

Role of the Office of the Attorney General

The Office of the Attorney General is the Commonwealth's law firm. Its clients are the Virginia state government and the state agencies, boards and commissions that compose that government.

The full time staff includes a chief deputy attorney general, six deputy attorneys general and about 150 assistant attorneys general, 40 additional full time lawyers appointed as special counsel to particular agencies, and 140 legal assistants, legal secretaries and other professional support staff. The Office of the Attorney General is structured very much like a private law firm, with sections devoted to legal specialties.

One thing the Attorney General and the other attorneys on our staff cannot do is give legal advice to private citizens. If you have a private dispute, this Office cannot intervene. If you would like more information regarding finding an attorney for a private legal matter, please click [here](#).

The duties and powers include:

- Provide legal advice and representation to the Governor and executive agencies, state boards and commissions, and institutions of higher education. The advice commonly includes help with personnel issues, contracts, purchasing, regulatory and real estate matters and the review of proposed legislation. The Office also represents those agencies in court.
- Provide written legal advice in the form of **official opinions** to members of the General Assembly and government officials.
- Defend criminal convictions on appeal, and defend the state when prisoners sue concerning their incarceration.
- Defend the constitutionality of state laws when they are challenged in court.
- Enforce state laws that protect businesses and consumers when there are violations. Individual consumer **complaints** are usually handled by another agency.
- Represent consumers in utility matters before the State Corporation Commission.
- Collect debts owed to state agencies, hospitals and universities.
- Conduct or assist criminal investigations and prosecutions in certain limited cases (for example Medicaid fraud, money laundering, theft of state property, environmental crimes, and computer crimes).
- Represent the Department of Social Services in its efforts to collect child support on behalf of children and families.
- Supervise the appointment and payment of private attorneys hired by other state agencies for various matters.
- Assist victims of crime who are following criminal cases at the appellate level.
- Provide information to the public on Identity Theft prevention and remediation.
- Administer grants to help reduce crimes involving gangs, drugs and sex predators.
- Administer the Sexually Violent Predator Civil Commitment Program to protect children from the most dangerous predators.