



Alabama State Bar



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## 2014 Annual Meeting

July 9-12, 2014

*Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa*

## Volunteer Law Program

### Volunteer Lawyers Program - More Info

*Even if you can devote only a few hours of your time to pro bono work, we strongly encourage you to join the program.*

The Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) is a project of the Alabama State Bar. Its purpose is to provide free legal services to low-income Alabamians in civil matters. Our office is located in the Alabama State Bar Association Building, 415 Dexter Avenue, in Montgomery. The VLP's full time director is an attorney and can assist you with problems or answer questions you may have about the VLP. Please consider joining today with many of your peers who have already volunteered their services through this important Alabama State Bar program.

### The Need

An elderly couple threatened with eviction from their apartment, a young woman with small children seeking protection from an abusive husband, a terminally ill parent trying to prepare for his children's future-these are just a few of the difficulties that can spring up in a person's lifetime. For an attorney with the skills to navigate the system, these are surmountable challenges. For the person with no financial resources and a limited understanding of the options, they are overwhelming crises.

YOU are the answer! Just a little of your time can make a major difference. By contributing even a small amount of your expertise, you could solve the life-shattering legal problems that confront many of the low-income persons living in our state.

By conservative estimates, there are over 723,000 persons living below the federal poverty level in Alabama and the numbers increase each year. With limited staff and budgets, federally funded Legal Services programs cannot handle all the legal problems of these overly-stricken Alabamians. As a result, many poor persons find themselves waiting for, or even without, legal representation in matters crucial to their well-being.

YOU can help! If you are a regular member of the Alabama State Bar, please consider assisting us with this critical problem by voluntarily agreeing to handle not less than two civil case referrals over the next twelve months. If this is impossible for you just now, or if you hold a special membership in the bar, other options are available through the program to serve low-income Alabamians, such as performing intake and screening at an "advice only" legal clinic or Legal Services office in your area, or serving as a speaker at a VLP-sponsored training seminar, or even recruiting for this program at bar association functions. We gratefully accept whatever time you are able to give.

### Types of Referrals

The VLP is funded, by the Alabama State Bar, Alabama Law Foundation, Legal Services Alabama and the Alabama Access to Justice Commission, to provide pro bono legal services in civil, non-fee-generating matters. Our clients include low-income

persons who cannot afford an attorney's fees. They have a wide range of legal problems including, among others, consumer, domestic, housing, and probate matters.

The VLP is primarily a panel-model program, which means that volunteer attorneys designate the area(s) of referred cases. Because we want the referral process to be beneficial and easy for both you and the client, referrals are made by matching the volunteer attorney's indicated interest with a client whose problem falls within that area of law. Our procedures are tailored to suit the needs of the individual attorney. Every effort is made to make referrals in a manner which avoids undue disruption of your schedule.

**How the Program Works** The process is as follows:

- All potential VLP clients are first screened and interviewed for income eligibility by intake professionals, thus assuring that they are indeed eligible for free legal assistance.
- All referrals to volunteer attorneys are made by the VLP Director in Montgomery or local pro bono coordinators (Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile) based upon the area of law involved in the client's problem. The volunteer attorney is contacted by letter. Following a conflicts check and assuming the case is accepted by the volunteer, copies of intake information are forwarded to the attorney. The client is advised of the referral by letter from the program and is instructed to call the volunteer attorney immediately to schedule an appointment at a mutually convenient time. If the client fails to contact the attorney within 30 days, the case is closed.
- All cases are accepted on a pro bono basis and the volunteer attorney is expected to handle only the one specific legal problem of the client which was referred by the VLP. Cases should be filed in forma pauperis and volunteer attorneys are encouraged to use an affidavit of substantial hardship wherever possible. Otherwise, clients are to assume responsibility for court costs and incidental fees, whenever they are financially able to do so.
- The VLP reporting requirements are simple. You are expected to complete cases referred to you. Three months after referral, the VLP Director or local pro bono coordinator will send you a form to advise the program of the status of the case. You will also be asked to return a case-closing memo at completion advising the VLP of the final disposition of the case and the number of hours of services provided.
- Malpractice insurance coverage can be made available by the program at no cost to volunteer attorneys for pro bono cases handled through the VLP. Contact the VLP at (334) 269-1515 or 1-800-354-6154 for more information or e-mail us at [vlp2@alabar.org](mailto:vlp2@alabar.org).

### Why Become a Volunteer

The VLP offers you a simple, well-organized mechanism for fulfilling your professional responsibility to make legal counsel available to indigents consistent with a true sense of professionalism and Rule 6.1 of the Alabama Rules of Professional Conduct. Equally important, our volunteer attorneys gain excellent client and courtroom experience since they are fully in charge of their pro bono cases. For more seasoned attorneys, program participation provides an avenue for sharing expertise with newer members of the profession by serving as mentors or co-counsel to VLP attorneys. Most important of all, VLP volunteer attorneys gain great personal satisfaction from helping the less fortunate among us and from making a positive, visible difference in their communities.

Although helping others in trouble is often its own reward, VLP volunteer attorneys also receive recognition for their service through annual awards and certificates of appreciation given by the Alabama State Bar, special events spotlighting community pro bono activities, articles in Alabama State Bar publications and free training seminars for CLE credit.



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