

## **LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICE**

### **Background**

Despite the Yellow Pages, TV commercials, billboards and the Internet, consumers frequently rely on lawyer referral services. The Missouri Bar's Lawyer Referral Service links clients to lawyers throughout the state, except for the St. Louis area, Springfield and the Kansas City area. Local bar associations in each of those cities provide their own lawyer referral services. Nationally, most bar associations sponsor lawyer referral services. In all, about 300 public service lawyer referral services are currently in operation. The American Bar Association estimates that 19,000 callers per day ask for a referral somewhere in the U.S.

The ABA adopted model rules for Lawyer Referral and Information Services in 1993. The rules identify certain public service components necessary for a program to use the term "lawyer referral." The ABA offers program assistance and review of those lawyer referral services that request help. It also provides promotional material to lawyer referral services that comply with all of the model rules. Each year, the ABA also sponsors a training conference for those who supervise or operate lawyer referral services.

### **Missouri Bar Activities**

The Missouri Bar has operated its Lawyer Referral Service since 1974. Each day, the service fields 40 to 60 calls. Most of these callers are not referred to lawyers; rather, after the callers explain their situation, they are often referred to various other resources – everything from prosecuting attorneys to government agencies. (This is typical of all such services.) About 110 lawyers participate in the service. Callers are charged \$25 to cover the administrative costs of the program, and lawyers agree to pay 10 percent of fees received above \$200. The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service is registered with the Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel, and its rules are determined by the Supreme Court. Unlike the ABA model rules, Missouri's rule does not require attorneys to have minimum experience before signing up for various panels.

The best way to understand this service is to listen to the calls. Here is a sample of 10 calls and responses made on a summer day: a Columbia woman wanted to know how she could file a complaint against a physician – referred to Board of Healing Arts; a man from St. Charles referred by Traffic Law Center – will think about whether he wants to pay for a referral; a woman calls about sister in jail, doesn't know if she is charged – told to find out whether there is a charge, then call back; a woman from Sikeston wants a pro bono attorney – referred to [www.lawyers.com](http://www.lawyers.com); a man from Rolla wants to sue company for slander, libel and wrongful termination – referred to EEOC and Missouri Commission on Human Rights to file a complaint; a Columbia woman needs legal advice on amending child support order – referred to attorney; a Farmington man has new home problems, wants to know whether he can sue builder – referred to attorney; a woman from Jefferson City wants to know what she can and cannot do about divorcing husband – referred to attorney; a woman from Oceanside, CA, says attorney Missouri attorney wanted her to do something that was unethical – referred to Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel.