



DRS DIALOGUE

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DISPUTE RESOLUTION SERVICES
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
SUPREME COURT OF VIRGINIA

A Fresh Look: Standards of Ethics and Professional Responsibility

Dan Wassink, DRS Manager

Virginia's Standards of Ethics and Professional Responsibility for Certified Mediators are foundational to the work of mediators in the Commonwealth. The Standards provide critical guidance to all certified mediators, whether they are mediating court-referred cases or community disputes; or serving as trainers of certified mediation courses or as mentors.

However, the Standards are showing their age (aren't we all?!), not having been updated since 2011. Since then, scenarios that never could have been anticipated (think Artificial Intelligence and the explosion of virtual mediation) have surfaced. In addition, just during my 3+ year tenure, DRS has fielded many questions and concerns about the proper interpretation of the Standards.

In other words, it's high time to review and update our Standards.

That process began in late May, with the first meeting of the Ethical Standards Review committee. That initial meeting was largely organizational in nature, with discussion focused on committee membership and structure, and the process that will be followed.

Currently, we have nearly 20 individuals interested in helping with the task of reviewing and updating the Standards. That number may grow as the committee seeks to add diversity and varying perspectives to its ranks. While I reserve the right to change my mind, I envision a core group of 8 to 10 individuals forming the main committee, joined by others who will offer their input and expertise as members of subcommittees that will address specific topics and sections of the Standards. Aside from virtual mediation and the use of AI in our work, other possible topics include determining when the Standards apply, clarifying when mediators are qualified to provide professional advice, and refining the definition of confidentiality and its practical application.

I want to thank the current and future committee and subcommittee members in advance for their work. This will undoubtedly be a long and challenging – but necessary – journey. That journey will eventually include soliciting feedback from all certified mediators; and, of course, no modifications or additions to the Standards are possible without the review and approval of the Judicial Council of Virginia.

In the meantime, feel free to contact me to offer suggestions and ideas – or just to wish us luck!

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AN HISTORIC GALA CELEBRATION

Honoring 40 Years of Mediation in Virginia

Pamela Struss, Executive Director,
Greater Richmond Community Mediation Center



This year marks a momentous milestone in the history of conflict resolution: four decades of mediation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. What began on May 10, 1985, as a conversation among visionary court leaders, social workers, and mediators in Petersburg has grown into a statewide commitment to peaceful resolution, judicial efficiency, and, most importantly, empowering people to find their own solutions.

From that conversation, the Virginia Mediation Network began to take shape. And over the years, the commitment of judges, clerks, legislators, and mediators helped mediation take root across all court levels—from General District to Juvenile and Domestic Relations, to Circuit, and most recently, the Appellate Courts.

Today, mediation in Virginia is not only codified in law—it is thriving, with trained and certified mediators working every day to foster understanding, collaboration, and justice.

Save the Date: A Gala to Remember

To honor this incredible journey, you are invited to a Gala Celebration, hosted by the Greater Richmond Community Mediation Center in partnership with leaders from across the Commonwealth.

Date: August 23, 2025

Location: The Shed at Historic Main Street Station, Richmond, VA

Special Guest: Virginia Supreme Court Justice Stephen McCullough will offer remarks and a toast to all who have championed mediation in the courts.

This event will shine a spotlight on the Pioneers of Mediation, the Judges and Clerks of Court who embraced and referred mediation, and the Mediators who dedicate themselves to guiding resolution every day.

Enjoy:

- A Cocktail Hour with live music by the talented Mr. Ethan, a recent graduate of the Appomattox Governor's School
- A Silent Auction to support the celebration
- A stunning Legacy Wall and Historic Timeline Presentation
- An interactive Art Installation that brings our collective journey to life

This Gala is lovingly co-chaired by Pamela Struss, Cecelia Garner (Clerk of Court, City of Richmond GDC), and Kimberly Kyle (Mediator, City of Richmond), with support from the Honorable Jeanette Irby and Kristen Kalina. We're seeking additional volunteers and sponsors who share our belief that honoring the past builds a stronger future. Whether you're a longtime mediator, a court official, a legal professional, or a supporter of alternative dispute resolution, this is your celebration too.

