

Paralegal Focus

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Paralegal Focus is the quarterly newsletter of Vermont Paralegal Organization, Inc.

Vermont Paralegal Organization, Inc. is a Member of the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA).

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*Newsletter Design By
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President's Message

By Laurie S. Noyes, MBA, PHR®

I can barely wrap my head around the fact that another year has flown by. This year has brought a return of some normalcy as things have started to creep back to the “way they were” before the pandemic hit us. That being said, some aspects of our lives are forever changed by the events of the last few years, and I don't think a full return to “pre-Covid” lives will ever truly happen. Many of us continue to work different or hybrid schedules, or our work has changed scope and structure. Many of us changed jobs as we navigated a new employment landscape, or we made changes to our personal lives to help us cope with stress and the after effects of all that has transpired the last few years. At the very least, my hope for all of you is that you have managed to find joy where you can and took time to care for yourself over this last year. If you haven't, this is your reminder and your permission to do so, to remember that you perform better when you practice self-love and foster a commitment to your own well-being. I wish that for all of you in the new year!

The VPO has been busy this year. We have a new CLE store up and running on the VPO website where you can purchase prior CLE's for great prices. A shout out to our Membership Chair and Vice President, Melinda Siel for that idea, and getting that implemented. The VPO has also started accepting online credit card payments for CLEs and membership renewals, and various other events. Thanks to our Treasurer, Elsie Goodrich and Melinda Siel (again) for making that convenience a reality for our members.

Other initiatives got underway this year, including the Pathways to the Paralegal Profession, through a partnership with Attorney James Knapp, who is teaching the real estate portion of the Pathways program. The VPO's goal is to add additional pathways in new areas of law that will give paralegals or people interested in the paralegal profession basic skills sets to begin their careers. Stay tuned for new areas of focus in this program, and additional offerings in 2023.

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Our Professional Liaison, Carie Tarte, and Pro Bono Chair, Lucia White, have continued their efforts in exploring the opportunities for limited licensure of legal paraprofessionals in Vermont. A report on those efforts will be going out to the membership and we will be seeking input from our membership with respect to pushing that initiative forward in 2023.

Our CLE Chair and Newsletter Editor, Louise Reese, with help from Carie Tarte (again) continues to put in the work in offering CLEs to our membership throughout the year, and is already in the planning process for our in-person annual meeting in 2023. We are looking forward to seeing everyone's faces again live and in-person for our annual meeting. This year is an election year, so members will need to come out to vote as well.

I am so very proud of the work the VPO Board has put in this year. Each and every member continues their dedication to the paralegal profession, and their commitment to this field is apparent in all that they do. I am grateful for such an energetic team of talented people to work and collaborate with throughout the year.

The VPO Board still has vacancies, and we would love to have new board members sign up to help out in various areas. These various Board positions are open: Finance Chair, Website Chair, and NFPA Secondary. Feel free to reach out to me to discuss any of these positions if you might be interested. If you don't want to commit to a board position, we will take help on any initiatives or events the VPO is working on throughout the year. Just let us know what peaks your interest, where your talents lie, and what your availability is like, and we can find the right spot for you!

Wishing you all a happy and healthy holiday season, and a Happy 2023!

Editor's Message

By Louise Reese

Alas, another year on the books is coming to an end. Where did it go? The Board and Committees have been busy, but we still need your help. We have some open spots that need your attention. Melinda has provided a description of the open roles under Membership News. Please consider coming to work with our team!

Please meet our newest Member Spotlight – Zachary York. Welcome to the wall of fame, Zach! Carie has provided us with an article about limited licensure for paralegals in Vermont. If this is something you may be interested in, please contact Carie, Laurie, or Lucia, as mentioned in her article.

We also have some Did You Know reminders or news tidbits for you. Enjoy!

Finally, Andy Mikell, longtime supporter and presenter for the VPO, will be retiring from CATIC after 25 years of service at the end of the year. The VPO wishes him well in his retirement, and thanks him for all of his support over the years.

Membership News

By Melinda Siel

As of November 2022, we have 76 active members: 53 voting; 20 associate; 1 student; and 2 sustaining corporate.

