

MSBA in brief

MINNESOTA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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Highlights...

A **summary dissolution pilot project** will help ease the financial burdens of Minnesota couples facing the difficulties of divorce. Page 2.

The Lawyer Advertising Committee solicits **samples of offensive ads** as it continues to examine possible regulation. Page 2.

A Twin Cities agency serves the **legal needs of nonprofits** by drawing on volunteers from area firms. Page 2.

The Minnesota State Bar Association and Minnesota Continuing Legal Education

cordially invite you to an
Open House
on

Friday, January 17, 1992
4:30 to 7:30 p.m.
at the
Minnesota Law Center
514 Nicollet Mall
Minneapolis

Please join us to celebrate the opening of the new MSBA offices and new Minnesota CLE Conference Center. Both facilities will offer dedication ceremonies and refreshments. The reception in the MSBA offices will especially honor the volunteer reviewers for *Summary Reporter*.

Office Pitfalls Explained in New MSBA Manual

Quick: How do you explain paralegal billing hours so that clients believe they are getting a fair deal?

For that matter, *should* you bill for paralegal services, and if so, what's the best procedure?

If these answers popped to mind immediately, you may have the benefit of a full-time office administrator, or a broad background in office management. Many attorneys, however, find that the daily demands of their practice consume all of their energies, leaving little time to consider how to run the office most efficiently.

The Law Office Management Committee has produced a new manual to address these needs. Written and edited by attorney members of the committee, the looseleaf manual attempts to provide useful tips and procedures in an easy-to-use format.

"The committee wanted the manual to be a quick reference guide," said committee chair Darel Swenson, "so that a small law firm that had to deal with a particular management issue could pull it from the shelf and find a chapter dealing with the issue they needed."

Each chapter opens with a quick outline of the issue to be presented, followed by detailed backup explanation. It includes general tips on setting up office procedures, as well as specific charts and documents that can be used by practitioners.

For example, a chapter on billing for nonlawyer staff points out how an increasing reliance on legal assistants has changed the way many lawyers practice. It goes on to provide suggestions for recording this time, as well as how to present paralegal support to clients as a means of holding down attorney billable hours.

Other topics include:

- Tailoring retainer agreements to **Manual to page 2**



Jarvis Jones, president of the Minnesota Minority Lawyers Association, testifies before the Supreme Court's Racial Bias Task Force. "In a nutshell," Jones told the task force, "the legal system is too white."

Task Force Examines Racial Bias; Hears Testimony on Mistreatment

Minnesota people of color often sense that courtroom doors open a little quicker, and a little wider, for other people. A Supreme Court task force has been working to examine that perception, and to take steps to correct the inequities.

The task force, chaired by Justice Rosalie Wahl, was formed by the Court in December 1990 to examine difficulties encountered by minorities as a result of statutes, rules, practices, or conduct throughout the state court system. At a recent series of public hearings, members heard testimony from more than 100 people who spoke of perceived racism at all levels of the justice system.

"I have a feeling that what we're seeing is the tip of the iceberg," said John Stuart, state public defender and member of the task force. "For every person who comes and talks, there may be a hundred who haven't heard of the task force or who may be afraid of repercussions if they do speak."

At one of the hearings, members heard a mother tell how her son was held in juvenile detention following a school altercation, while white students were not; from a private attorney who said police turned their backs on violence, so long as it stayed confined to minority communities; from a woman arrested

following a barroom fight while her attackers were never questioned; and from many others who spoke of a system that they felt excluded them.

"The stereotypes you hear about the system are true," Ramsey County Public Defender James Hanks told the task force during one hearing. Juries and court personnel—as well as attorneys—often have little sense of what life is like in minority communities, and apply their own preconceptions. The result, Hanks said, is that people of color receive harsher treatment.

Stuart, whose background has focused on juvenile law, said that racial attitudes affect courtroom perceptions.

"So often the problems of a family are magnified or distorted by the cultural lenses that people use to view the situation," he said. "Communities of color are very dissatisfied with the treatment of minorities. They see juvenile court as an agency that breaks up minority families."

Wesley Iijima, Hennepin County Housing Court referee and task force member, said he was encouraged by the numbers of people who came to the hearings to testify. The

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hearings allowed task force members to show members of the public that the court system could be responsive to their criticisms and concerns, he said.

"For everyone involved in the justice system, this is an important message to get out," he said.

The Racial Bias Task Force has scheduled three additional public hearings:

- January 14: Courtroom 3, Courthouse, Albert Lea.
- January 23: Auditorium, Hennepin County Government Center, Minneapolis.
- January 29: Auditorium, St. Paul TVI, St. Paul.

The hearings are scheduled to run from 6:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. Call (612) 297-7579 to register to testify.

The task force plans to present its report to the Supreme Court in January 1993.