have made through RBA. And I am honored to be part of this amazing organization build on civility, comradery, respect, and friendship! I encourage all the young lawyers to get involved. I can assure you that it will be worth it!"

-Hon. Jayne A. Pemberton
Chesterfield Circuit Court

"Be an active member of the Richmond Bar Association (RBA). Reach out to fellow members for their insight, on an issue you've encountered in court, or on how judges in the various courts prefer to do things. The RBA is an immensely collegial organization, comprised of attorneys with hundreds of years of collective trial experience. One of the real benefits of RBA membership is the ability to draw on the collective knowledge of its members."

-Hon. Matthew T. Paulk
Richmond General District Court

The McCammon Group

is pleased to announce our newest Neutral



Hon. Lee A. Harris, Jr. (Ret.)

Former Chief Judge, 14th Judicial Circuit Court of Virginia, Henrico County

The Honorable Lee A. Harris, Jr., the longest-serving judge in the Commonwealth of Virginia, recently retired after 35 years of distinguished judicial service on the bench of the Henrico County Circuit Court, including three terms as Chief Judge. His judicial career began as a Judge of the General District Court in Henrico County, where he served for two years. Early in his legal career, Judge Harris served as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney for Henrico County and later as the Commonwealth's Attorney in that office. He also enjoyed a private law practice in Richmond, litigating a wide range of civil, criminal, and family law cases. Judge Harris now brings this record of dedication and accomplishment to The McCammon Group to serve the mediation, arbitration, judge pro tempore and special master needs of lawyers and litigants throughout the Commonwealth.



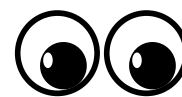
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MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

SCOTT A. HARRIS MORAN REEVES & CONN

FAVORITE THING ABOUT PRACTICING IN RICHMOND?

I moved from Norfolk/Va Beach in 2009, but Richmond is home. It's a sophisticated legal market without being overly rigid. There's a bedrock of respect here that you don't find everywhere. And even when we are fighting for our clients, there's a level of professional congeniality that makes our work more effective, and much more enjoyable.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

Moran Reeves Conn is a truly collaborative team. As a first-year associate, I'm often operating in a blur of what I don't know yet, but here, everyone is united in teaching and mentoring associates. I've been given substantive work since day one of my summer internship. The firm's commitment to investing in real experience ensures that we're positioned to succeed and thrive, both personally and professionally. More than any of that though, the most rewarding part is the culture. After the grind of law school, being at a firm that understands the importance of life outside these walls, especially family, means I never have to choose between being a present parent or partner and a dedicated attorney.



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

"Do not self-select out of an opportunity." The world is full of people who will tell you no. Don't do it for them, do it for you. A close second is, "no one will care as much about your career as you will."

By any standard metric I should not be here. I was in the restaurant business for years before COVID pushed me to take a chance. When I floated the idea of law school by my wife, I fully expected her to say "no" (and she would have been justified), but she supported me completely. This amazing career would not be possible without daring to ask for something "ridiculous."

The same is true in your career. I took my first deposition while still in law school because I dared to ask for the opportunity.

If you ask for opportunity, or experience, or even just for coffee with the boss, most people will respect it and bring you in. The easiest way to set yourself apart is by showing up and trying to be better.

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

Don't wait for permission to be ambitious. Raise your hand, reach out, and show up. And don't forget to appreciate the people in your support system and recognize the sacrifices they make as well.

WHAT DOES YOUR PERFECT WEEKEND OFF LOOK LIKE?

If it's a swim meet weekend for my daughter: low times and no injuries.

Otherwise, I don't want to be found. Cutting grass, reading books, and playing video games with my kids.



The Richmond Bar
Association

PRO BONO BULLETIN

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

This bulletin is made possible by the RBA Pro Bono Committee & the following Pro Bono Partners:

[Central Virginia Legal Aid Society](#)

[Legal Aid Justice Center](#)

[Greater Richmond Bar Foundation](#)

[University of Richmond School of Law](#)

[Virginia Poverty Law Center](#)

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.

The Richmond Bar Association is proud to recognize



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THE PROMISE AND PERILS OF AI IN THE PRACTICE OF LAW

Advice for Richmond Attorneys Navigating the AI Revolution

By: Patrick Austin

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming industries across the global economy, and the legal profession is no exception. Often viewed as a tradition-bound profession, the practice of law is now at the forefront of technological experimentation and innovation. From contract review and legal research to litigation strategy and client communications, AI-powered tools are increasingly becoming embedded in legal workflows.

While AI tools promise substantial gains in efficiency, access to justice, and data-driven analysis, they also introduce significant risks, ranging from factual inaccuracies to ethical dilemmas involving confidentiality and professional responsibility.

