

WSBA License Fee Fact Sheet



The WSBA license fee has been set at \$450 for four consecutive years (2010–2013).

- The Board of Governors voted unanimously in 2011 to keep the fee the same through 2013, despite continued growth of the membership and budget pressure.
- Last year the Board also cut programs and staff and held expenses to a growth of only 0.25%.
- During this same time, membership grew by 5 percent and additional valuable programs and services were added to assist our members and the community, including the statewide Moderate Means Program, the Home Foreclosure Legal Aid Project, as well as free and low-cost CLE programs for new attorneys and those volunteering for our public-service programs.

Reducing the license fee to \$325 is equivalent to what was collected a decade ago when the WSBA membership was 28 percent smaller (22,393) with fewer programs and services offered.

- A cut in license fees of this magnitude equates to a 26 percent budget cut, or \$3.6 million, putting numerous programs and services at risk for cuts or elimination.
- If the WSBA eliminated all non-regulatory functions, it would still fall short of achieving the \$3.6 million reduction that would be required if the referendum passes, thus putting the Bar's core regulatory functions at risk as well.
- A decade ago WSBA did not offer many of the current programs for members, including Casemaker, the research tool available to all members at no cost; dedicated programming to assist new attorneys as they enter the profession; and the nationally acclaimed WSBA Leadership Institute that is focused on training the future leaders of our bar. These valuable programs and services would all be in jeopardy in addition to many of our older, high-use programs such as the Ethics Line; our sophisticated consumer affairs line dedicated to expeditious processing of grievances against members; and the Law Office Management Assistance Program (LOMAP).

The WSBA is both a regulatory agency and your trade association. Paying your annual license fee is the equivalent of obtaining a business license.

- The WSBA serves nearly 30,000 active members and is charged with regulating the profession as well as providing valuable services and programs to members and the public.
- Washington is one of 32 states* with a mandatory bar. The rest (18) pay a license fee to the state and additional fees for a bar membership.
- Many other professions require annual license fees to practice in our state. While a number of professions pay less, others pay more. For instance, midwives pay \$525, chiropractors pay \$607, and dentists pay \$576.

*The District of Columbia also has a mandatory bar.

When looking at other state bar associations that perform regulatory functions, Washington's license fees are on par.

- Of the 32 mandatory state bars in the country, Washington's license fees rank near the middle among those states with comparable membership size (e.g., Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia).
- By comparison here in our region, Oregon and Alaska, also mandatory bars, have annual license fees of \$492 (Oregon) and \$660 (Alaska).
- By contrast, Massachusetts is a "voluntary" state, where attorneys pay a license fee to the Massachusetts Board of Bar Overseers as well as a voluntary membership fee to the state bar association to be a member. Those combined fees total up to \$660 annually.