



The V-News!

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THE V-LAW GROUP'S NEWSLETTER

JULY 2025

WELCOME TO OUR

Quarterly Newsletter

Message from the Managing Attorney



Welcome to our law firm's inaugural newsletter. We are beyond thrilled to connect with you and keep you abreast of some news you could use. In no particular order, this issue will catch you up to speed on new, events, and happenings in the legal community, from the period of January to April 2025. More so, as it has been four months since our reopening (on March 20, 2025), there is nothing more fitting than entitling the theme of our introductory newsletter issue, "*In the Beginning*." So, I will take you on a walk down memory lane and share my story of transformation, from an immigrant with dreams, to the managing attorney of the V-Law Group. Additionally, and as we plan to do in every issue, we will feature a case summary of a precedential case from a federal court.

Then we will shift the focus to those who are making an impact on the legal landscape, as well as those who are making a difference in their community. So much has happened since the beginning of 2025, and we cannot wait to catch you up to speed.

Looking ahead, our next issue will be published in September 2025, at which point we will catch you up to speed about happenings and events, from May to August 2025. So, stay tuned. In the meantime, I hope you find all that we have to share helpful and inspiring. ~Vanessa-Nola Pratt, Esq.

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In the Beginning - How it Started: A Deep Dive into the V-Law Group History



Did you know that the V-Law Group was founded by an immigrant? Managing Attorney, Vanessa-Nola "Vanessa" Pratt is a Sierra-Leonean American who grew up in the Washington, D.C. area.

Born in Sierra Leone, Vanessa migrated to the United States with her family at a very young age, when her father began working for the World Bank Group, in Washington, D.C.

Like every immigrant, Vanessa has a story. From a very young age, she always knew she wanted to be a lawyer. When she was approximately 8 years old, she decided that she wanted to follow in her maternal and paternal grandfathers' footsteps. They were both a barrister-at-law in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Although both grandfathers were deceased by the time she was born, Vanessa was always inspired by the stories her parents, grandmothers, and other family members told about her grandfathers. Little did she know that in her early teenage years, a series of unfortunate circumstances would render life-altering circumstances that impacted her family, due to the dissatisfactory services of an immigration lawyer.

The invaluable assistance of her new family immigration lawyer, however, inspired and sparked Vanessa's interest in immigration law. Shortly thereafter, Vanessa graduated from high school in Silver Spring, Maryland and went on to matriculate at the University of Maryland, College Park.

After obtaining her bachelor's degree, Vanessa would accomplish another life-long dream by following in her father's footsteps by working at the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

After a few years at the IMF, Vanessa made a difficult decision to resign from the IMF and pursue her life-long dream

of attending law school and a lawyer. At the time, Vanessa had also developed an interest in corporate law. However, destiny had other plans.

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Many months after graduating from Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Vanessa's legal career officially began. Two days after Christmas, that year, she received a phone call that turned out to be the opportunity of a lifetime. She was offered, and she accepted, a prestigious job offer

in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Coincidentally, on the one-year anniversary of the opening of the Supreme Court of the United States Virgin Islands, Vanessa started this job as an appellate law clerk to the Honorable Ive Arlington Swan, as one of the first group of law clerks to clerk for the newly formed, Virgin Islands Supreme Court.

Shortly after she started her job at the Virgin Islands Supreme Court, Vanessa became a licensed attorney, after she successfully passed her Bar Exams, and she was sworn in to the New Jersey Bar.

Approximately a month-and-a-half later, Vanessa was also

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sworn in to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

After completing her clerkship with the Virgin Islands Supreme Court, Vanessa went on to work for a private law firm very briefly, in St. Thomas.

She then decided to move back home, to the Washington, D.C. area, to be closer to her family.

Within a month of returning to the Washington, D.C. area, Vanessa was in talks of starting up a law firm with three others. However, plans to open this law firm fell through.

VISIONARY & VALUE-ORIENTED!

At this point, Vanessa decided to start her own law firm. And thus, with her administrative background, legal acumen, and all she had learned from her clerkship and in private practice, Vanessa commenced plans to open a law firm on February 27, 2012. On April 17, 2012, however, the V-Law Group was officially established and founded as a general practice law firm in Washington, D.C.

This was only the beginning, as this new role gave Vanessa great latitude to create lasting relationships in the legal community, while building something unique. As part of her legal strategy, she provided job opportunities for young attorneys

and combined brilliant legal minds to tackle challenging cases.