Please welcome our newest members: Sarah Carter of Paul Frank + Collins P.C., Betsy Elliott, Noah Housman and Ian Sartwell of Gale and McAllister PLLC, Sylvia Jerome of Casella Waste Systems, and Sheila Mooney of Langrock Sperry & Wool!

ANNOUNCEMENT: OPEN COMMITTEE POSITIONS

The VPO needs your help! We have two open committee positions and one Director position on the VPO Board, and we are hoping that one of you has the will, the talent, and the drive to serve the paralegal community by becoming a committee chair or Director.

First, we have an opening for a **Finance Committee Chair**. The Finance Committee Chair assists the VPO treasurer in tracking and identifying expenses, preparing reports, and updating the VPO Board with respect to the financial position of the Organization. The Finance Committee Chair is open to any voting member of the VPO and is a standing committee with a right to vote on the Board. Anyone interested in this position should reach out to the VPO's Treasurer, Elsie Goodrich, at egoodrich@dunkielsaunders.com to learn more about the role and its requirements.

Second, we need someone to take over the role of **Website Committee Chair**. The Website Committee Chair can be any member of the VPO who has an interest in social media and website maintenance. Duties include maintaining the Organization's website to ensure that current and accurate information is available to its members, such as Board of Directors current contact information, membership information, employment opportunities announcements, newsletters, meeting and seminar announcements, NFPA affiliation and Paralegal Certification announcements, news and information; and to periodically verify links and forms provided for informational purposes on the Organization's website to ensure correct functionality and accuracy. If you would like to learn more about the position, please reach out to the VPO's Vice President, Melinda Siel, at msiel@dunkielsaunders.com.

Third, we need someone to take on the role of **NFPA Secondary**. The NFPA Secondary position is open to any voting member of the VPO and is a Direction position with a right to vote on the Board. The NFPA Secondary assists the NFPA Primary as the VPO's representative to the national organization NFPA, become familiar with NFPA philosophies and publications as well as current national issues, and attend and act as the VPO's voice at NFPA national convention and regional meetings, as well as regularly held NFPA Board meetings. If you would like to learn more about the position, please reach out to the VPO's NFPA Primary Robyn Sweet at vponfpal@gmail.com.



Q&A

Zachary York Member Spotlight

How old are you?	30
Describe your family?	My wife Jolie and I have been together for ten years and married for two.
Town in which you live?	Burlington.
What is your favorite food?	Diner breakfast food, probably sausage gravy over biscuits and some hot sauce.
Do have any pets? If so, what are they, and what are their names?	We have a 7 year-old cat named Scout, but she has a lot of nicknames.
What kind of hobbies do you have?	I enjoy watching movies, playing games, seeing friends, going to concerts, and I volunteer at ANEW Place, a low barrier shelter serving dinners to guests a couple times a week and I have a legendary VT twitter account. I also enjoy baking and cooking.
How do you unwind at the end of a long work week?	Jolie and I like to watch movies, go yard sale hunting, and find cheap thrills at Habitat for Humanity or Restore.
What is your educational background?	I have a BA. in Legal and Justice Studies and a Certificate of Paralegal Studies. (Burlington College, 2014)
Where do you work?	I work at Sheehey Furlong & Behm, P.C. in Burlington.

When did you first become a paralegal?	November 2021.
What area of law do you work in?	Generally civil litigation, some criminal defense, utility regulation, and land use.
What do you enjoy about working in that area of law?	There is a broad array of stuff to work on, it's challenging, and I have a good working knowledge from 5 years with the State Judiciary.
If you could work in any other area of law, what would it be?	Hmm. Maybe Intellectual Property.
What is the one thing about being a paralegal you would change if you could?	I don't believe I'd currently change anything about my role.
How or why did you first enter the paralegal field?	I wanted to work in the legal field in college so I pursued the major and certificate program. I worked for the Judiciary before moving into the private sector.
Did you hold other positions, or have a different career, prior to becoming a paralegal, and if so, what was it?	I worked through college at Shaw's Supermarket, and after graduating I was promoted up to department manager. I left for the Judiciary to follow my legal passion.
What do you love about the paralegal profession?	The adversarial legal system is not perfect, but it's great to go from being neutral at the court to actually advocating on behalf of a client.
What things about the profession do you dislike?	Not getting control of a document until late in the day. ☹️
How long have you been a member of the VPO?	I think I joined in late 2021.