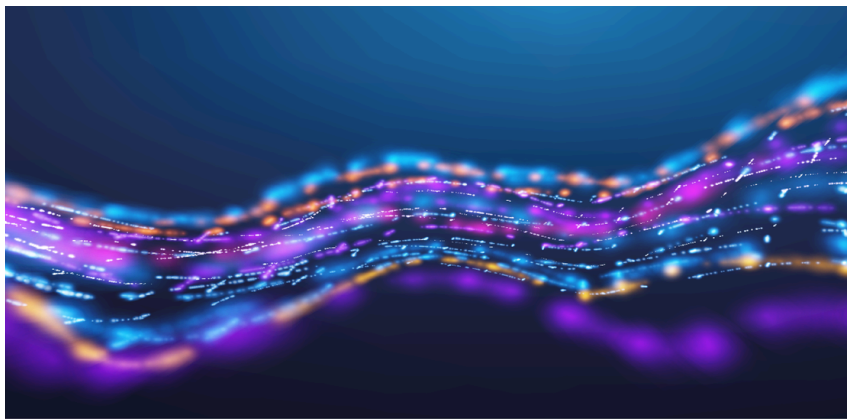
The Promise of AI in Legal Practice

One of the most compelling benefits posed by AI in the practice of law is the possibility of dramatically increasing overall efficiency and productivity. Legal work often involves repetitive and time-intensive tasks such as document review, contract analysis, due diligence, and legal research. AI tools can perform these functions in a fraction of the time required by human attorneys and at a significantly lower cost.

For example, AI-driven document review platforms can analyze thousands of pages of discovery materials within minutes, identifying relevant documents, flagging key terms, and even categorizing content based on legal issues. Similarly, AI research assistants can quickly retrieve case law, statutes, and secondary sources, often synthesizing the results into concise summaries.

The result is not only time savings but also the ability for attorneys to focus on higher-value work such as strategic thinking, advocacy, and client counseling.

In addition to potential efficiency gains, integrating AI into the practice of law may result in greater access to legal services. For example, many individuals and small businesses can



get priced out of traditional legal services.

However, with AI tools, attorneys may be able to take advantage of the aforementioned efficiency gains to reduce cost where thereby could lead to more affordable legal options that are accessible by a larger client pool. For example, automated document drafting systems can generate contracts, wills, and other legal documents at a lower cost, while still allowing for attorney oversight. This hybrid approach can bridge the gap between fully bespoke legal services and do-it-yourself legal platforms.

Along with broader access to legal services, data-driven insights and analysis are another potential benefit of deploying AI in your legal practice is data-driven insights. For

example, AI systems typically excel at identifying patterns extracted from large datasets. In litigation, this capability can be used to analyze judicial decisions, predict case outcomes, and inform litigation strategy. In transactional work, AI tools have the capacity to identify anomalies in contracts or flag risks that might otherwise go unnoticed. While human judgment remains essential, AI can serve as a powerful augmentation tool that can help attorneys make more informed decisions based on data rather than intuition alone.

Perils of AI in Legal Practice

Despite its promise, AI introduces a range of risks that attorneys must carefully navigate. One of the most widely discussed risks is the phenomenon of AI "hallucinations,"

where an AI system generates a plausible sounding, but incorrect or entirely fabricated, output. In the legal context, this can cause significant harm to a client's case and result in reputational harm to the attorney or firm.

There have already been a number of high-profile incidents where attorneys relied on hallucinated AI-generated case citations that did not exist. For example, two attorneys were recently sanctioned by the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals and ordered to pay \$15,000 each for filing a brief with more than two dozen fake citations and misrepresentations of fact in the appeal.^[i] The Court went on to excoriate the attorneys declaring they "sullied the reputation" of the bar.^[ii]

Such errors can undermine credibility with courts, expose attorneys to sanctions, and adversely impact your clients' interests. It is important to remember, when using an AI tool for legal research and memo drafting, generative AI models produce outputs based on probabilistic patterns rather than verified sources. This is why it is so important to always independently verify the outputs of an AI system.

Another potential peril of using AI in the practice of law is its impact on confidentiality and the attorney-client privilege. Many AI systems, particularly those offered as cloud-based services, may process user inputs on external servers, potentially exposing sensitive client information. This also raises critical ethical questions. For example, does inputting client information into an AI tool constitute a waiver of privilege?

The Southern District of New York recently addressed this issue in *United States v. Heppner*^[iii] and ruled that a client's use of an AI tool (specifically the free version of Anthropic's Claude) and the outputs generated were not protected by the attorney-client privilege. The Court determined that when an AI platform's own disclaimer negates any reasonable expectation of confidentiality, then a core prerequisite of the attorney-client privilege cannot be met.

[i] US appeals court fines lawyers \$30,000 in latest AI-related sanction, REUTERS, March 16, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/us-appeals-court-fines-lawyers-30000-latest-ai-related-sanction-2026-03-16/>.