Ticket and sponsorship information coming soon at www.richmondmediates.com. Stay tuned.

For more details or to get involved, please contact Pamela Struss, 804-720-0715, pstrusserichmondmediates.com, www.richmondmediates.com.

VMN 2025 FALL CONFERENCE



As we celebrate 40 years of supporting ADR professionals, the Virginia Mediation Network invites you to join us for our 2025 Fall Conference, themed “Lighting the Way to Sail Your Own Ship.” Whether you’re just beginning your journey or looking to strengthen your practice, this year’s conference offers the insight, tools, and inspiration to navigate your own course in the world of mediation and conflict resolution.

Held in a hybrid format, the conference begins with two in-person days on October 3-4 at the Virginia Crossings Hotel and Conference Center in Glen Allen. This portion includes 2 hours of ethics content and the opportunity to connect face-to-face with colleagues and presenters. The in-person event will feature a keynote address by Senior Justice of the Virginia Supreme Court William “Bill” Mims, who brings a wealth of experience and insight to our field.

The conference continues virtually from October 6-10, offering more than 20 hours of Continuing Mediator Education (CME), including required categories, and 7.5 hours of MCLE credit for attorneys. With flexible access throughout the week, you can tailor your experience to your schedule.

This year’s sessions explore a wide range of topics to support both the depth and breadth of your work, including:

Douglas Spoors, VMN President
Pamela Struss, VMN Conference Chair &
Immediate Past President

- ADR Tools: Genograms, AI for mediation and training, relational repair
- Family Mediation: Cross-cultural practice (South Africa), divorce coaching, parenting assessment tools
- Practice Development: Running a mediation business, managing clients and emotions
- General Interest: Mindfulness, forgiveness, dealing with angry people, peacebuilding through art
- Legal and Judicial Perspectives: Insights for ADR practitioners and K-12 sector engagement
VMN members receive significant savings on registration:
- \$250 Early Bird (by August 22)
- \$275 Regular Member Rate
- \$360 Non-member Early Bird (by August 22)
- \$400 Non-Member Rate

Now is a great time to join or renew your VMN membership to take advantage of conference discounts and year-round benefits like educational webinars, networking events, and a statewide community of professionals committed to advancing mediation in Virginia.

Visit www.vamediation.org to join VMN.

Registration for the Fall Conference will open in June!

2025 PARENT EDUCATORS SYMPOSIUM

Terry Dysick,
Parent Education Coordinator

Dispute Resolution Services' 2025 Symposium went very well! We had approximately 70 attendees. This symposium consisted of a main guest speaker in the morning and a speaker and panel during the afternoon! Dr. Lisa Bennett out of Fairfax County spoke very eloquently about children resisting visitation with the other parent and brought great information regarding the updated terminology and different ways of perceiving and diagnosing the issues when children are refusing visitation.

Taylor Frome, one of the dedicated training committee members, promoted the idea of having webinar trainings in between the symposia each year. Great ideas were generated about topics as well as providers eager to present. Several questions revolved around restorative justice which would be one of our upcoming topics as well as the impact of trauma on children and parenting. Again, there will be many other great topics that we will be entertained at least once a month as we move forward. In addition, the Parent Education Coordinator will be visiting localities to meet with providers and discuss what is working and what is challenging, support marketing opportunities and observing the talented and varied presentations!



There was a lot of discussion around holding parents accountable for the parent education classes as well as interest shared about moving forward on holding parents accountable for criminal behaviors that are done in the school. Ms. Bentley expressed opportunities for offering the classes in schools.

The judges both spoke profoundly on their interests and their dedication to the service provided which educates parents on the importance of coparenting and provides knowledge as they proceed to mediation or further matters before the court dealing with custody, visitation and or support.

Attorney Bowman emphasized her investment with children and unity of families by making sure she visits with her assigned clients, remain honest with her involved parents and is always prepared to report back and or appear in court in the best interest of the child. The guardian ad litem pointed out great common examples which indicated parents often detour from keeping the child(ren)'s best interests in the forefront.

