



DRS DIALOGUE

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

SUMMER SPOTLIGHT

"FROM PUBLIC SERVICE TO DISPUTE
RESOLUTION"



MY JOURNEY TO DRS

Joining Dispute Resolution Services (Drs) has been an exciting new chapter in my career and an opportunity to continue something that has been consistent throughout my professional journey in public service.

Before joining the Supreme Court of Virginia, I worked with the Virginia Department of Health Professions, where I provided administrative support for three regulatory boards: Physical Therapy, Funeral Directors and Embalmers, and Long-Term Care Administrators. In that role, I gained valuable experience supporting licensing and regulatory processes, managing records, communicating with professionals and members of the public, and helping ensure that administrative processes moved efficiently.

Joi Yancey

Administrative Assistant

Prior to state service, I worked as a Contest Representative with the Internal Revenue Service, assisting taxpayers with a variety of tax-related inquiries. My responsibilities included helping taxpayers understand account information, processing amended returns, and scheduling appointments for individuals who needed additional assistance. Working directly with the public strengthened my communication, problem-solving, and customer service skills and taught me the importance of providing clear and accurate information, especially when helping someone navigate an unfamiliar process.

My Role in Dispute Resolution Services

Today, I have the opportunity to bring those experiences to my administrative role with Dispute Resolution Services (DRS), where I support our three primary program areas: Mediation, Tribunal Settlement Conferences, and Parent Education.

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As a first point of contact for DRS, I regularly communicate with judges, court clerks, mediators, mediation coordinators, program participants, and other stakeholders throughout Virginia. One of the things I have quickly come to appreciate about this position is how administrative support connects so many different pieces of our work. Whether I am responding to an inquiry, coordinating with another department, updating information, or helping resolve a payment issue, each task contributes to the larger work of DRS and the Judicial Branch.

My responsibilities include supporting Judicial Settlement Conference operations through judge onboarding, voucher and payment communications, website updates, and coordination with Accounts Payable and Payroll.

I also support broader DRS administrative operations through records management, invoice processing, and the continued development of more efficient electronic processes and workflows.

Another important part of my role is collaborating with Department of Judicial Services administrative staff and other internal partners, including Fiscal, HAWKS, Accounts Payable, and Payroll. These partnerships have allowed me to learn more about how the different areas of the Judiciary Branch work together behind the scenes to support Virginia's courts and the people we serve.

Looking Ahead

As I continue growing in my position, one of my goals is to identify opportunities to strengthen administrative processes, improve communication, and create more efficient workflows that support both our staff and stakeholders. I also look forward to building lasting professional relationships throughout the Judiciary Branch and continuing to learn from the people and programs around me.

What excites me most is knowing that administrative work can have an impact beyond the individual task in front of us. Effective communication, organization, collaboration, and customer service all contribute to helping our programs operate successfully and ultimately support the mission of the Supreme Court of Virginia.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of DRS and look forward to continuing to grow within the agency, connect with colleagues and stakeholders across the Commonwealth, and contribute wherever I can to the goals of our department and the Judicial Branch.

Beyond the Office

Outside of work, my favorite role is being a mom. I am also a part-time DJ and enjoy hosting events and helping create memorable moments for my clients on their special days. When I am not working or DJing, you can often find me spending time with my plants and flowers. I am a proud plant mom and enjoy being outside in my garden.

Whether behind a desk, behind the DJ booth, or in the garden, I enjoy opportunities to connect with people, create something meaningful, and continue growing.



JSC EXPANSION & NEW JUDGES

Jordan Blackstone
ADR Program Specialist

The Judicial Settlement Conference (JSC) Program continues to make substantial progress serving parties in Circuit Courts across Virginia. A testament to that progress is our recent program expansion.

In just my first 3 months heading up this program, I've had the pleasure of onboarding three new judges – the highest number of judges joined in any given quarter since the program's inception.

The Hon. James Willett, Retired Judge of the Prince William County Circuit Court, will serve the 9th, 12th, 13th, and 14th Judicial Circuits. Additionally, The Hon. James W. Updike, Retired Judge of the Bedford County Circuit Court, will serve the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th Judicial Circuits. Because these jurisdictions include previously unserved or underserved localities such as Danville, Pittsylvania, and Roanoke, our office is proud to be expanding program access in this region.

