

RHODE ISLAND
STATEWIDE PLANNING
PROCESS

Submitted to
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

By

RHODE ISLAND
STATEWIDE PLANNING
COMMITTEE

And

RHODE ISLAND LEGAL SERVICES
Walter Stone, Chairperson

Introduction

In February 1998 Rhode Island Legal Services (RILS) received communications from LSC with regard to the implementation of a statewide planning process for the future delivery of legal services. LSC has suggested that the planning process include individuals and organizations that are concerned with civil legal services to the poor. In July 1998, LSC provided RILS with a more detailed outline of its request indicating the main areas the planning process should review and address in its 16-page memorandum entitled State Planning Considerations.

In response to the LSC's request RILS contacted a number of organizations and individuals requesting their assistance in discussing, debating and preparing an updated statewide plan for the future delivery of legal services for indigent persons. Representatives of the court system, the Bar Association, the State Legislature, the Office of the Attorney General, clients and social service agencies all agreed to participate in the planning process. (A list of each member of the Committee follows on the next page.) The participants agreed that the report could be completed only by the creation of subcommittees, each to address one of the areas LSC suggested should be considered as part of the planning process.

The Committee took as its starting point the November 1995 report that RILS submitted to LSC which provided a detailed outline addressing the statewide planning issues sought by LSC. It was the Committee's view that the matters addressed in the 1995 report need not be repeated here even though many of the issues are similar or even identical. For this reason the 1995 Statewide Plan should be considered a part of this submission and considered in conjunction with this report. In addition, the report is an unsynthesized compilation of six subcommittee reports and contains overlapping recommendations and a variety of writing styles. With these drawbacks in mind, the report is reflective of a broad range of thinking on the issues for which LSC sought comment and recommendations.

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Statewide Planning Committee for Civil Legal Services in Rhode Island Subcommittees

SUBCOMMITTEE I. Creating a Delivery System That Maximizes Client Access To High Quality Legal Assistance

**The Hon. John E. Martinelli
Providence Probate Court
Providence City Hall
25 Dorrance Street
Providence, RI 02903**

Phone: (401) 421-7740
521-3110

Fax: (401) 861-7708

SUBCOMMITTEE II. Use of Technology to Enhance Delivery of Services

**Robert M. Barge, Esq.
Executive Director
Rhode Island Legal Services,
Inc**

56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-
2652

Fax: (401) 453-0310

E-mail: RBarged~Ri1s.org

Ms. Deborah DeBare, Executive Director

RI Coalition Against Domestic
Violence

422 Post Road, Suite 200

Warwick, RI 02888

Phone: (401) 467-9940

Fax: (401) 467-9943

E-mail:

DebDeBare/RICADV~RICADV.org

Elizabeth Dennigan, Esq.
Saint Francis Cares Wellness Center
58 Weybosset Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 861-8195
Fax: (401) 453-0034
E-mail: edennigan@loa.com

Robert C. Harrall
Court Administrator
Rhode Island Supreme Court
250 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 222-3263
Fax: (401) 222-3599

Robert Sabel, Esq.
Director of Litigation
Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc.
50 Washington Square
Newport, RI 02840
Phone: (401) 253-2090
Fax: (401) 848-0383
E-mail: [Sabe14Ri1s\(~AOL.com](mailto:Sabe14Ri1s(~AOL.com)

The Hon. **0.** Rogeriee Thompson
Associate Justice Superior Court of Rhode Island

Introduction

250 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 222-3250
Fax: (401) 222-2794

Dean Bruce Kogan
Roger Williams University School of Law
Ten Metacom Avenue
Bristol, RI 02809
Phone: (401) 254-4502
Fax: (401) 254-3525
E-mail: [BIK\(d~nvu1aw.rwu.edu](mailto:BIK(d~nvu1aw.rwu.edu)

SUBCOMMITTEE III.
Coordinating Efforts to Expand Client
Access to the
Courts; Educating the Client Community

The Honorable Albert E. DeRobbio
Chief Judge District Court of Rhode Island
One Dorrance Plaza
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 458-5200
Fax: (401) 861-9570

Ms. Noreen Shawcross, Executive
Director
RI Coalition For The Homeless
11 Aurora Street
Providence, RI 02908
Phone: (401) 421-6458
Fax: (401) 421-6426
E-mail: RIHomeless@intap.net

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SUBCOMMITTEE III. (Cont'd.)

