



## Board of Governors September Meeting Recap

Sept. 27, 2025

A summary, prepared by the Washington State Bar Association Board of Governors (Board), of its meeting held Sept. 26-27, 2025, at the WSBA Conference Center in Seattle. The agenda, materials, and video recording from this Board meeting are [posted online](#). The next regular meeting is Nov. 14-15, 2025, in Seattle. The Board is the WSBA's governing body charged with determining general policies of the WSBA and approving its annual budget. To subscribe to the Board Meeting Notification list, email [barleaders@wsba.org](mailto:barleaders@wsba.org).

### TOP TAKEAWAYS

#### Passing the Gavel

The WSBA's new officers were sworn in to kick off the 2026 fiscal year beginning in October: Francis Adewale is the President, Kari Petrasek is President-Elect, and Nam Nguyen is Treasurer. Look for more information about each member of the Board of Governors in the October issue of Bar News.

#### Celebrating Legal Luminaries!

Hooray for our 2025 APEX (Acknowledging Professional Excellence) honorees—[their videos debuted last Friday](#) so now everyone can see how these amazing colleagues are making a difference in their communities and the world. You can also read about the honorees in the most [recent edition of Bar News](#). Join us in honoring Justice Susan Owens (posthumous), John Cummings, Bruce Johnson (posthumous), Tyler Quillin, Dennis Cronin (posthumous), Erin Lennon, the Blake Refund Bureau, Kim Tran (posthumous), Hon. LeRoy McCullough, and Kristin Brewer.

#### Expanding the License Fee Exemption Based on Financial Need

The Board approved a bylaw amendment to better support members who are experiencing financial hardship. The amendment expands the current license-fee hardship exemption in three ways: (1) increase the number of times an active member is eligible for the hardship exemption from two to three; (2) raise the eligibility threshold from 200% of the federal poverty level to 270% of the federal poverty level; and (3) change the name from "Hardship Exemption" to "License Fee and Assessment Exemption Based on Financial Need." The amendment will now go to the Supreme Court for approval. ([See page 21.](#)) The goal is to have these changes in place by the time the upcoming license renewal season starts in November.

## **'Strategic Roadmap for Washington's Legal Profession in a Time of Technology Disruption'**

The Board received and accepted the final report from its [Legal Technology Task Force](#). After almost 18 months of extensive study and surveying, the task force grouped its recommendations within 10 key points, paramount of which is that "legal professionals must integrate new technology tools into their daily work to serve clients efficiently, ethically, and competently." The report suggests critical ways that the WSBA can support legal professionals and adapt its regulations, as well as recommendations for courts and law schools. [Read the entire report online](#). Expect to learn more as the Board turns the report into action plans in coming months.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

The Board of Governors approved the FY26 budget, which includes a \$10 increase in the active-attorney license fee ([approved in November 2024](#) and the first increase since 2020) to maintain regulatory programs and services. The final budget includes about \$800,000 in planned use of unrestricted general-fund reserves—still maintaining reserve funds far above the minimum \$2 million requirement. This budget was the first to be built using a new [license-fee policy](#), which will be the standard for years ahead: A market factor (COLA) will be considered each year to ensure the license fee is keeping track with the changing value of the dollar; then the Board will adjust the fee, depending on anticipated changes in revenues, expenses, reserve funds, and program needs.

### **New Licensing Pathways**

The [Licensure Pathways Implementation Steering Committee](#) provided an update on its work to implement the [Washington Supreme Court's adoption of bar-exam alternatives](#) to establish competency to practice law. A subcommittee has identified core lawyering competencies that an individual should possess to be licensed as a lawyer. ([See page 519](#).) The committee hopes to submit draft implementation rules to the Court by spring 2026 with the goal of making the experiential pathways available to the class of 2027.

### **Revised Legislative Policy and Procedures**

The Board amended WSBA's policies regarding legislative activities to align with evolving interpretations of relevant rules and caselaw about the role of mandatory bar associations. The recommendation, from the Board Legislative Committee, consolidates current legislative policies and distinguishes WSBA legislative activity from law-improvement, when WSBA members respond to lawmakers on technical aspects of proposed bills. ([See page 304](#).)

### **Law Clerk Changes**

The Law Clerk Board recommended several amendments to rules and regulations related to the Law Clerk Program intended to increase participation and clarify requirements. The amendments include increasing the number of law clerks that a tutor can take on, decreasing the years of experience needed to qualify to be a primary tutor, and expanding the list of qualifying textbooks and materials that can be used for the program. The amendments were approved by the Board to move forward to the Court for consideration. ([See page 343](#).)

## **Washington State Bar Association**

Sara Niegowski, Chief Communications Officer,

## **WSBA Strategic Plan for FY 2026-2029.**

The Board adopted a three-year strategic plan focused on four goals:

1. Access to justice (advance a fair, inclusive, effective, and accessible legal system for all people in our state—ensuring all Washingtonians have the resources, knowledge, and support needed to seek justice)
2. Technology (provide legal professionals with education and resources to understand and optimally utilize emerging technologies to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality, ethical legal services, improve career satisfaction, and increase the public's access to legal services)
3. Culture (Foster a culture where inclusivity, belonging, civility, and wellness are foundational, ensuring that all legal professionals can thrive and serve their communities and clients with excellence and integrity)
4. Governance (commit to a continuous process to enhance and improve WSBA governance structures and processes to ensure transparency, accountability, and inclusive engagement, while effectively serving the needs of the legal profession and the public and appropriately preserving confidential information). Within each area, the plan identifies objectives and indicators of success. ([See page 546.](#))

### **The Board also:**

- Heard an update from the Council on Public Defense on implementation of the WSBA standards for indigent defense, [in light of the Court's adoption of its own related standards in June.](#)
- Completed the annual Executive Director evaluation.
- Adopted the 2026 Keller deduction.
- Approved trustee appointments and proposed bylaw changes—to clarify and remove outdated language—for the Washington State Bar Foundation. ([See page 331.](#))
- Heard an annual report from the Client Protection Board. ([See page 309.](#))

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