



Mobile Volunteer Lawyers Program—the Gold Standard

Perhaps the most important project of the Alabama State Bar is the Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP). This program provides critical legal services for low-income Alabamians in civil matters. It utilizes the expertise of talented attorneys from throughout the state to help supplement the limited resources of Legal Services Alabama. It provides those lawyers who participate with a chance to fulfill their professional responsibilities to make legal counsel available to indigents. The program operates from a central office at the state bar in Montgomery, with the combined efforts of bar associations throughout the state.

A success story

The most successful VLP program in the state—and one of the best in the country—is conducted by the Mobile Bar Association (MBA). It sets a "gold standard" to which other city, county and state bar programs should aspire.

In 1985, the MBA organized the Pro Bono Program to provide free legal representation to low-income clients in Mobile County. In 2000, the program's name was changed to the Mobile Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Program to be more easily understood by the general public.

During the first two years of its existence, the program was operated through the office of the MBA executive secretary. A separate office was established in 1989 with a part-time director. Today the Mobile Bar Association VLP is a non-profit program and a partner agency of the United Way of Southwest Alabama. It has a full-time executive director, an administrative assistant and an intake specialist.

Nearly 60 percent of lawyers participate

The program has more than 600 lawyers who volunteer their expertise and time to work with low-income clients in certain types of cases. According to the most recent participation statistics, an incredible 59 percent of "regular" bar members in Mobile County participate in the program.

What sets it apart?

Mobile VLP board member **Henry Callaway** says the program's success is three-fold—a combination of the unwavering support of Mobile-area attorneys, the strong backing of local judges and the leadership efforts of an outstanding staff and board of directors.

"The main reason for the success of the Mobile Bar Association VLP is the tremendous support of the local bar," Callaway says. "The Mobile legal community has a great dedication to public service, and the Volunteer Lawyers Program is our bar association's flagship program. Mobile lawyers are justifiably proud of it."

Lawyers + judges = pro bono success

Lawyers support the program by taking cases and also by contributing financially.

"The judges' support has been critical as well," Callaway says. "All the local, state and federal judges helped with recruitment when we were building the program. The state court judges give pro bono lawyers docket priority and speak at our CLEs. We've had a judge on the VLP board for the last several years, and there's also a plaque posted in the courthouse listing the names of all the volunteer lawyers.



Thomas J. Methvin



"It's a great pleasure to be a member of such as committed board," Callaway said. **Executive Director Blakely Davis** and her staff are extremely dedicated and do a wonderful job, and the 30-member board is a true working board. Unlike many non-profits where the board's main function is to raise money, the Mobile VLP board is very involved in developing plans to deliver legal services to as many low-income folks as we possibly can."

If not for them. . .

Current Mobile VLP board officers are **David Peeler**, president; **Lisa Darnley Cooper**, vice president; **Gilbert B. Laden**, treasurer; and **Meegan Nelson**, secretary.

Board members are: **Tonny Algood, Judge Donald Banks, Ann Brown, Hank Caddell, Henry Callaway, Angela Campbell, Joe Carr, Harwell Coale, Luke Coley, Celia Collins, Robert Edington, Vince Gaddy, Scott Hetrick, Jim Jeffries, Chris Knight, Edwin Lamberth, Greg McAtee, Terrie Owens, Larkin Peters, Gaby Reeves, Denise Riemer, Tracie Lee-Roberson, Frankie Fields Smith, Michael A. Smith, and Bill Watts.**


The rest of the Alabama State Bar owes the Mobile Bar Association a debt of gratitude for its excellent leadership in the VLP arena, and it is hoped other Alabama programs will follow its lead. Keep up the good work!

For more information about Mobile's VLP, go to www.vlpmobile.org or visit the ASB online at www.alabar.org.

—Thomas J. Methvin, president, Alabama State Bar

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