Carl Krueger, Esq.
Staff Attorney
International Institute of Rhode Island
645 Elmwood Avenue
Providence, RI 02907
Phone: (401) 461-5940
Fax: (401) 467-6530

**Maria Encarnacao, Legal Clinic
Coordinator**
RI Coalition for the Homeless
11 Aurora Street
Providence, RI 02908
Phone: (401) 421-6458
Fax: (401) 421-6426
E-mail: RIHomeless@intap.net

Mr. Thomas M. Connell
Law Enforcement Coordinator
United States Attorney's Office
Fleet Center 8~ Floor
50 Kennedy Plaza
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 528-5224
Fax: (401) 528-5474
E-mail: Thomas.Connell@usdoj.gov

Nancy Ponte, Esq.
Staff Attorney
Rhode Island Legal Services,
Inc.
56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-2652
Fax: (401) 453-0310
E-mail: Nponte@Rils.or~

Mary Curtin
Paralegal
RI Legal Services
56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-2652
Fax: (401) 453-0310
E-mail: Mcurtin@d~Rils.or~

SUBCOMMITTEE IV.
**Coordination of Training and
Professional Development for Advocates**
Walter Stone, Esq.
Adler, Pollock & Sheehan

2300 BankBoston Plaza
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-7200
Fax: (401) 351-4607
E-mail: WSTONE@apslaw.com

Janet Gilligan, Esq.
Deputy Director
Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc.
56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-2652
Fax: (401) 453-0310
E-mail: JGilligan@ThRils.org

SUBCOMMITTEE V. Volunteer Lawyer Program

Ms. Susan Fontaine
Director of Public Services
Rhode Island Bar Assoc.
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 421-5740
Fax: (401) 421-2703
E-mail: SusanF@ids.net

Julia Rueschemeyer, Esq.
Director of the Feinstein Institute
for Legal Services
Roger Williams University School of Law
10 Metacom Avenue
Bristol, RI 02809
Phone: (401) 276 4889
Fax: (401) 254-3525
E-mail: JYR@rwulaw.rwu.edu

Maria Encarnacao, Legal Clinic Coordinator
RI Coalition for the Homeless
11 Aurora Street
Providence, RI 02908
Phone: (401) 421-6458 Fax: (401) 421-6426
E-mail: RIHomeless@intap.net

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SUBCOMMITTEE V. (Cont'd.)

Ms. Noreen Shawcross
Executive Director
RI Coalition For The Homeless
11 Aurora Street
Providence, RI 02908
Phone: (401) 421-6458
Fax: (401) 421-6426
E-mail:

RIHomeless(diintap.net)
SUBCOMMITTEE VI. (Cont'd.)

Ms. Adrienne Newsome
Director of Development
Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc.
56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-2652
Fax: (401)453-0310
E-mail: ANewsome@Rils.org

SUBCOMMITTEE VI.

Resource Development SUBCOMMITTEE COORDINATOR

Robert M. Barge, Esq
Executive Director
Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc
56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903

Phone: (401) 274-2652
Fax: (401) 453-0310
E-mail: RBarge~Rils.org

Ms. Charlene A. Kneath
Assistant to the Executive
Director

Rhode Island Legal Services,
Inc.
56 Pine Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-2652
Fax: (401) 453-0310

E-mail: **RILS a ids.net**
Lauren Jones, Esq.
President
Rhode Island Bar Association

115 Cedar Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 421-5740
Fax: (401) 274-2805
E-mail: Jonesapp@ids.net

Mr. Ray Bandusky
Executive Director
Rhode Island Disability Law Center
349 Eddy Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-3150
Fax: (401) 274-5568
E-mail: I-IN7384~handsnet.org

Introduction

STATEWIDE PLANNING COMMITTEE

FOR

LEGAL SERVICES IN RHODE ISLAND

GOALS:

1. Identify and address the most important legal needs of eligible clients, as determined by appropriate needs assessments, taking into account the diversity of persons and needs in the state and its various communities.
2. Strive to provide low-income persons throughout the state broad and equal access to legal services, regardless of such obstacles as disability, geographical isolation, culture, and language.
3. Provide high quality legal services to clients throughout the state, regardless of regional distinctions in demography, the economy, or the presence or absence of other local resources to provide or support the provision of legal services to low-income persons.
- 4. Encourage innovation in the** delivery of legal services accompanied by appropriate assessment of results.
5. Minimize duplication of capacities and administration and make the best use of resources available to the delivery system as a whole and its component parts.
6. Have the capacity and flexibility to respond effectively and efficiently to new and emerging client needs and other changes affecting the delivery of legal services to the poor.

