



Virginia Association of Defense Attorneys

VALUE PUT INTO PRACTICE

MESSAGE FROM THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF DEFENSE ATTORNEYS (VADA) October 2026

In December 2025, the Virginia State Bar issued its much-anticipated *Report on the Entry, Growth, and Distribution of the Virginia Attorneys* (EGAD Report) on the state of the Virginia Bar, and the results are stunning:

- The total new admissions to the VSB declined by 46% from 2012 to 2024 – a decline of more than 7.5 times the national average.
- The total Virginia Bar Examinees, from 2012 to 2024, declined 57% for all examinees.
- Of Virginia's 133 localities, 73% are "private practice deserts" (with fewer than 1 attorney engaged in private practice per 1,000 residents).
- Less than 26% of Virginia attorneys are under the age of 40.
- Over the past 20 years, membership in the Young Lawyers Section of the Virginia Bar decreased by 1,600 lawyers.

In 2026, the news continues to be unsettling with the recent announcement that the July 2026 Virginia Bar Exam had the lowest July exam pass rate in nearly a decade, with only 413 examinees passing the exam. As Virginia's population is nearly 9 million residents, the admission of only 400+ new Virginia lawyers in 2026 is woefully insufficient to stem the decline of the Virginia Bar numbers.

Virginia's civil defense bar has and continues to unquestionably feel the impact of this decline. The unfortunate reality is that the civil defense practice is less appealing to today's young lawyers for a variety of reasons. Our members consistently report difficulty in hiring and retaining new attorneys in a competitive marketplace for the following reasons:

1. Uncompetitive hourly rates reduce compensation.
2. Student loan debt due to the high cost of law school means that students must find adequate compensation to service the debt.
3. Arbitrary reductions in time entries by auditing services further reduce effective hourly rates and attorney satisfaction, leaving the attorneys discouraged.
4. High case volumes due to inability to hire and retain attorneys.

Additionally, experienced civil defense attorneys are retiring and not being replaced by younger attorneys. Simply stated, it has become increasingly difficult for Virginia's civil defense firms to recruit and retain lawyers of all ages and experience levels.

The membership of the Virginia Association of Defense Attorneys has been for generations the standard bearer for excellence in professional competence, ethics, and trial skills and has worked in partnership with the civil defense industry. In order for this partnership to continue in the changing landscape of Virginia's reduced pool of available talent, acknowledging and addressing the issues is required.

The insurance and risk management communities that rely upon the existence of a robust, engaged, talented, and experienced civil defense bar in Virginia can address the core issues outlined in this statement to help keep the best and brightest young attorneys in the civil defense field. Our fellow citizens who rely upon a robust defense when they are sued also deserve the best and brightest lawyers to defend them. Our system of justice will fail without competent lawyers for the plaintiffs and for the defense.