<p><i>Tell me about the skills or traits you possess that you find most useful in your position?</i></p>	<p>Managing multiple pending items and prioritizing effectively. Generally, time management and attention to detail. I can't read minds, but I can learn what folks want/need and cater to litigator preferences to craft accurate and effective results for their requests.</p>
<p><i>What character oddities or personality traits do you find at odds with your career?</i></p>	<p>Personally, I feel very compatible with this career.</p>
<p><i>What brief advice or friendly tip would you offer to someone just entering the paralegal field?</i></p>	<p>Pay attention, show up, work hard.</p>



Two Important Questions Surrounding Limited Licensure For Paralegals In Vermont

By *Carie Tarte, RP®*

“So how does everyone feel about limited licensure for paralegals?” That was precisely the question Mike Kennedy asked at our Ethics CLE earlier this year. Much to my chagrin, the group remained silent. No one had an opinion one way or another about granting limited legal licensure to paralegals in Vermont. The silence made me question whether or not to continue to push for some form of limited legal licensure. It eventually occurred to me that, while I have been working on this issue and it has been at the forefront of my mind for several years now, the general paralegal public in Vermont is likely unaware of the issues driving some states to explore the granting of limited licensure to paralegals. Let me take this opportunity to fill everyone in on why I think voluntary licensing of paralegals in Vermont is a win-win for everyone involved.

First, to be clear: I am not saying that in order to be a paralegal in Vermont, you should become licensed. What I am saying is that trained legal paraprofessionals should be allowed, if they so choose, to assist members of the general public with very specific tasks in prescribed areas of law after completing an educational program and successfully passing an examination, ultimately resulting in licensure. In other words, if you have no desire to undergo a special educational program and take an examination to become licensed in a particular area of law, you do not have to do so. The program will not require all paralegals to be licensed in order to simply work as a paralegal, rather it will allow those seeking to become licensed the opportunity to expand the duties and scope of their work beyond the traditional paralegal role. Anyone not wishing to become licensed can continue working as a paralegal in the same manner they currently do - under the supervision of an attorney.

You might be wondering why I have been focused on this and why it matters. The answer is actually bigger than you would think. According to the Vermont Access to Justice Coalition, eighty percent (80%) of all cases in Vermont’s docket currently have one or more self-represented litigants. Access to justice at its core involves basic fundamental rights. Far too often, poor to middle income Vermonters fail to recognize when they have legal rights to be exercised to begin with. Even when their legal rights are identified, Vermonters are representing themselves in foreclosure and eviction actions, collection actions, custody disputes, and divorce - all of which have far-reaching impacts on social and financial well-being.

Without equal access to justice, low to moderate income Vermonters struggle with legal problems that negatively impact their livelihood, health, housing, marital status, children, and families, which has a rippling effect on their communities. Preventing domestic violence reduces emergency medical treatment and law enforcement costs. Establishing parentage and child support helps single parents provide for their children. Avoiding foreclosure helps neighboring houses not to lose value, and protects local lenders from being saddled with bad-debt write-offs. Preventing eviction avoids costs of emergency shelters. Access to legal services removes barriers that keep people in poverty.

In June of 2019, The Resource for Great Programs, Inc. provided a report to the Vermont Access to Justice Coalition. The June 2019 report found that legal services provided by Vermont Legal Aid, Legal Services of Vermont, the Vermont Volunteer Lawyer Program and the South Royalton Legal Clinic were able to secure SSI, SSDI and other Social Security benefits in 86 of their cases in 2017 which resulted in an average federal monthly award per successful case of \$859. The total estimated impact from these successful cases was estimated by The Resource for Great Programs to be \$10.3 million dollars. Over \$10 million dollars fed back into the State of Vermont and its people in 2017.