STATEWIDE PLANNING COMMITTEE
**Creating a Delivery System that Maximizes Client Access
to High Quality Legal Assistance**

The Subcommittee addressing this area of the RILS Statewide Plan initially reviewed the State Planning Considerations enunciated by LSC in its July 1998 Memorandum. Many of the considerations and indicators require a review of the current delivery system, especially that portion of the system that addresses initial intake and its mechanisms for advice and referral. RILS delivery system was fully described in its November, 1995 Statewide Plan Report to LSC and was reviewed by the Subcommittee. Many of the indicators that were identified by LSC as appropriate areas for review had already been addressed by RILS through its coordinated statewide approach, its merger with the Legal Aid Society, its telephone intake system which focuses on advice, brief service and referral, and its continuing upgrading of its technology. The Subcommittee also reviewed the special barriers to access of services by certain clients due to disability, geography, language or the like. Again many of these same issues and concerns were addressed in the 1995 Statewide Plan.

RILS has continued to focus attention on hiring bilingual staff, has recently upgraded its telephone system both in Providence and very recently in its Branch Office in Newport, maintained its 800 numbers, and has coordinated with other agencies to ease some access problems for clients that have difficulty accessing one of our offices. For example, the Newport Branch office has a cooperative relationship with the Community Action Program serving Washington County whereby clients may use fax machines at the CAP agency to both send and receive materials from RILS greatly facilitating RILS ability to deliver both routine and emergency assistance.

After review of both the existing system and the 1995 Statewide Plan, the Subcommittee decided that it would focus its attention on future goals for improving RILS delivery of high quality legal assistance which would take into account both the limited resources available and the benefits available through technological improvements. The Subcommittee has recommended improvements in two key areas and

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a proposed new initiative to develop more private attorney involvement in the provision of advice and referral services. The Subcommittee has recommended the upgrading and greater dissemination of our client education (CLE) materials and increased attention to the benefits that may be derived from our Web page. It has also recommended an initiative to recruit retired attorneys as volunteers.

Recommendation

Greatly expand the dissemination of legal educational materials by making such materials available at all state agencies, shelters, Community Action Programs, and throughout the library system.

At present RILS legal educational material is only available at RILS' offices or through its intake advice system. Some of the material is quite good and other material needs to be updated. Within RILS each unit of expertise should conduct an assessment of the materials they have developed, rewrite the materials in need of updating, and insure that all the materials are available in Spanish as well as English, since the Hispanic population is our fastest growing population. The Subcommittee believes this work should be done within the next two months.

The Subcommittee recommends that in November 1998, RILS coordinate a meeting of the ten largest state agencies for an inventory review of each agencies legal educational materials to determine if there is any overlap or conflict in the information being provided. After eliminating overlap and addressing in other relevant concerns, RILS CLE materials should be distributed to the agencies, programs, libraries, etc. mentioned above.

Recommendation

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The Subcommittee recognizes that as advanced technology becomes more and more pervasive, RILS client population will have increasing access to the Internet. In addition,

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other service providers to RILS' client population have increasing access to the Internet and therefore another means of accessing RILS' legal education material. Such access could also be helpful in assisting and recruiting volunteer attorneys. The Subcommittee recommends that RILS' Web Page, created in 1996, needs to be updated and that a resource be identified that will insure that it continues to be updated. Dean Kogan had mentioned that RILS could possibly obtain a volunteer from Roger Williams University to assist in this regard. The Subcommittee recommends a timeframe of 45 days for RILS to address this issue.

Recommendation

To establish a "Hot Line" manned by retired volunteer attorneys.

The Subcommittee recommends that a luncheon meeting be arranged to kick this off with a target date of the end of October. The Subcommittee has a tentative list and will set a time to work on the meeting agenda and invitations and work out the mechanics of this new initiative.