In representing the V-Law Group, Vanessa also undertook pro bono cases in bankruptcy law, and on occasion, spent Saturdays volunteering at the D.C. Bar's Advice & Referral Clinic at the NW and SE locations of Bread in the City, Washington, D.C.

Vanessa's proudest moment was when she was sworn in to the United States Supreme Court.

More so, she particularly enjoyed the benefits of practicing in multiple jurisdictions, being licensed to practice in New Jersey, District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Thus, although she was no longer living in St. Thomas, she continued to work there, serving on the Virgin Islands Supreme Court indigent defense panel, in which she represented defendants in criminal appeals before this court. She also served as a board member of Legal Services of the Virgin Islands for 7 years, during which she had the opportunity to travel to different states where she met and networked with other legal aid attorneys. Concomitantly, Vanessa served as an indigent attorney for the Office of Appellate Representation at the New Jersey Public Defender's Office.

In addition to all these roles, Vanessa was an accredited

Veterans Affairs attorney, representing Veterans before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. She was also a very active member of the National Bar Association, where she served as a panelist and a moderator at appellate seminars; chaired and organized Youth (Law) Day for high school students, in which the V-Law Group was one of a number of sponsors for this program; and she also served as editor and chair of the appellate section newsletter, the Appellate Forum.

In creating the V-Law Group brand- "visionary & value-oriented"- Vanessa built relationships by networking with and mentoring other attorneys, in pursuit of building a successful practice.

In the interest of career development, she stepped away from private practice to work for the Federal Government.

THE VALOR OF LEGAL REPRESENTATION!

After 8 years of Federal service, Vanessa has returned to private practice to continue the V-Law Group legacy, rebranded and expanded to include the practice of immigration law.

Onward and Upward!

In the News: Updates in Immigration Law!

The following information is not intended, and may not be construed as legal advice. The objective of this article is to educate, inform, and/or update our audience about current news and events in immigration law. Thus, in light of these updates, please consult with an immigration lawyer.

We rung in the New Year with a New Administration. On January 20, 2025, Donald J. Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States. Immediately, changes came into effect, negatively impacting countless immigrants, here, in the United States. Here is a review of news and happenings in the immigration landscape, looking back to the period of January to April 2025 (First Quarter). Although this is not an exhaustive list, the following updates are just a number of highlights and updates in immigration law.

During this First Quarter, and most notably, there was an unprecedented rise in Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests, especially including immigrants without a criminal history, detained in ICE custody, and/or removed from the United States.

In January 2025, United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) waived Covid 19 requirements for adjustment of status applicants. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security initially terminated the 2023 designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelan Nationals. In March, however, a federal judge issued a stay, halting the termination of the 2023 TPS designation. Separately, however, TPS, under the 2021 designation for Venezuela remains in effect until September 2025. Litigation on this matter is ongoing and pending.

In February 2025, USCIS announced a new policy that requires undocumented immigrants, aged 14 and older, to register with the federal government, submit fingerprints, and carry proof of registration at all times. USCIS informs that failing to comply is punishable by fines of up to \$5,000 or six months in jail.

In March 2025, a lot of changes transpired. First, a critical policy change in green card applications was



implemented. Specifically, the Trump Administration instructed USCIS to pause processing green card applications for certain individuals, including approved refugees and asylees. This directive explains that the purpose of this temporary pause is to broaden efforts to enhance the vetting process for immigrants, and more so, according to USCIS, to identify fraud, public safety, or national security concerns. Additionally, USCIS placed a temporary pause on finalizing certain adjustment of status applications, pending a completion of additional screening and vetting. Also, In March, there were more than 46,000 immigrants detained, across the United States. More so, by this time, numerous legal challenges to the new immigration policies, implemented by the Trump Administration, were mounting up in Federal courts.

In April 2025, USCIS announced that effective immediately, it would start monitoring social media accounts and immigration applicants' conduct for antisemitic activity, including support for antisemitic terrorism or harassment of Jewish individuals.

The only thing that is constant in immigration law is change. Thus, the September 2025 issue will cover more immigration news and updates for the period of May - August 2025 (Second Quarter). Stay tuned!

From a Legal Perspective: Case Spotlight in Veterans Disability Benefits

This section of the newsletter is dedicated to our Nation's Veterans, who have valiantly fought for our freedom. We thank you for your service. In this issue, we will evaluate and discuss case law precedent from the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Our featured case is *Johnson v. Collins*, No. 23-7589 (Vet. App. 2025). We will discuss and summarize the main points from this precedential decision, in which the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ("CAVC" or "Court") issued a holding on a hotly debated issue in Veterans law.