DRS has currently received 75% of the evaluations!

Approximately 97% of the reviews we have received were a very high ratings stressing relevancy, interesting and the appreciation for engagement overall and the networking! Grateful responses were added for the accessories which included the balloon decorations, lunch choices and the jazz music intermittently asserted in the program! DRS worked very well together with a united front and were very accommodating to all participants! A couple of the team members stated this was less stressful than previous events.

Overall, the experience was invaluable and the connects continue to grow and enhance the opportunities for our providers and for entities in need of the service. Energy is already building for the next Symposium!



The panel consisted of a local guardian ad litem, Bridgette Bowman, a school social worker, Kathryn Bentley, from Richmond Public Schools, and two District Court judges: The Hon. Brice Lambert from Richmond JDR and The Hon. Thomas Sotelo from Fairfax JDR. Their engagement was wonderful and so many questions were answered!

DRS IN THE FIELD

Annual JSC Meeting with DRS

MICHAEL BARR, ADR ANALYST



On 13 May, DRS staff traveled to Williamsburg for the Judicial Conference of Virginia, an annual affair organized by the Department of Educational Services with the Office of the Executive Secretary that brings together judges from around the Commonwealth. DRS attended to meet with the retired judges involved in the Judicial Settlement Conference (JSC) program. The purpose of our gathering is to update and inform participant judges on a variety of matters from forms and invoices to program effectiveness, and to answer questions and hear their concerns as a body.

The JSC neutrals handle court-referred cases at the circuit court level, both civil and family, often complex matters with legal issues in play. After introducing ourselves, Dan discussed policy updates, Michael peppered them with quiz questions, Jordan shared reminders about forms and vouchers, and Jon showed graphs to illustrate the high settlement rate (79%) and positive reception from parties and attorneys alike. Jon noted as “statistically astounding” the fact that of those cases that did not come to any agreement, only one participant purported to not see value in the effort.

To do things a little differently this year, DRS shortened up its presentations significantly to give the floor to two of the neutrals, on the supposition that as far as training goes, judges may prefer to listen to other judges. Judge Daniel Bouton gave tips on specific subjects that often prove nettlesome: pro se parties that may not understand the process, domestic relations cases with intense emotions, personal injury cases when liability is not contested, and overzealous attorneys.



Judge Paul Peatross, Jr. spoke on the advantages and disadvantages of virtual conferencing. With similar settlement rates seen between in person and virtual, understanding the types of cases each work best with can help inform strategy toward settlement or resolution.



DRS IN THE FIELD (cont.)

"DRS to Welcome and Inform New Judges"

DAN WASSINK, DRS MANAGER



There is no better time to promote and encourage judges to take full advantage of court-referred mediation than before they take the bench.

DRS will be doing exactly that during the New Judge Orientation for New Judges in Short Pump on June 25 and 26. This is at least the fourth consecutive year that Michael and I will attend the Orientation, giving interactive presentations at two separate sessions for new district court judges, and a third session for new circuit court judges. This year, Parent Education Coordinator Terry Dysick will join us at the session for new JDR judges to tout the program she has been leading since February of this year.

Recognizing the fact that 'judges listen to other judges,' DRS has once again enlisted the enthusiastic support and talents of Judges Thomas Sotelo (Fairfax Co. JDR) and Robert MacDonald (Chesapeake CC) as co-presenters at the upcoming sessions. Both judges have proven to be staunch supporters of mediation during their time on the bench, and DRS is grateful for their continued participation.

PLASTIC, NOT PAPER!

JON LAMP,
ADR PROGRAMS SPECIALIST



Attention mediators, prospective mediators, and prospective trainers! As many of you know, there is a \$25 application fee for all applications for certification and to become the trainer of a core course. This fee must be paid for by check or money order, as OES does not accept online payment - UNTIL NOW! Beginning July 2025, our office will begin accepting payment by debit and credit card for the application fees associated with mediation.