Finally, we're happy to announce the return of The Hon. Patricia West, Retired Judge of the Virginia Beach Circuit Court. Judge West previously served our program in the 2nd Judicial Circuit and briefly stepped away to fulfill another appointment. We are thrilled to have her back.

As a reminder, JSC is a no-cost, confidential process in which the parties meet with a neutral third party (a retired judge) to explore options for settling their dispute. JSC is open to parties for whom a judge has issued an Order of Referral and Designation to the program.

Dan Wassink
DRS Manager

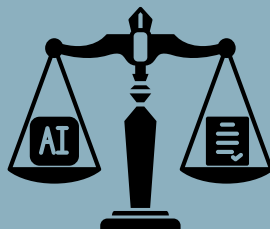
Be Intelligent about AI

If you're contemplating ways Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technology can assist your mediation practice, but wish to proceed cautiously and ethically, you may want to check out a new resource on the Dispute Resolution Services (DRS) website.

The document ([bestpractices_et_al.pdf](#)) serves as a quick reference containing best practices, and actions to avoid, when using AI or other technology in your mediation practice. You will also find questions and tips to consider assessing the security, confidentiality and privacy of an AI platform before deciding whether to use it. The final page of the document contains a link to take you to additional resources you may find helpful.

Credit for this new resource goes to members of the Mediator Ethical Standards Review committee's AI and Technology subcommittee. Subcommittee chair, **Karen Richards**, along with subcommittee member (and internationally renowned expert) **Dan Rainey** compiled the AI and security portion of the document. Other subcommittee members who helped to create and review the document are **Sara Arthur, Donita King, Sara McAllister, Pam Struss and Dan Wassink**.

The subcommittee has also developed AI and technology-related language to add to the Standards of Ethics and Professional Responsibility for Certified Mediators. This language will eventually be presented to the Judicial Council of Virginia, along with proposed edits from other subcommittees, for approval most likely in 2027.



DRS IN THE FIELD

"HIT THE ROAD, JACK!"



Dan Wassink,
DRS Manager

DRS staff continue to 'hit the road' whenever possible to educate judges, court staff and others about the work we do. Two such opportunities are coming soon.

Judicial Conference of Virginia for District Courts

The Commonwealth's district court judges will gather for their annual conference in Virginia Beach this year from October 5 to 8. On two of those days, DRS will send a delegation to host an exhibitor's table.

While this is an event I always look forward to attending, I am unable to do so this year for medical reasons. So, I have left the job in the capable hands of ADR Analyst Michael Barr and Program Specialist Jordan Blackstone. The Conference is an excellent opportunity to meet our General District (GDC) court and Juvenile and Domestic Relations (JDR) court judges and discuss ways they can utilize our Mediation and Parent Education programs – for their own benefit, and for the benefit of the parties they serve. Michael and Jordan will bring brochures and other materials to distribute (and maybe even some candy!), along with their expert knowledge of DRS programs.

Judicial Management Program for New Clerks

Usually twice per year, we have the chance to meet with new GDC and JDR (and combined court) clerks of court to educate them and ask for their help in making sure all litigants have full access to our Mediation and Parent Education services. Clerks of Court are on the 'front line' and the first point of contact at most courthouses, and as such, they are invaluable partners.

Approximately 11 clerks of court will be in Richmond in early November for three days of learning and fellowship. On November 4, DRS will have 45 minutes on the agenda. Terry will focus on Parent Education, while Michael and I will cover Mediation.

This is an intense training for new clerks, often described as 'drinking water from a fire hose,' but we do our best to engage them and make our time with them memorable.



RECERTIFICATION REMINDER 2026

Michael Barr
ADR Analyst

Are you a certified mediator?

If so, did you renew your certification last year? If you did not, then chances are high that it is your turn to recertify in 2026.

What must you do to bring your certification current? To be short about it – CME's – that is, Continuing Mediator Education credit hours. A total of 10 are necessary, at least 2 of which must be approved for mediator ethics, based on the Virginia **Standards of Ethics and Professional Responsibility**. Do you have any carryover credit from your last recertification? If so, that will be automatically applied to your total as non-ethics credit.