In *Johnson, Supra*, the Veteran served on active duty in the United States Marine Corps, from September 1972 to July 1974. During his service period, he served as a security guard at Nam Phong Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) (in the Kingdom of Thailand).

In 2016, the Veteran filed claims for service connection for diabetes mellitus, bilateral lower extremity peripheral neuropathy, and hypertension, all due to an in-service herbicide exposure. After the regional office (RO) denied all of the claims, the Veteran appealed the RO's decision with the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board).

Meanwhile, as this appeal was pending before the Board, Congress passed a new law called, "Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022" (better known as the PACT Act), which established a presumption of herbicide exposure for veterans who served in certain areas of the world during certain periods of time. Therefore, the Veteran filed supplemental claims for the same, above-mentioned disabilities, under this new PACT Act. As this provision was applicable to the Veteran's claims, the RO granted service connection for these disabilities, in the supplemental claims.

Since the RO granted the Veteran's claims, the Board, in a December 2023 decision, concluded that the Veteran's appeal was moot and dismissed it. As the basis for doing so, the Board explained that the RO had already granted the Veteran's claims in March 2023, and thus, "there remains no allegations of fact or law for appellate consideration on the claim[s]."

Was the Board correct in finding that this case was moot and dismissing it? Well, this is where the heavily contested debate lies, and CAVC has addressed the issue. Upon the Veteran filing an appeal of the Board's decision with CAVC, the Court did not agree with the Board's conclusion. Accordingly, it reversed the portion of the Board's December 11, 2023 decision that concluded that the Veteran's appeal was moot; it set aside the Board's decision, dismissing the service connection claims; and it remanded the case back to the Board. CAVC's decision, of course, was supported by a plethora of evaluated case law.

The Veteran argued, *inter alia*, that the Board erred in dismissing his appeal, as moot, the Board had jurisdiction over the question of herbicide exposure, and that the Board failed to satisfy this obligation and fully adjudicate the issue. The Secretary, on behalf of the Board (and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)), argued, *inter alia*, that the Board was correct, in dismissing the Veteran's claims, as the RO granted benefit that the Veteran sought (service connection) in March 2023.

Citing *Roebuck v. Nicholson*, 20 Vet. App. 307, 313 (2006), the Secretary also argued that multiple theories of service connection, pertaining to the same benefits, are part of the same claim. The Secretary also analogized the Veteran's arguments as a mere attempt to obtain an earlier effective date for service connection for his disabilities, and further, argued that the Board did not have jurisdiction to address the downstream issue of the appropriate effective date of service connection for his disabilities. The Court, however, rejected these arguments.

The Court found that the RO's March 2023 decision, which granted the service connection claims, and in which the same claims were also in a second claim stream, did not resolve the pending, pre-PACT Act

Board appeal. The Court stated, from the onset, that these are two distinct claim streams in the Veteran's case.

CAVC explained that a pre-PACT Act claim stream began in May 2016, due to the Veteran's assertion of herbicide exposure during his active service on RTAFB. The Court further clarified that the Veteran filed a separate, PACT Act claim stream in October 2022, when the Veteran filed his service-connection claims based on liberalizing law (i.e. the provision of the PACT Act that established a presumption that certain veterans who served on RTAFB were exposed to herbicides.

In support of its holding, CAVC cited to numerous case law precedent. In particular, and string citing *Bailey v. Wilkie*, 33 Vet. App. 188, 203 -04 (2021), *Warren v. McDonald*, 28 Vet. App. 214, 221 (2016), and a host of other precedential cases, the Court explained that once a claimant has appealed a claim to the Board, but not finally resolved, a subsequent RO decision, in a separate claim stream cannot resolve the pending Board appeal.

The Court further expounded on the cases, *Warren* and *Bailey*. It noted, *inter alia*, that *Warren* and *Bailey* bear a salient, common factor with the Veteran's case, in that they dealt with situations involving two distinct claim streams, with the original claim stream still pending a final Board adjudication; and that the Board failed to acknowledge and adjudicate a pending service-connection appeal, properly within its power to review. The Court further explained that in *Warren* and *Bailey*, it held that remand for the Board to adjudicate the appealed claims to completion was required.

The Court, however, clarified that although the Board did not overlook the Veteran's pending pre-PACT Act claims, its misunderstanding that the RO's decision could moot the pending Board appeal from a different, earlier, still-pending claim stream led to the same problem that arose in *Warren* and *Bailey*. Thus, it concluded, as it did in *Bailey* and *Warren*, that a remand is the proper remedy for the Board to process

the Veteran's appeal in the pre-PACT Act claim stream to completion.