Use of Technology to Enhance Delivery of Services

The Subcommittee was charged with assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the current use of technology as well as recommending means to strengthen and expand services to eligible clients. The Subcommittee paid principal attention to Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc. (RILS) and the Roger Williams University Legal Clinic (R.W.U.) in its assessment.

Current State of Technology

The review of current technology disclosed the following:

- (1) All attorneys and other employed staff at both RILS and R.W.U. law clinic have computers at their desks. Student-attorneys at both organizations share computers. The computers available to attorneys, employed staff and student-attorneys are a mix of Level I (Pentium) and Level 11(486) computers with a majority being Level I.
- (2) E-mail and Internet access is available in a variety of configurations. Some attorneys and employed staff members at RILS have only internal email while others have internal e-mail, external e-mail, and Internet access. All R.W.U. attorneys and staff have full e-mail and Internet access.
- (3) All attorneys, paralegals, and student-attorneys have access to automated legal research databases. Not all legal service providers to eligible clients have the same access to automated legal research databases. For example, R.W.U. attorneys and student-attorneys have unlimited access to Lexis and Westlaw while RILS' attorneys and staff have only limited access to Lexis and Westlaw.

Use of Technology to Enhance Delivery of Services

Use of Technology to Enhance Delivery of Services

(4) Each separate office (RILS -Providence, RILS -Newport, and R.W.U. -Providence) has its own local area network for computer connectivity. The R.W.U. Providence office is connected via a wide area network to the Law School and University campus in Bristol. A wide area network does not currently connect the two RILS offices. A wide area network does not currently connect the separate offices of RILS, R.W.U. and other relevant entities (e.g. Rhode Island Disability Law Center, Intemational Institute, etc.).

(5) Both RWS and R.W.U. Law School presently maintain separate Internet web pages. At present there are not html links between the two websites.

Some other relevant legal services providers or related entities do maintain

Internet websites (e.g. Rhode Island Bar Association), while others do not (e.g. Rhode Island Disability Law Center).

(6) At present the Rhode Island court system does not maintain any public online access to court information, such as, case dockets or court calendars, nor does the court system maintain an Internet website. The Rhode Island Supreme Court Clerk's Office has indicated that steps are presently being taken to create an Internet website for the court system and bar examiners. An internal on-line information system reflecting case dockets and court calendars is available to court personnel only.

(7) At present there are only very limited amounts of legal information or selfhelp forms available for eligible clients in the Internet websites of RILS, R.W.U. or other relevant entities.

Use of Technology to Enhance Delivery of Services

(8) At present there is no technology liaison group or standing committee established to address the common technological concerns of the various civil legal services providers.

Recommendations

The Subcommittee, after review of the current state of technology available to enhance delivery of services to eligible clients, makes the following recommendations:

- (1) All attorneys and employed staff at both RILS and R.W.U. legal clinic should have a Level I (Pentium or higher) computer on their desks. All student-attorneys should have access to a Level I computer. This upgrading should be completed as soon as possible since more and more research materials are available through the internet at little or no support cost and internet use is significantly impeded if access thereto is via a level II or lower computer. At the very least, the upgrading of Level I computers across the board should be completed before the end of 1999 because of possible year 2000 (Y2K) compliance problems.
- (2) PM attorneys, employed staff, and student-attorneys should have access to internal e-mail, external e-mail, and the Internet no later than the end of 1998.
- (3) An attempt should be made to explore expanding the range of automated legal research bases available to legal service providers to eligible clients. Some of this may occur by a by-product of linking the websites of the relevant entities which may serve as gateways to research systems available at particular providers (e.g. the CD-ROM research materials in the R.W.U. Law School library could be made available through the **R.W.U. website**).
- (4) The separate local area networks of the RILS -

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Providence and RLS -Newport offices should be linked through a wide area network unless such linkage is prohibitively expensive. If a wide area network is not implemented between Providence and Newport, then steps should be taken

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to avoid conflicting representation and to regularly merge data from both offices through alternative means. The separate networks of the other legal service providers should not be linked presently because of potential conflict and confidentiality problems.

(5) All legal service providers to eligible clients in Rhode Island should maintain Internet websites and all such websites should be linked to one another through HTML links. Providers with particular expertise in website creation and maintenance should be asked, where feasible, to share that expertise in a way that might enable those providers without a website to create one. This topic is one that might be addressed by the technology liaison group proposed in recommendation #8 below.

(6) The Rhode Island court system should develop and implement both an Internet website and public on-line access to court information such as case dockets and court calendars. These steps would not just benefit eligible clients and their legal service providers, but would benefit all lawyers practicing in Rhode Island and the public in general.

(7) A comprehensive set of easily understandable legal information and self-help forms should be made available to eligible clients through the Internet websites of the various legal service providers. Exactly what information should be on which website is a matter to be addressed by the technology liaison group proposed in recommendation #8.

(8) A technology liaison group or standing committee should be established by and between the various legal service providers to address the common technological concerns on an on-going basis.

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COORDINATED EFFORT TO EXPAND CLIENT ACCESS TO THE COURTS, ENHANCE SELF HELP OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOW INCOME PERSONS, AND PROVIDE PREVENTIVE LEGAL EDUCATION AND ADVICE

The Subcommittee recognizes that many of the issues addressed by the Subcommittee relate to or overlap issues addressed by other subcommittees. In addition, some strategies for increasing access will necessarily require increased resources to address the increased demand.

Advertising The Subcommittee believes that certain client groups are not well aware of the availability of legal services in civil matters. It recommends that RILS, within budget constraints, advertise in local newspapers, especially those that are designed to serve the minority communities. The subcommittee also recommends that the availability of television public service spots be determined and whether the times available would tend to reach our targeted population.

Increase Awareness! Volunteerism As indicated above any increase in client access is likely to increase the need for additional resources. The subcommittee recommends that additional efforts be undertaken to recruit more members of the bar community to assist in representation of low-income individuals.

A) Reach the Rhode Island Bar community to obtain commitments to do pro bono work. The Rhode Bar Association, as of September 8, 1998 reported 4,815 practicing attorneys in the State of Rhode Island. If each of these attorneys took on one case per year, approximately 4,800 individuals would have legal representation. Cases usually settle/resolve much faster when both sides have the assistance of counsel, and when cases settle, court dockets get smaller and everyone benefits.

B) Increase recruiting of students from the

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Ralph Pappito Law School at Roger Williams University to participate in more internship within Legal Services. It

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was recommended that RILS enlist the expertise of Robert Gemma in recruiting more students, not only from the law schools, but also from universities.

Collaboration .The Subcommittee believes that one way for RILS to expand its reach to the client community is through collaboration with other agencies that provide legal services to the communities, especially the hard to reach communities. RILS must attempt to coordinate its efforts to provide our Community Legal Education materials to the public with the efforts of other agencies both to expand client's opportunities and to prevent duplication of services and materials.

CLAN, (Cooperating Libraries Automated Network) .One subcommittee recommendation in this regard is to take advantage of the CLAN system that is carried by all state libraries. Tom Connell generously volunteered to contact a representative from CLAN to discuss incorporating our pro se legal packets and information into library computers.

Space in the Courthouse Access to RILS' services could be significantly enhanced if RILS could maintain a permanent presence in the Providence Courthouse, similar to the Public Defender. There is little doubt that RILS' presence at the courthouse is needed and would significantly benefit low-income persons that commonly appear pro se without any assistance or advice as to how to present their claims or defenses. Our absence is yielding many post-judgment visits to our office presenting difficult issues with respect to reopening completed cases and requiring Rule 60 motions for clients who were not aware of our services. According to our Chief Judge, in August 1998 there were 480 trespass and ejections in Sixth Division alone. RILS represented only 7% to 10% of these individuals. Although there is very limited space within the Garrahy complex, the Subcommittee recommends that should space become available, RILS take advantage of such an opportunity to enhance client access.

Escrow Program The Subcommittee recommends that one method of increasing

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financial resources to RILS is the proposed security deposit escrow program

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that has been submitted to the state legislature for consideration. At present Rhode Island law does not require that security deposits be held in separate accounts or draw any interest. If all of Rhode Island rental property owners were required to deposit tenants security deposits in an interest bearing account, similar to the IOLTA program, the annual interest would yield a substantial sum that could be used towards legal representation of tenants unjustly being evicted or living in substandard, blighted conditions.