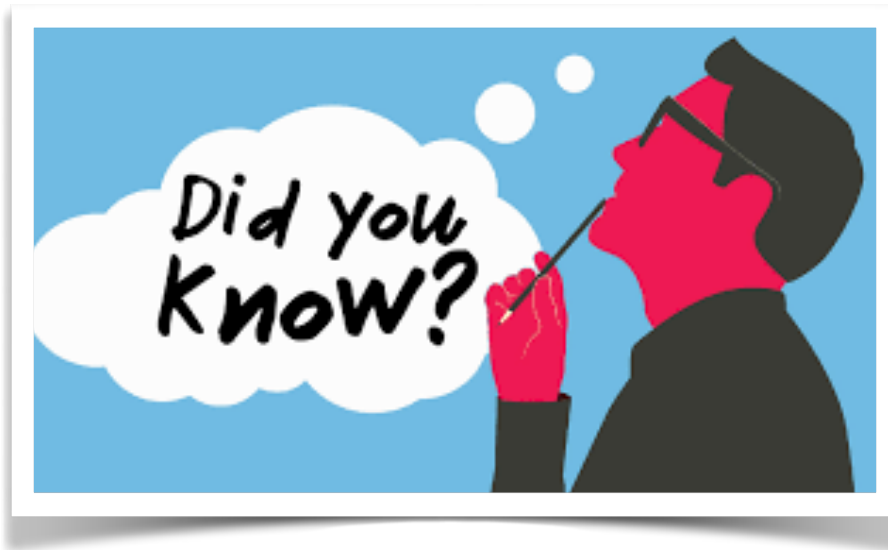
Outside of Social Security and SSDI benefits obtained, \$2.8 Million in Medicare benefits were obtained for legal service users, \$14.6 Million in Medicaid benefits were obtained, \$4.1 Million in child support payments were obtained, \$400,000 in Veterans benefits and other awards were obtained, \$800,000 in cost savings resulted from prevention of domestic violence, and \$1.1 Million in savings to communities from prevention of foreclosure^[1].

The Resource for Great Programs calculated an \$11.00 return on investment for every federal dollar spent for programs like Vermont Legal Aid, Legal Services of Vermont and Vermont Volunteer Project that increase access to justice.

After reading these promising statistics you may be thinking we do not need limited licensure for legal paraprofessionals because we have Vermont Legal Aid, Legal Services of Vermont, and other legal volunteer organizations that are able to provide the necessary legal services. Unfortunately, these organizations are not able to meet the demand. Sam Abel-Palmer of Legal Services Vermont advised that every 30 days, their office receives in the vicinity of 2,000 voicemails requesting assistance, in addition to the 100 to 200 online intakes during that same time period. This has been the level of requests for help for over two years now just to Legal Services Vermont. Moreover, none of these non-profit legal service providers go to court on behalf of service users, and the assistance provided is often restricted to only certain income levels.

If, after reading this, you are asking the second important question - “how can I help?” - then we should talk. A small group of VPO Board members has been working together to try to move an initiative forward in Vermont that could provide paralegals with another career path, while at the same time, providing some much-needed assistance to low and middle-income Vermonters. If you would like to join in this initiative, please reach out to me, Laurie Noyes, or Lucia White.

[1] Report to the Vermont Access to Justice Coalition by The Resource for Great Programs, Inc., June 25, 2019, Tables 2 through 9.



Don't forget that Vermont notary commissions are set to expire at the end of January 2023. The Office of Professional Regulation of the Secretary of State's office has mandated a minimum of one hour of relevant continuing education for non-attorney notaries. If you didn't attend the webinar offered by the Vermont Bar Association on October 31, 2022, they you can access a recorded session is available on the VBA's website.

Starting November 1, 2022, attorneys can email their vacation schedules to jud.centralclerkreview@vermont.gov and the information will be entered into Odyssey and made available to all courts, including Probate and the Judicial Bureau, for scheduling purposes. Attorneys will no longer need to send notices separately to each trial court.

If attorneys also wish to notify the Vermont Supreme Court of their schedules, they should copy jud.supremecourt@vermont.gov on the email.



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