



The LRIS Committee: A Win-Win for Clients in Need and Attorneys

It's a win-win. The Orange County Bar Association Lawyer Referral & Information Service (LRIS) is just about the perfect concept: match qualified lawyers with residents in need of legal services and support access to justice. Whether you refer a case to LRIS or take a case from one of the thirty-five panels, you will be helping an Orange County resident in need of legal services, benefiting a fellow Orange County attorney and providing funds for pro bono legal services.

LRIS is a non-profit legal referral service certified by the State Bar of California that has been referring those in need of legal services for more than fifty years. Approximately two hundred of your Orange County colleagues populate thirty-five different panels according to practice area. Many of those panels, such as elder law, labor and employment, and intellectual property have specific minimum qualifications to serve as a panel member. Just last year, LRIS referred 7,792 cases to LRIS panel members. LRIS staff members also promote the referral service at community events throughout the county and provide information to residents.

The OCBA's LRIS Committee supervises the administration of the LRIS, including deciding on the various panels and which of those panels require minimum qualifications before an attorney may join. The Committee also reviews, updates, and implements the requirements to ensure that the right attorneys are referred to the prospective clients. The Committee is well-staffed by OCBA employees who report to the OCBA's CEO/Executive Director, Trudy Levindofske. When a potential client calls the LRIS, a qualified OCBA employee will provide that person with the names of up to three Orange County lawyers who are on the panel that best matches the client's need for legal services. The referred attorneys are selected on a rotation basis. The client then is charged a small fee (\$25.00, which is waived for certain panels such as immigration, criminal law, and family law), that helps to defray the administrative costs of operating the program. If a referred attorney accepts the case, LRIS receives fifteen percent of the fees generated by the referred client's matter, known as a "forwarding fee."

The LRIS Committee consists of eleven individuals: the LRIS Chair, eight members chosen by the OCBA President, and two chosen by the LRIS Chair. I was asked to serve on the Committee in 2003, and was honored to serve as Chair of LRIS from 2008 to 2014. I have remained on the Committee until this last year, when my responsibilities at the OCBA made continued service impractical, although the good news is that as president this year I may serve as an ex officio member! The current LRIS chair is Brian Bayati and the co-chair is James Yang. I am pleased and relieved to be leaving LRIS leadership in such capable hands.

The LRIS Committee is in need of additional attorneys to serve

on the various panels, especially Elder Law. If you have not previously considered serving on an LRIS panel, now is the time to get on board. Not only will it benefit you professionally, but because LRIS is a non-profit program, all income generated by LRIS above reasonable operating costs must be distributed to pro bono legal services. LRIS has provided in excess of \$1,200,000 to the Public Law Center for its invaluable pro bono legal services in our community.

Now back to the win-win. I would encourage all Orange County lawyers and law firms to set up a firm protocol to refer to LRIS potential clients who are seeking a legal service that you or your firm do not provide. It's as easy as giving the potential client the name of LRIS and the phone number at (949) 440-6700. All attorneys to whom the client will be referred are experienced in their practice areas and carry malpractice insurance. Several firms in Orange County already have set up such a procedure and refer cases to LRIS on a regular basis. Second, if you are looking to grow your practice, simply sign up for a panel or two (or more!) so that you, too, may begin to receive referrals. Third, know that, either way, you are benefiting Orange

County pro bono legal providers because the net income received in forwarding fees by LRIS goes straight to pro bono legal providers.

LRIS takes it one step further for those in need of legal services who cannot afford to pay the regular hourly rates charged by the attorney, but who do not meet the eligibility requirements for pro bono legal services. In 1994, the OCBA Modest Means program was established

by none other than my husband, Joel S. Miliband, who chaired the LRIS Committee back in the day. In fact, in recognition of the creation of the Modest Means program, the OCBA received the coveted ABA Louis M. Brown Award for Legal Access, as well as the Community Service award from the Public Law Center. By agreeing to accept cases for modest income individuals at substantially reduced rates, the attorneys on the Modest Means panel assist people who would otherwise go without legal representation.

Also, in recognition of the requirements of certain clients, LRIS has an after-hours program in the areas of Criminal Law, Family Law, and Personal Injury where messages will be returned by one of the referral services panel members.

Many lawyers ask me: "How can I help?" Now you know!



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