



LRS NEWS

Lawyer Referral Service Newsletter

April 2017

Introducing the Modest Means Legal Program

June 1, 2017 marks the debut of an updated and improved version of the Reduced-Fee Referral Program called the NH Modest Means Legal Program. The new program is designed to make affordable legal representation accessible to more clients, while simultaneously making participation in a reduced-fee referral program feasible for more attorneys.

Accessible to More Clients

Under this new program, clients with income of up to 325% of the federal poverty level (FPL) will now qualify, albeit at a higher hourly rate. Currently, the Reduced-Fee Program only assists clients with income of up to 275% of the FPL. (See financial eligibility chart on page 4.)

Feasible for More Attorneys

The Modest Means Program features a sliding-fee scale, that allows panel members to charge up to \$125 per hour. Currently, all Reduced-Fee cases are capped at \$80 per hour, which hasn't changed since 2008. The sliding-fee scale will work as follows:

Clients with income between:	150 – 250% of FPL	251 – 300% of FPL	301 - 325% of FPL
Attorneys may charge up to:	\$80 per hour	\$100 per hour	\$125 per hour

How it Will Work

LRS will perform a preliminary financial assessment over the phone or through email, to determine under which FPL category the client appears to qualify. The client will be informed that they have been *pre-qualified* for a Modest Means referral under the determined hourly rate. They will also be informed that the referred attorney may require supporting financial documentation, and makes the final determination regarding eligibility.

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Sheila Vermacy and Janice Rabchenuk exhibiting for Legal Services at the Seacoast Veteran's Conference on April 6, 2017

CLIENT SURVEYS

Clients read reviews. According to Search Engine Land, 88% of consumers have read reviews to determine the quality of a local business and 39% read reviews on a regular basis.

With this in mind, when LRS receives a client survey with positive remarks regarding a panel member, we now add the remarks to the panel member's attorney profile (using the client's initial's only.) Panel members will receive a letter when positive (or negative) survey comments are received.

TECH TIP

Have you ever encountered a client who wants to send you a text message?

Maybe you don't have a business cellphone or would prefer not to provide your personal cell phone number to clients.

We recently learned that there is a way for clients to send text messages to your work email address rather than a cellphone. Essentially all the client needs to do is create a new message on their cellphone, compose the message, enter the email address of the recipient (any email address will do), and send!

You, the recipient, should then receive the text message in your email inbox. You can then respond to that text message the same way you would respond to a standard email.

Rates and restrictions may apply so be sure to discuss all methods of communication with the client before connecting with them in this way.

Since clients are frequently required to submit financial information to the court through their attorneys (depending upon the case type), panel members are in a better position to determine final eligibility for the program.

As a panel member, you will receive a referral confirmation email listing the financial information the client provided in order to qualify, and which hourly rate category the client appears to qualify under. If you find the client has more income/assets than they reported to LRS, refer them back to us to be requalified. We understand how that might feel awkward to some, but it is the client's responsibility to provide accurate financial information in order to qualify.

No Fees For Panel Members

As was the case with the Reduced-Fee Program, there will be no percentage fees due to LRS for cases accepted under the Modest Means Legal Program, and no membership fee to join. There will be a separate application section for this program so you may choose different case types than you choose for the LRS full-fee service. You may choose as few or as many Modest Means case types as you certify you are competent to handle.

We hope this new program appeals to more attorneys. The target population for this program are people with "modest means" and who cannot afford to pay full rate legal fees. Occasionally, low-income clients may receive a referral if they indicate a plan for paying fees, i.e. personal loan, credit card, tax return, etc. It will be important to obtain signed fee agreements and retainers, and equally important to enforce them! You are not expected to provide free services!

How to Join

If you are a current member of the Reduced-Fee panel, you will automatically be emailed a Modest Means application to fill out. If not, you will find the Modest Means Legal Program application through your Member Dashboard under Member Benefits, then Join the Lawyer Referral Service. You may also email LRSreferral@nhbar.org and request an application be emailed to you.

Thank you for your participation in the Lawyer Referral Service and/or the Reduced-Fee soon-to-be Modest Means Legal Program. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 603-715-3235 or email svermacy@nhbar.org.

~Sheila Vermacy, LRS Coordinator



What's New at LRS?

New Staff

We introduced you to Tom Jarvis in our last newsletter; when he was working with LRS through a temp agency. We are very pleased to announce that he has accepted a permanent part-time position with LRS, and is working 20 hours per week. We are very happy to be fully staffed again, and look forward to working together as a team.

Tips for Writing a Great Attorney Profile

Your attorney profile is your first impression with referred clients, and in some cases, out-of-state attorneys who need to connect a client with a New Hampshire attorney. Some attorneys think a profile is just a curriculum vitae, but it's more than that. Clients subjectively view the profile to not only gauge whether you seem competent to handle their legal matter, but also if you are a good fit for them.