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] Access the full Heppner opinion here: <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.nysd.652138/gov.uscourts.nysd.652138.27.0.pdf>.

Rather, the AI platform's Terms of Service, and not the user's intent, control the privilege analysis. The Heppner decision highlights the importance for both attorneys and clients to exercise caution and diligence when entering case-related or client-related information into an AI system.

Relatedly, the integration of AI into legal practice raises important questions about professional responsibility and how to abide by our ethical obligations as attorneys. For example, attorneys owe a duty of competence, which increasingly includes an understanding of the technologies that are being used regularly in legal practice. Attorneys must also adhere to duties of confidentiality, candor to the tribunal, and supervision. Using AI does not absolve attorneys of these responsibilities. If anything, it heightens them. This is why attorneys must ensure that AI-generated work product is accurate, that client information is protected, and that the use of AI complies with applicable ethical rules.

Best Practices for Adopting and Deploying AI in Law Firms

To harness the benefits of AI while mitigating the risks, attorneys should consider adopting a thoughtful and structured approach to AI integration. Below are some best practices and recommendations to effectively, and ethically, deploy AI in your legal practice:

1. **Conduct Due Diligence on AI Tools:** Before adopting any AI tool, conduct thorough and detailed due diligence. This includes evaluating the tool's functionality, accuracy, data security measures, and terms of service.
2. **AI Acceptable Use Policy:** Attorneys and law firms should develop internal policies governing the use of AI. These policies should address what types of tasks AI can and cannot be used for, how to handle confidential information, requirements for human review and verification, documentation and recordkeeping practices, and clear guidelines help ensure consistent and responsible use across the organization.
3. **Protect Client Confidentiality:** Attorneys must take steps to safeguard client information when using AI tools. This may include using enterprise-grade AI solutions with robust security features, avoiding the input of sensitive information into unsecured systems, and anonymizing or redacting data (where possible).

4. **Maintain Human Oversight:** AI should be viewed as a tool to assist, and not replace, attorneys. This is why maintaining human oversight is critically important. All AI-generated outputs should be reviewed and verified by a qualified professional before being relied upon, shared, or filed with a court. This is particularly important for legal research, drafting, and attorney work product.
5. **Train Attorneys and Staff:** Effective adoption of AI requires in-depth training and “buy-in” from both attorneys and staff. Your legal team should understand how the AI tools work, their limitations, and the ethical considerations involved. Training should emphasize critical thinking, verification practices, and the importance of maintaining professional judgment.
6. **Monitor and Audit Usage:** Ongoing monitoring of AI usage is essential to ensure that the tools are being utilized appropriately. You should periodically audit AI-generated work product, assess compliance with internal policies, and stay informed about evolving legal and ethical standards.

Looking Ahead: The Future of AI in Law

AI is not a passing trend or fad. Considering its explosive growth and rapid integration into virtually all sectors of the U.S. and global economy, it is fair to say that AI is becoming a core technology that will have a significant impact on the practice of law and how people access legal services. As AI tools become more sophisticated, their capabilities, and their risks, will grow.

Looking ahead, the attorneys who embrace AI thoughtfully and responsibly are likely to be better positioned to compete in this evolving landscape. Attorneys who ignore AI risk falling behind.



Patrick Austin

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Patrick Austin is a member of the Richmond Bar Association’s Communications Committee and works at BroadStreet Partners as Senior Cybersecurity & Data Privacy Counsel.

“My practice frequently takes me outside of Richmond, and I joined the Richmond Bar hoping to find a local sense of community. I continue to be a member because I found even more than I was hoping for: A vibrant community of outstanding and collegial lawyers and jurists.”

-Brian L. Hager

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- 1** Fill glass halfway with cherry 7-Up.
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- 3** Add vanilla ice cream until drink has reached the rim (about 2 ½ scoops!)
- 4** Jazz it up with a fun drink stirrer.



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OUTSOURCING THINKING: AI AND THE FUTURE OF LAWYER MENTAL HEALTH

Taylor Steffan, JD, LCSW

As artificial intelligence becomes more embedded in legal practice, most of the conversation has centered on efficiency and competency. How much faster can AI review a contract than a junior associate? Often, quite a bit faster. Can lawyers trust that AI's legal research is accurate and thorough? Increasingly, yes. In a profession defined by long hours and burnout, these feel like huge steps forward.

AI isn't just changing how lawyers work, though. It's changing how they think, and that distinction carries real consequences for mental health.

The brain adapts to how it's used. Skills exercised regularly strengthen; those that go unused tend to fade. In a legal context, that raises some uncomfortable questions. What happens to deep analytical thinking when the first pass is no longer yours? What happens to your ability to sit with complexity when answers appear in seconds? What happens to your confidence in your own reasoning when it's constantly checked against (or partially generated by) a machine?