Recommendations

COORDINATION OF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ADVOCATES

The Subcommittee for the Coordination of Training and Professional Development for Advocates considered the existing and proposed capacity of Rhode Island Legal Services to afford all advocates access to an adequate and appropriate training and opportunities for professional development. Traditionally, RILS has offered its staff an excellent law library and a wide assortment of local, regional, and national training opportunities through attendance at meetings, conferences, and seminars. While these opportunities continue to exist and are often an effective method of professional development, RILS cannot and will not ignore the developing availability of computerized legal research, internet access to legal services advocates and data, and email.

The committee considered that at the present time all RILS advocates have desktop e-mail options available to them. All have been encouraged to utilize this service as a daily method of communication with colleagues and co-workers. The ability to share documents and legal research has also been emphasized to RILS staff.

In addition to e-mail functioning, all RILS advocates have desktop access to computerized legal research through the Law Office Information Systems Inc., (LOIS) program. This ability to instantly research statutes and cases has already proven invaluable to RILS staff in their legal work. As RILS has continued to improve its computer system and networking capability, staff has been offered individual training in computers and word processing programs in response to a definite need for advanced technological training.

Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc. is in the process of providing all advocates desktop internet access. At the present time, all Newport office staff have individual internet access through an integrated program that includes their e-mail system. In the Providence office, access to the Internet is available to all staff in the law library, and

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universal desktop internet access will be installed by November 1, 1998. RILS will train all staff in internet use as part of the implementation of its internet network.

RILS will continue to work with the Volunteer Lawyer Project of Rhode Island in offering its pro bono attorneys access to technologically updated research and case development materials. RILS staff attorneys will continue to work with the Volunteer Lawyer Program in providing expertise in designing and implementing training sessions for volunteer attorneys, as well as offering access to its computer systems. The staff at the VLP also will continue to offer their pro bono attorneys the opportunity to be mentored by RILS staff in areas of poverty law that are specific to a legal services practice.

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PRIVATE ATTORNEY INVOLVEMENT THE VOLUNTEER LAWYER PROGRAM

The Volunteer Lawyer Program (VLP) Subcommittee assessed the current status of the VLP, which is administered by the Rhode Island Bar Association and funded by Rhode Island Legal Services and the Rhode Island Bar Foundation. It was the consensus of the committee that the program has continued to provide quality legal assistance, in priority areas, to indigent clients on a statewide basis while increasing services annually. When necessary, the priorities of the program are adjusted and/or increased to quickly respond to the needs of the poor. For example, this year the VLP program immediately responded to recent changes in the law that negatively impacted the most vulnerable, poor children. Over fifty attorneys were recruited to handle Social Security Income benefits cases for children whose benefits were or were threatened to be discontinued, and training was provided at a major law firm and the Bar Association headquarters. To date, the VLP program has approximately 1,050 members and processes 1,200 cases a year. All referrals made through the program are for clients whose income is at or below the federal poverty guideline.

The committee focused its attention on ways to increase membership, expand services, and provide greater incentive for current members to remain active participants. The first project that will be undertaken, in the fall of 1998, is to match Roger Williams **University School of Law students with VLP attorneys to work on pro bono cases.** The availability of students to handle research and certain aspects of cases is a positive step toward increasing their interest in future involvement in public service activities. It is the hope of the committee that this project will also encourage current members to accept a greater number of complicated matters.

Judicial involvement and support is the cornerstone for the recruitment and retention of the volunteer lawyer. The Rhode Island Bar Association is in the process of establishing a judicial pro bono initiative to specifically support the Volunteer Lawyer Program, Pro Bono Elderly Program and their respective members. The target date for

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initiating this project is the Spring of 1999.

Since continuing legal education is mandatory in Rhode Island, it is considered to be one of the most effective tools for recruiting attorneys. On an annual basis the VLP program sponsors at least two free seminars for its members and those who wish to join. The seminars focus on poverty law and are highly successful. The committee recommends that the continuation and expansion of these seminars be a high priority. With this in mind, a fourth seminar for this year is being planned in cooperation with Roger Williams University School of Law and Rhode Island Legal Services in the area of eviction defense. This seminar will be held on October 29, 1998.