The Court also held that the Board overlooked the significance of the PACT Act as liberalizing law. Citing *Schroeder v. West*, 212 F.3d 1265, 1269 - 70 (Fed. Cir. 2000) and *Roebuck*, 20 Vet. App. at 313, the Board acknowledged that when "a claimant raises multiple theories to establish service connection, generally all theories of service connection are part of the same claim." Further citing *Roebuck*, CAVC further acknowledged that a claimant only needs to succeed on one theory of the claim, to prevail on the underlying claim, and thus, if the Board were to grant service connection, based on the remaining theory, the Court's adjudication of any other theories would result in a waste of judicial resources. However, the Court concluded that *Schroeder*, *Roebuck*, *Bingham v. Principi*, 18 Vet. App. 470, 474 (2004), and like cases are distinguishable from the Veteran's case.

The Court explained that in *Roebuck*, the Veteran raised two theories of service connection within a single claim stream, which the Board unilaterally bifurcated, and that *Schroeder* and *Bingham*, likewise, dealt with a single claim stream. Thus, by contrast, as the Court pointed out, the Veteran's case is distinguishable from these cases because he raised two separate theories of entitlement in separate claim streams, in which, significantly, one theory of entitlement was based on the new PACT Act.

CAVC further noted that it previously held that claims based on liberalizing law are separate and distinct from prior claims for the same disability, even when the claims depend on the same factual basis. *Spencer v. Brown*, 17 F.3d 368, 372 (Fed. Cir. 1994) (*Spencer II*), *aff'ing* 4 Vet. App. 283 (1993) (*Spencer I*). The Court explained that it indicated, in *Spencer*, that an applicant's latter claim, asserting rights that did not exist at the time of the prior claim is necessarily a different claim. The Court concluded that *Spencer* and related cases support its conclusion that the Veteran's second, PACT Act-based claims were separate and distinct from the first claims he filed in 2016.

Attorney Spotlight: Meet Simone Archer, Esq. Archer Law Firm



This quarter, our Attorney Spotlight shines on Simone N. Archer, Esq., Managing Member of Archer Law, PLLC.

Tell us about Simone, the lawyer?

Simone is focused and dedicated. Her goal is to deliver excellent legal services in a way clients can truly understand. Too often, people's interactions with the legal system leave them confused or overwhelmed. Simone strives to combine her legal knowledge and communication skills to guide clients through each step—helping them understand opposing parties, judges, the process itself, and potential outcomes.

What Would Your Clients Say About You?

My clients often tell me they appreciate how responsive and knowledgeable I am. When they call, I'm there. I make it a point to clearly explain my opinions and give them the opportunity to choose the path that feels right to them based on my legal guidance.

What Motivated You to go into Immigration Law?

My own immigration journey inspired me. I was born on the island of Jamaica, and my mother filed for me to come to the United States. As a high school student thinking about what I wanted to do with my life, I realized I wanted to help others navigate the immigration process—although I didn't fully understand what that meant at the time. After graduating from law school, I interviewed with several immigration firms, but the salaries they offered couldn't cover my responsibilities: I had student loans to repay, a mortgage on my home, and my mother and siblings to help support. So, I accepted a position at a personal injury firm.

My greatest inspiration to pursue immigration law came from helping my mother resolve her status. Representing her through my firm and guiding her to U.S. citizenship remains one of my proudest moments. When I was in high school, an attorney from a local community-based organization told my mother not to file for citizenship, but I never really understood why. Years later, as an attorney, she handed me her file. She had criminal charges in her background, which complicated the case, but we moved forward. Despite my limited experience in immigration law at the time, I took on the challenge.

One of my biggest concerns was whether she would be able to pass the civics portion of the exam because she had dropped out of school at a young age. Helping her become a citizen was deeply meaningful to me—even if, in the moment, it didn't fully sink in. To be honest, it wasn't until after she passed away and I stumbled across her file in my office that I realized how important that journey had been. I also regretted that I didn't attend her swearing-in ceremony.

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Dropping out of School isn't About Intelligence. Its About Circumstances, Isn't It?

Absolutely. My mother is the smartest person I've ever known. She was my navigator—my guide through the MTA and through life. Anytime I needed help, I called her. Her lack of formal education had nothing to do with intelligence—it was simply about circumstances and the opportunities she never had. In fact, she never completed elementary school, yet she worked tirelessly and built a life for our family.

