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November 21, 2008

Board of Governors
State Bar of California
180 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Board of Directors of the San Bernardino County Bar Association strongly opposes the State Bar's proposal to implement the "Find a Lawyer" program, a searchable online directory of attorneys admitted to the practice of law in California.

The many protections afforded to the public by the required certification by the California State Bar of existing Lawyer Referral Services are altogether missing from this proposed online search engine.

The California State Bar has long served the dual purposes of ensuring ethics and standards among its members for the protection of the public, as well as serving attorneys and local bar associations. It does nothing for either the public or lawyers to institute a referral service which does not help clients find the right kind of attorney for their needs, does not ensure that the attorneys they are referring to have adequate experience to handle the matter at hand, does not require the attorney to protect the client with malpractice insurance, and does not remove attorneys from the referral list for cause. These matters are best handled at a local level, by experienced individuals who know the community and the attorneys involved, and can deliver a personalized service.

Local Bar Associations have a well-established system of Lawyer Referral Services which see to it that these standards are met, and more. In San Bernardino County, the Lawyer Referral Service is respected and relied upon by the public, the bench and the bar. It costs the public nothing to use the service. Lawyers gladly share their fees with our Bar Association, which helps fund the Lawyer Referral Service, Mandatory Continuing Legal Education classes, Fee Dispute Arbitrations and other high-quality programs. The proposed "Find a Lawyer" service undermines these efforts and the partnership that has developed between the Local Bar Associations and the State Bar.

There are already many sources of advertising for lawyers, some free and others not. It does not seem necessary for the California State Bar to toss its hat into that ring.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael A. Scaffiddi
President, San Bernardino County Bar Association