A good profile not only engages a client and makes them feel like you are the right attorney for them, but also creates a connection that supports business development and assists with the referral process. Here are some tips to improve this ever-important snapshot of your practice.

Include All of Your Referral Case Types

It's important to include all the areas of law in which you have chosen to receive referrals. There have been some instances where a client has requested a second referral because they didn't see their case type listed on the profile (i.e. a client calls to set up a trust but the attorney profile only lists criminal law). Providing all selected referral areas and not just the primary ones, will assure the client that you have experience with their referred legal matter.

A Dash of Personality

Some profiles can be downright boring. Write your profile in your own voice. If you're humorous, let that shine. If you're laid back, demonstrate that. Writing in your own voice and letting your personality come through will not only make your profile come easier when writing it, but will also help establish that elusive connection with prospective clients and aid them in determining if you're the right fit for them. It's also a good idea to include a little personal information, such as what you do in your free time or activities you enjoy. This demonstrates to the client that you are more than just an attorney.

Keep It Relevant

Having a short list of accomplishments, organization memberships, awards, and certifications is a great idea, but keep it focused and relevant to your practice. If you've mentioned your Little League trophies and spelling bee accolades, you may need to reign it in. Additionally, citing significant cases you were involved in, or examples of how you saved clients' money can go a long way. If you are a new attorney, you may want to emphasize work you did as an intern, special achievements while in law school, professional organizations you belong to, or community involvement.

What Drives You?

A brief, authentic description of why you practice law can be helpful. Most clients want to feel like you will go to bat for them. If you can provide them with that extra insight, it may assuage any concerns.

Consider Your Audience

Most clients read your profile on their computers or mobile devices, so format your profile for online readers. Use short, succinct sentences and paragraphs, where possible, and use bullet points where proper. You may also use headers to break it up into smaller bits for easy consumption.

Prufread, Profread, Proofread!

Finally, be sure to have someone proofread your profile, as typos detract from your credibility. You could have the most captivating profile out there, but misspelling precedent as president or judgment as judgement can underwhelm in a hurry.

~ Tom Jarvis

A NOTE OF THANKS

The staff at the Lawyer Referral Service would like to say thank you to those panel members who submitted their annual case disposition reports. While this report may seem redundant and perhaps even time consuming, it is important for our service to note changes to referrals made throughout the year.

We hope that our referrals generate income for panel members but as you know, some clients take their time when determining whether to hire counsel or even pursue legal action. A referral made in January may be reported closed in March but then be reopened in August after the potential client has taken time to think about their options. It would be difficult for our service to track returning clients without this report so again, we appreciate all the updates received from panel members!

If you have not yet submitted your Annual Report, please do so ASAP to avoid any interruption of referrals. Contact us at LRsreferral@nhbar.org if you need another copy.

A tort survey report was also mailed out to panel members who had requested Tort matters for potential plaintiffs. Given that most Tort cases may take several years to settle, the information remitted allows our service to estimate some income that will be received in the next few years and also create a realistic budget for the next fiscal year.

~Jacqueline Geddes



Percentage Fees

Effective January 1, 2017, there was a slight change to the calculation of percentage fees owed to LRS. The amount owed is now calculated on 10% of the total net collected fees, rather than just on cases that net \$250 or higher. Due to the way our software works, this calculation occurs regardless of when the case was referred, and unfortunately we are unable to grandfather cases that were not reported to LRS as closed as of December 31, 2016. We hope this change streamlines the payment process for both panel members and our accounting department.

Adverse Party

As a result of a panel member suggestion, we are now including the name(s) of adverse party (if known) in the case notes on the referral confirmation form. Suggestions such as these are easy to implement and we are happy to do what we can to improve the referral process. Please don't hesitate to let us know about any suggestions you may have.

Small Business Administration's Resource Guide

LRS is now listed in the SBA's resource guide, which may be found online and in print.

We are always on the lookout for new places to spread the word about LRS. We welcome any suggestions you may have.

MODEST MEANS LEGAL PROGRAM FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

Household size:	250% FPL Maximum gross household income	251 - 300% FPL Maximum gross household income	301% - 325% FPL Maximum gross household income	Allowable Liquid Assets
	Up to \$80 per hour	Up to \$100 per hour	Up to \$125 per hour	
1	\$30,150	\$36,180	\$39,195	\$3,500
2	\$40,600	\$48,720	\$52,780	\$4,500
3	\$51,050	\$61,260	\$66,365	\$5,500
4	\$61,500	\$73,800	\$79,950	\$6,500
5	\$66,500	\$78,800	\$84,950	\$6,500
6	\$71,500	\$83,800	\$89,950	\$6,500
7	\$76,500	\$88,800	\$94,950	\$6,500
8	\$81,500	\$93,800	\$99,950	\$6,500