The Volunteer Lawyer Program has a strong network of support. Rhode Island Legal Services provides self-help materials for clients as well as an excellent library which may be used by the volunteer lawyer. The Rhode Island Bar Association donated a \$25,000 Lexis credit for use by the RILS last year and this system is available for use by volunteer attorneys and students. Rhode Island Legal Services is in the process of distributing information to members of the Bar Association in regard to their Web page. The two largest law firms in the state are “firm members” of the program and have in-house pro bono coordinators who communicate directly with the VLP coordinator. The Volunteer Lawyer Program has an active partnership with the Coalition for the Homeless and their legal clinic project. Attorneys from the VLP program staff these clinics and the VLP director is a member of the coalition’s legal services committee. The Rhode Island Shorthand Reporters Association also supports the VLP. Since being established, the Roger Williams University School of Law has donated space and in-kind resources to the VLP on an annual basis. All of these groups work together continually to promote pro bono legal assistance. Additionally, the Legal Services Committee of the Rhode Island Bar Association, which meets monthly, is committed to the expansion of this program and provides a forum for attorneys to make recommendations and interact with program staff.

In conclusion, it is the opinion of the committee that the Volunteer Lawyer Program is strong and effective, and that it remains the best vehicle for encouraging and

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tracking private bar involvement. The subcommittee recommends that increased outreach and recruitment remain central to the goals of the program and with the implementation of the new initiatives recommended above, the goals will be significantly strengthened.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Resource Development Subcommittee met on August 18, 1998 and again on September 2, 1998 to formulate recommendations and goals for maximizing resources to support civil legal services for indigent Rhode Islanders. Due to the **uncertainty of IOLTA and federal funding, The Resource Development** Committee felt that RILS should focus on securing and increasing state, corporate and local support. The subcommittee considered the strengths and weaknesses of the State's resource development efforts and developed the recommendations listed herein:

IOLTA Status and Revenue: Rhode Island Bar Foundation leaders have already negotiated with the banks in the State, resulting in an increase in IOLTA interest rates. It appears that IOLTA revenue will remain a source of funding for RILS at least through 1999. The Committee recommends that the Bar Association closely monitor the challenge to the IOLTA program and continue to consider ways to ensure that the Rhode Island IOLTA program will be able to remain in effect.

Increasing Private Bar Involvement: The Bar Association makes its mailing list available to Rhode Island Legal Services for the Campaign for Equal Justice and other fundraising events. The Committee recommends that Rhode Island Legal Services, The Rhode Island Bar Association, the Rhode Island Disability Law Center, the Urban League of Rhode Island, and other interested parties collaborate to sponsor and plan a "Justice for All" Ball. The goal would be to establish this event as a major fundraiser, which would continue each year and attract corporate support.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Filing Fee Expansion: A Filing Fees Bill was passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1997 which earmarks \$10 from every case filed in Superior Court to support legal services to the indigent. The Committee recommends that efforts be made to expand the filing fee provision to cases filed in the Rhode Island Family Court.

State Funding for Legal Services: Rhode Island Legal Services is not included in the State Budget and gets no legislative appropriations. The Committee felt that a concentrated effort should be made to obtain State funding for Legal Services. This should be accomplished by working with allies in the Rhode Island General Assembly, developing a coordinated communication, public relations and media campaign to build public awareness of the value of legal services to the State, and meeting with the Governor and/or members of his staff.

Creating a Planned Giving Program/Endowment/Foundation:
There is currently no planned giving program or endowment to support legal services in Rhode Island. The Committee recommends that a permanent Resource Development Committee be formed to consider this and to study other ways to increase funding for Legal Services.

Increasing United Way Funding: RILS is a United Way Partner Agency and receives United Way Funding. However, the level of funding is moderate and could possibly be increased. The Committee recommends that RILS, along with members of its board, bar association supporters, and union leadership, lobby United Way to

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increase the allocation for Legal Services in light of decreased federal funding and the importance of these services to the community.

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Collaboration with other Organizations: RILS has recently received a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation funding a collaborative effort with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence to provide legal assistance to victims of domestic violence. A grant proposal was also submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice for further funding of this project. The Committee recommends that RILS look for further funding opportunities and/or contracts to provide services to the low-income community in collaboration with other non-profit entities such as the Rhode Island Disability Law Center and the Rhode Island Parent Information Network.