I mention her lack of formal education because it underscores how remarkable it was that she studied for the civics exam on her own and passed, even though she never had the chance to develop the kind of test-taking skills that are taught in school. She prepared so diligently, determined to learn the material. I was incredibly proud of her dedication and drive. When she passed, it felt like such a victory, not just for her, but for everything she overcame. She did it!

Did You Help Her Prepare for the Exams?

I did, but only minimally—she did most of the studying herself. She even knew all the toughest questions. Seeing her become a naturalized U.S. citizen was a proud moment. After she passed away, I found her immigration file among my closed files. It made me reflect on how far we had come. At the time, I didn't know much about immigration law, but I did the research, reached out to colleagues, and learned everything I needed to help her.

Are there areas of immigration law that you specialize in?

I'm cautious about using the word "specialize," because it carries legal connotations. So, I'll say that I handle many family-based petitions and removal proceedings cases.

Given the current political climate, with so many immigrants worried about their safety, what advice do you have?

My main advice is: Don't "self-deport." Don't leave on your own before or during immigration proceedings. If you find yourself caught up in the system, it's critical to consult a knowledgeable attorney and go through the process. The reality is that, in this political climate, immigration policies change constantly, and I can't always give definitive answers.

However, I can provide my clients with options and help them evaluate which path aligns best with their circumstances and strengths. As an attorney, I care deeply, and I'm concerned—but my worries are not the same as my clients', because they are the ones living through the situation. Only they know what they can realistically manage and what toll the process may take on them and their families.

What other practice areas does your firm handle?

Archer Law, PLLC is a general practice firm. We handle real estate matters (including landlord-tenant disputes and sales and purchases of property), trusts and estates, family law (custody and divorce), personal injury, small claims, licensing, collections, business formation, business agreements, and other civil litigation. If a matter is outside our scope, I'm connected to a strong network of colleagues through various bar associations and can refer clients to trusted professionals.

If you are seeking legal services in the New York City area, Archer Law PLLC is highly recommended. With offices in Manhattan and in Queens, NY, you can contact Archer Law, PLLC's office by phone at (212) 709-8291, or via e-mail at office@archerlawpllc.com.

Community Impact Spotlight: Grace Helping Hands

This quarter, our community impact spotlight is on Grace Helping Hands, a non-profit organization that serves numerous communities in Maryland and Washington, D.C. What is Grace Helping Hands, and what do they do? A message from the Founder and Director provides all the details.



Grace Helping Hands was born from a simple, yet profound realization: access to basic hygiene products is not a luxury—it's a necessity. Yet, for many women and children experiencing homelessness, these essential items are often out of reach.

Our founder, Manuella King, had been volunteering since 2008 with local nonprofits like SOME (So Others Might Eat), Bread for the City, and her church. Over the years, she worked directly with vulnerable populations and consistently noticed a quiet but urgent need—feminine hygiene and personal care items were often scarce, if not completely unavailable. Women would ask discreetly for pads or wipes. Mothers would request toiletries for their daughters. It was a recurring pattern that left a lasting impression.

In 2022, after assembling kits as part of a church outreach event, Manuella felt a tug on her spirit. She saw how something as small as a thoughtfully packed hygiene kit could restore dignity, offer relief, and communicate care. That moment sparked the beginning of what would become Grace Helping Hands.



By December 2024, Grace Helping Hands officially launched as a grassroots initiative. Within the first month, the organization had already distributed over 370 kits. Each one was hand-assembled with care and delivered through trusted partners like shelters, outreach teams, and food pantries in Montgomery County, Howard County, Prince George's County, Baltimore City and Washington DC.

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Our name—Grace Helping Hands—is intentional. "Grace" reflects our belief that everyone deserves compassion and dignity, no matter their circumstances. "Helping Hands" honors the many volunteers, donors, and community partners who make this work possible.

What began at a kitchen table is now a growing community effort. We partner with organizations like Shepherd's Table, City of Refuge Baltimore, Helping Up Mission, and more to ensure these kits reach those who need them most.



~Manuella King
Founder & Director
Grace Helping Hands

The V-Law Group extends its gratitude to Grace Helping Hands for the impact they make in various communities.

If you would like to support the mission of Grace Helping Hands, you may do so by making a donation. Please scan the link below:



Through the Years: A Visionary Walk Down Memory Lane

As we close out this newsletter, "In the Beginning", we are going to take you on a "visionary & value-oriented" walk down memory lane, through the years.