Early answers are already showing up in practice. Many lawyers now spend less time generating ideas and more time reviewing and editing AI output. The work moves faster, but it also becomes more fragmented: prompting, scanning, revising, verifying, then repeating the cycle. Depth of engagement has quietly decreased even as productivity has climbed.

Those cognitive shifts carry psychological weight.

There's the issue of trust, for one. When part of the work is outsourced, it becomes harder to locate your own judgment in the final product. Lawyers may find themselves second-guessing not just the technology, but their own ability to catch its mistakes, resulting in a low-grade, persistent anxiety rooted in uncertainty about their own thinking.

There's also the potential erosion of satisfaction. The practice of law has always involved wrestling with ambiguity and building arguments from the ground up.

That process isn't merely a means to an end; it's where a sense of mastery is built. When it gets shortened or skipped, work may feel easier but also strangely flat. Efficiency and fulfillment don't always correlate.

Then there's attention. Deep focus is required to hold a complex problem in mind long enough to solve it. It is increasingly hard to sustain such focus when AI allows lawyers to work in short bursts across unrelated tasks. Over time, the capacity for sustained concentration can erode. That matters beyond productivity. Fragmented attention tends to exacerbate burnout. Sustained focus, on the other hand, is a reliable buffer against burnout.

Finally, there's a quieter question about professional identity. Lawyers are trained to think. Analysis, judgment, and reasoning under uncertainty aren't incidental to the role; they are the role. As AI absorbs more of the initial thinking, the lawyer's function can start to feel more like reviewing than creating. That shift may be efficient. It can also quietly breed a sense of inadequacy that looks a lot like imposter syndrome.

None of this is an argument against AI. Its benefits are real, and its place in legal practice is only going to expand. But as the profession looks ahead, it's worth widening the lens.

The question isn't only what AI will do to the work. It's what it will do to the people doing it.

The goal should not be to avoid using AI and related tools, but rather to use them deliberately and thoughtfully. There's a meaningful difference between AI that supports your thinking and AI that gradually replaces it. Protecting space for independent, deep analysis will help lawyers stay sharp, stay confident, and stay well.

The future of law will almost certainly be more technologically advanced. Whether it will also be cognitively and psychologically sustainable for the lawyers remains an open question, and one the profession would do well to take seriously.



A TOOL: ACES

By Parke Sterling, LPC



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. Learn more at www.richmondanxiety.com.

I'm uncertain what the future holds for us. But I am certain that the mind will most likely overestimate the threats that lie in the future. This is adaptive. It helped our ancestors predict and avoid danger for eons.

But like so many adaptive features, it is optimized for survival, not happiness.

To offset this natural human tendency, we need tools. When we get whisked downriver by the proverbial thought stream, we need a way to pull ourselves onto the riverbank and catch our breath.

The following is a simple but powerful tool I teach most clients. It is best done often, not just when you are suffering. It can become a way of moving through the world.

It is called ACES.

Acknowledge the Thoughts & Feelings that are Present

Take an observer's view here. Instead of saying, "I am anxious," say, "Anxiety is here." Instead of saying, "I will be replaced any day now," say, "The thought is arising that I will be replaced any day now."

We then can notice that thoughts and feelings are visitors because they come and go, yet we remain.

Come Back to the Body & the Breath

This is what is traditionally called grounding. We simply shift our attention away from the prediction machine and place it on the body, like a flashlight shifting its focus.

Place your attention on your hands, torso, or feet. It has been said that the feet are the safest place for our attention, since they are the farthest point from the mind.

Elongate the out-breath. Let the last little bit of air leave your lungs, then pause at the bottom of the out-breath for a second. Allow the inhale to naturally return as a result of what is called "air hunger."

Do this for two or three breaths. See how nice that feels. Keep going if you are so inclined. There's no rush.

Expand into the Senses

So far we have taken inventory of thoughts, feelings, and the body. Now go external.

It is like telling the mind, "Yes, yes, I know it is all going to hell. But what else is here?"

What can you see, smell, touch, hear, or taste?

Notice the gift of the senses. Enjoy that you have this capability.

It is difficult to truly sense something and think at the same time.

Try it now with hearing. Truly listen. Notice subtle sounds and see if it does not short-circuit thinking for a moment.

Step Up with Your Values/Self-Compassion/Savoring

You have a choice here depending on the situation at hand.

If action is required, step up in a values-aligned way. Who is the person you want to be in this moment, regardless of what thoughts and feelings are present?

If you are struggling, offer yourself self-compassion or encouragement. How would you relate to the five-year-old version of yourself or to your child? Why do you deserve any less?

Or you can take a moment to actively savor some part of your experience right now. Say a silent thank you for something you would normally overlook.

Do this often. Do it all the time. And you will travel a bit lighter regardless of what the future holds.

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