Fee for Service Contracts: In 1995, RILS entered into a three year contract with the State of Rhode Island to represent parents involved in neglect, dependency and abuse cases in Rhode Island Family Court. RILS is currently negotiating for another contract with the Supreme Court to provide representation to low income parents who are behind on child support payments. These contracts have enabled RILS to grow as a program despite the federal funding cuts. The Committee recommends that RILS continue to explore the possibilities of fee for service contracts to fill civil legal needs within the low-income community.

Lawyer Fund Drive: RILS instituted its Campaign for Equal Justice in 1994. It has had excellent support from the leadership of the Rhode Island Bar Association, with the president of the Association signing the appeal letter for the past few years. Each year, the Campaign has raised increasing sums of money for legal services. Although the Campaign has not reached its full fundraising potential, the Committee felt that this could be a continuing source of revenue for legal services. The Committee recommends that the leadership of the Rhode Island Bar Association work to emphasize the importance of the Campaign, and continue to promote the Campaign among its membership, with the goal of increasing the numbers of attorneys contributing.

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In-Kind Legal Services and Support: RILS currently utilizes unpaid interns from Roger Williams University School of Law to aid in the delivery of services. The Committee recommends exploring the possibility of utilizing loaned associates from some of the largest law firms in the state to assist in providing services to clients.

Landlord/Tenant Escrow Program: The Expanding Client Access to the Courts Subcommittee discussed the possibility of trying to have landlords deposit their tenant's security deposits in an interest bearing account, similar to IOLTA, and using the interest to help pay for legal assistance in housing matters for low income tenants. The Resource Development Committee felt that this would be an excellent source of revenue. The Committee recommends that this idea be developed further.

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Configuration of Programs Within the State that
Maximizes Delivery of Services

The primary focus of this state planning consideration as requested by LSC is for a review of the current LSC funded delivery system throughout the State, and a determination of whether a consolidated statewide delivery system could better serve our client population. As indicated in RILS' 1995 Report only LSC funded programs provide services through an integrated statewide system.

Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc. (RILS) is currently the only LSC funded program in the State of Rhode Island. There are other programs that provide free or reduced fee legal assistance to lower income persons in certain types of cases. As indicated in the 1995 Report there is currently a reasonable degree of interagency referrals among these providers and all providers recognize the importance of strengthening this process. Shown below is a chart which outlines the various entities now providing legal assistance to lower income persons.

One of the problems identified in the 1995 Report is the need of these providers to interact with one another on more than merely a case referral basis. These agencies need to develop a method of sharing information concerning the civil legal needs of indigent persons and developing a more coordinated mechanism for addressing them. The 1995 Report also suggested a strategy of coalition building and coordination between the legal service providers and the social service providers. In this regard, RILS and the RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence have participated in a joint application for program funding to address issues of domestic violence. The organizations expect to develop a coordinated initiative on a statewide basis that will take advantage of each organization's strengths to deliver services that neither organization could deliver as well independently.

As indicated in the 1995 Report, civil legal services to the indigent are currently provided by RILS on a statewide basis. The Report made note that such services has been

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considerably enhanced by RILS recent merger with the non-LSC funded Legal Aid Society of Rhode Island, the only other statewide provider of civil legal services to the

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poor. The merger is now in its fourth year and it can be reported that the benefits anticipated by the merger have been largely borne out. The consolidation has created a larger more efficient delivery system for clients in need of legal services in domestic matters. In addition, as a larger and more efficient provider of services in this area of law, RILS has attracted increased non-LSC funding to address other Family Court related matters such as child welfare and child support issues.

The recommendations of the 1995 Report have proved appropriate and are adopted and reiterated herein. Namely, that the provision of indigent civil legal services continue in the form of a consolidated statewide program. Only through a statewide system can economies of scale be realized in the administration of the program. Additionally, our statewide system offers the best opportunities for consolidated fundraising through the Bar and major foundation sources. A consolidated statewide system ensures a program with sufficient personnel to undertake a system of supervision, case review and peer support necessary to the provision of high quality representation for clients. It allows for greater opportunities in the utilization of volunteers, law students and others in the delivery of services.

A consolidated system allows for a critical mass of advocates (attorneys and paralegals) in all areas of law for which program services are deemed the most critical. It permits the development of a reasonable sized central library providing access to the specialized material necessary for high quality work (current CFR's, Program Manuals of State and Federal Agencies, specialized materials prepared by back-up centers, etc.), and it helps foster the technological changes that are now required for provision of high quality, efficiently delivered services.