To find an approved course, please see the **Advanced Training Calendar** located on the **Certification and Training | Virginia Court System** page. Did you take a course you benefited from that relates to mediation that is not yet approved? Consider asking for credit using the **Mediator Application for CME Course Certification, ADR 2002**.

How do you apply? Please submit to DRS the **Application for Mediator Recertification, ADR 1003** and include evidence of coursework, usually provided by the trainer of an approved course as an ADR 1010 form, and sometimes the ADR 1006 core course verification. The deadline is 31 October 2026.

Need more information? Please see the page on **Recertification** and / or the **Frequently Asked Questions about Recertification**.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Michael Barr
ADR Analyst

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FOR FAMILY MEDIATORS

Do you offer divorce and / or family mediation services or act as a trainer in these areas? [HB303](#) is described by the Virginia Family Law Quarterly, Summer 2026 as “the most impactful bill this year,” as it allows parties that are living separate and apart to file for a divorce from ‘bed and board’ without a waiting period. Prior to July 1, 2026 parties were required to wait a determined period of time before filing for legal separation. This invariably delays whatever court options may be available since the parties remain legally married. With this change, courts (and hence mediators) can step in to work with parties to address the immediate financial and parenting concerns that arise following separation, such as custody and visitation, support matters, and equitable distribution of certain assets.

For more information, please see this helpful summary: [Virginia Divorce Law Changes Effective July 1, 2026: What to Know Before You Separate » Geller Law Group](#). Many thanks to Aaron Hagmaier with the Fairfield Center for bringing this to our attention!



ALL-HANDS PRESENTATION



Terry Dysick,
Parent Education Coordinator

A reflection on civility, clarity, and collaboration within our judicial family

The Department of Judicial Services annual All-Hands Meeting brings staff together to connect, collaborate, and strengthen relationships through engaging activities and presentations focused on communication, compassion, and mutual respect.

This year, I had the joyful pleasure of presenting to our judicial family on an important and timely topic: Preventing Common Workplace Communication from Resulting in Conflict. The presentation offered practical reminders for recognizing how conflict can develop, understanding communication behaviors that may escalate or de-escalate tension, and practicing positive verbal and nonverbal communication before disagreements become formal workplace concerns.

“Most workplace conflicts do not begin with an argument. They begin with a look, a tone, an assumption, an unanswered question, an email, or something someone thought was said—but was not.”

Virginia’s Civility in the Workplace policy emphasizes mutual respect, a healthy work environment, and the prevention of bullying, harassment, and workplace violence in state government agencies. With that foundation in mind, the presentation encouraged each of us to be intentional about how we speak, listen, respond, and even pause during workplace interactions.

Participants engaged in role-plays, dance movement, and discussion to bring communication concepts to life. One memorable takeaway was the acronym **C-C-C: Clarify, Communicate, and Collaborate**. These three reminders can help us slow down, ask better questions, speak with purpose, and seek to understand.

In a judicial office, employees communicate across different roles, levels of authority, and responsibilities every day. The presentation served as a reminder that body language can speak volumes—and at times, it may send a message that differs from the words we intended to communicate.

ALL-HANDS PRESENTATION CONT.

Relevant workplace statistics remind us why these conversations matter. According to the American Psychological Association, 43% of workers typically feel tense or stressed during the workday, increasing to 61% among workers experiencing lower psychological safety. Workers with higher psychological safety are also far less likely to describe their workplace as toxic.

There is always room for improvement and gentle reminders. Let us be encouraged to communicate with intention, extend grace when misunderstandings arise, and help ensure that our judicial partners leave conversations on a positive note—even when we do not fully agree.