Along with this change, our office is also editing the ADR-1000A Application for Certification form to provide a better experience for those seeking certification. The ADR-1000A form itself will be much shorter, and applicants will attach a separate checklist for each certification requested. The final product is more straightforward for applicants, collecting only what is necessary for a given certification and providing helpful guidance for those new to mediating in Virginia.

We will be posting these revised forms in early July and will send an email once they are online. We hope you find these revisions helpful, and that you take advantage of the new payment option for new certification applications and training applications!

MEDIATION COORDINATORS: LOCAL MEDIATION REPRESENTATIVES

JON LAMP,
ADR PROGRAMS SPECIALIST

In Virginia, civil cases can be referred to a free dispute resolution orientation session to learn more about the alternative dispute resolution options available for their case. In district courts, parties may then choose to participate in a mediation for no cost.

To administer a mediation program, courts need to track many moving parts to ensure cases move smoothly through the mediation process. This can include maintaining a roster of mediators who are available for cases referred by the court, reviewing case files to determine how effective mediation might be, contacting parties to schedule a mediation prior to their court date – and more.

To help courts manage the workload imposed by an active mediation program, many district courts work with a mediation coordinator – a contracted organization or individual who manages the mediation program.

The specific duties of a coordinator can vary court-to-court, but they generally involve managing the court's roster of mediators and mediator schedules, setting and enforcing court policies and procedures for referring and reporting mediations, and serving as the liaison for the court program between the court, mediators, the public, and OES.

Coordinators may also take on additional work for the court and for mediators, including contacting parties to schedule mediations, screening cases for their appropriateness to referral, preparing mediation-related documents for mediators and the court, and even themselves serving as a back-up mediator if need be. Not every court works with a mediation coordinator, and some mediation coordinators have a contract with the locality where they provide services, rather than our office.

If you are interested in mediating in a new court, or in coordinating a district court's mediation program, you may want to start by reaching out to the court to learn about their current mediation program, and if they have need for additional services.

You may also reach out to our office for information on starting or joining a mediation program, and for more information about how mediation programs are administered. You can find a list of courts with OES-contracted coordinators on our website, [here](#), or by scanning the QR code below.



R-E-C-E-R-T-I-F-I-C-A-T-I-O-N

Michael Barr, ADR Analyst

- Did you become a certified mediator more than one year ago?
- Did you NOT have to recertify last year?

If you can answer YES to both questions, then it is your turn to recertify this fall. Do you have a plan?

Recert season runs from early August through October 31st and may be seen as a grand opportunity for you to talk up (and submit to DRS) what trainings you have taken to advance your professional growth in the past two years. If you are a trainer or have expertise in a subject area related to mediation and a desire to share it with the field, consider offering a course (and receive Continuing Mediation Education (CME) credit). (See the [Trainer Application for CME Course Certification, ADR-2001](#)).

How do you find good trainings? Courses that are pre-approved for CME credit should be listed on the [Advanced Training Calendar](#), found on the [Certification and Training](#) section of [DWI] our website. Each course will be verified by the ADR 1010 form distributed to participants by the trainer at the conclusion of the course. This calendar is updated often so please check back if you do not see a training of interest. If you would like to add a training to the calendar, you can use the [DRS Training Calendar Request survey](#). Feel free to reach out to mediation organizations and networks in Virginia, with many listed on this [Local Resources](#) page, and inquire what trainings they are developing or have pending approval.

Did you attend a conference or a training that is not pre-approved but is related to your mediation practice? To receive credit hours for the instruction received, complete a [Mediator Application for CME Course Certification, ADR-2002 form](#), but please allow up to 30 days for approval. If you are unsure if a training you took will be approved, please see the [FAQ's about Recertification](#) for criteria DRS uses to guide approval of unique course offerings, or just ask.

How do you apply to recertify? Easy - use [Application for Mediator Recertification, ADR-1003 form](#). Submit this form with proof of the approved trainings you've taken, and your certification will be renewed effective 1 November 2025. For additional information, please visit the [Recertification](#) page.

Happy training!

THANK YOU

for all you do!

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SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Have an idea for a future article?

Submit your ideas to

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As always, thank you for all you
do for ADR in Virginia.

