

Hi Maxine:

Although the VBA is not making any COVID-19 requests on its own behalf, it supports the following COVID-19 requests that are related to the practice of law and access to justice:

1. Access to Justice Coalition request for \$150,000, as described in the attached "Access to Justice and COVID-19" document. It's my understanding that House Appropriations has approved this amount and it is included in the "CRF Bill". Dan Richardson is scheduled to testify tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. and will address this request in detail. It includes the landlord tenant "low bono projects" in which VBA private practitioners participate. The request includes funding is for legal services for low-income persons whose housing status has been adversely impacted during the pandemic.

2. Digitization of Land Records group's request for \$3.5M (although I've learned this morning that the figure may be adjusted), to fund the initial digitization of land records in each town clerk's office throughout Vermont. The Committee on Senate Government Operations tasked the Digitization of Land Records group with "bringing land records into the 21st century", per the attached directive from Senator White. Also attached is a general description of the request, currently before the House Committee on Government Operations. The need for remote access to land records has been starkly apparent during the many weeks that town clerk offices were (some still are) closed to the public.

3. A request for \$124,000 to cover the projected cost of e-filing fees in the new Odyssey e-filing system in Vermont state courts, for the period April 20, 2020 through December 30, 2020. The health and safety of court users, court staff, Judicial officers, courthouse security personnel and courthouse support personnel are greatly enhanced by the new e-filing system. Instead of physically inspecting files at the courthouse, parties can view their case files and submit filings online from any location at any time. Multiple parties associated with a case can view the electronic record at the same time from their own desks. Courthouse staff can forward emergent pleadings to judicial officers without setting foot in chambers. And any paperwork that is submitted via the mail is handled only once or twice before scanning. The funds will enable e-filers to access justice through the courts remotely, without incurring e-filing fee costs that might otherwise impede their ability to take advantage of the health and safety benefits, as well as the efficiency benefits, of a modern e-filing system. The request will meet health and safety and efficiency goals, as well as the access to justice goals that the Vermont Constitution guarantees in Article I, Chapter 4 "[E]very person out to obtain right and justice, freely and without being obligated to purchase it." This request has been preliminarily discussed in Senate Judiciary, but the mechanics for the ask are unclear at present.

With respect to the general impact of COVID-19 on the practice of law and access to justice, attached is a memo summarizing what the VBA has done in response to the COVID-19 challenges, updated since the memo was first presented to House Judiciary on April 16. Recent highlights include volunteer lawyer efforts aimed at providing remote notarizations, reduced or free legal services for essential workers, copying and printing services for low-income persons who lack access to printers and copiers, and legal assistance to those applying for stimulus checks. In addition, the VBA in conjunction with the Attorney General's Office and VT Foodbank, has moved up the annual Lawyers Fighting Hunger Food Drive in September to the two-week

period beginning June 12, 2020, to help with the increased food insecurity associated with the health crisis.

I hope that this information is helpful to you. I look forward to returning to discuss the questions that you would like specific input regarding: technology investments in our justice system; emergency legislation becoming permanent; remote court hearings/appearances; after-hour rfa petitions; holding stations; and enhanced communication between court agencies. Please let me know when the next hearing date might be. Thanks very much for all that you and your Committee are doing to help Vermonters during these uniquely challenging times.

Teri