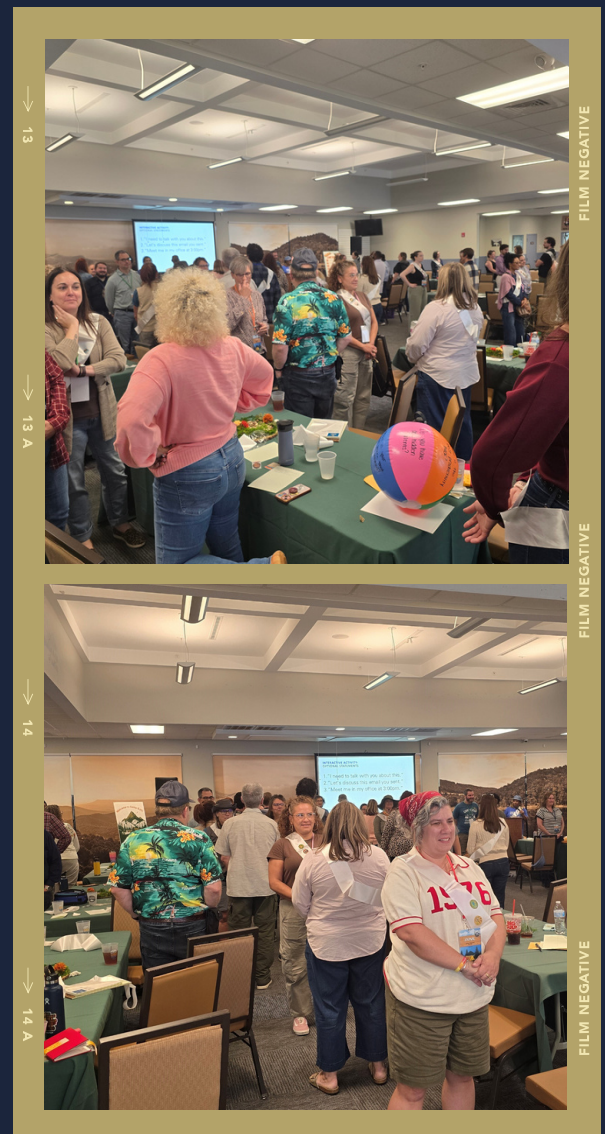
CLARIFY

COMMUNICATE



COLLABORATE

Staff putting communication into practice during Terry's interactive presentation



Terry Dysick,
Parent Education Coordinator



Parent Education (P.E.) Court Visits and Presentations

In order to continue providing valuable parent education seminars to litigants, and to enhance awareness of their availability and access, I have begun visiting chief judges and their staff to answer questions and clarify the opportunities available through parent education seminars for litigants who have filed for custody, visitation, and/or support.

Parent education seminars are court-required, four-hour classes designed to support parents and guardians going through separation, divorce, or custody disputes, pursuant to ***Virginia Code sections 16.1-278.15 and 20-103***. All providers are approved by the Office of the Executive Secretary.

Since August, I have met Chief Judge Overby in Newport News; Chief Judge Richard Collins in Yorktown, whose combined court includes New Kent County; and Chief Judge Alexis Fisher-Rizk of the Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. When available, Manager Dan Wassink joined me for these visits.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share with judges the benefits of referring litigants to parent education seminars, especially prior to any mediations that may also be court-referred. Classes are available both virtually and in person, and all providers complete an application process and training before being listed as available providers for the district and circuit courts.

Our brief presentations to the judges have been welcomed and appreciated, as they have allowed us to answer many questions based on changes that have taken place over the years. We look forward to continuing to meet with judges in other localities.

THANK YOU

for all you do!

CONTACT US

Dan Wassink,

DRS Manager-

dwassink@vacourts.gov

Michael Barr,

ADR Analyst-

mbarr@vacourts.gov

Jordan Blackstone

ADR Program Specialist-

jblackstone@vacourts.gov

Terry Dysick,

Parent Education Coordinator-

tdysick@vacourts.gov

Joi Yancey

Administrative Assistant-

jyancey@vacourts.gov

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Have an idea for a future article?

Submit your ideas to

disputeresolution@vacourts.gov

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



QUICK REFERENCE

Need to Contact Us?

Address: Supreme Court of Virginia

100 N. Ninth Street, Richmond, VA

Phone: 804-692-0375

Email: disputeresolution@vacourts.gov

Submitting an Application?

drsapplication@vacourts.gov

Making a Payment?

drspayments@vacourts.gov