

ABOUT THE WSBA

History of the WSBA

The Washington Bar Association was formed in January 1888, when lawyers who had cases set for argument before the Supreme Court were required to be present at the beginning of the Court term in January. Sometimes, lawyers were required to wait for days or weeks for their cases to be called on the calendar. In this setting, a group of lawyers met in the Supreme Court chambers in Olympia and decided to form the Washington Bar Association. The name was changed to the Washington State Bar Association in 1890, when the members were “reveling in the euphoria of new statehood.”¹ At that time, it was a purely voluntary organization and did not include all lawyers admitted to practice.

In 1933, the State Bar Act (RCW 2.48) was enacted, which established the Washington State Bar Association as an agency of the state and made membership mandatory for those licensed to practice law in Washington.

In 1983, the Court created Limited Practice Officers (APR 12). The court rule was enacted after the court invalidated a statute² authorizing closing officers on separation of powers grounds. In 2002, the Court transferred administration of LPOs to WSBA. In 2017, the WSBA Bylaws were amended to include LPOs as members.

In 2012, the Court adopted APR 28 creating Limited License Legal Technicians. In 2017, the WSBA Bylaws were amended to include LLLTs as members. In June 2020, the Court sent us a letter stating that it has decided to phase out issuing new LLLT licenses and would allow those in the pipeline to become licensed through July 31, 2021. (Candidates have until July 31, 2022 to complete their substantive law-related work experience.)

The WSBA operates under the delegated authority of the Washington Supreme Court to license the state’s three types of licensed legal professionals-lawyers, limited license legal technicians, and limited practice officers. In furtherance of its obligation to protect and serve the public, the WSBA both regulates legal professionals and serves its members as a professional association — all without public funding. The WSBA’s mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice. For more information, visit www.wsba.org.

As a regulatory agency, the WSBA administers the [bar admission process](#), including the lawyer bar exam and the licensing exams for LPOs and LLLTs; provides record-keeping and [licensing functions](#); and administers the [discipline system for licensed legal professionals](#). As a professional association, the WSBA provides [continuing legal education](#) for lawyers, LPOs and

¹ John Rupp, An Essay in History, Washington State Bar News 27, 29 (June 1983)

² Bennion, Van Camp, Hagan & Ruhl v. Kassler Escow, Inc. 96, Wn. 2d 443 (1981)

LLLTs, in addition to numerous other educational and member-service activities. The administration of lawyer, LPO and LLLT admissions, licensing and continuing education are now handled in one coordinated regulatory system.

The Washington Supreme Court has adopted General Rule (GR) [12.2](#) stating that the Court has plenary authority to regulate the practice of law in Washington and supervises the Bar Association. This Rule sets out the general purposes of the WSBA and specifies activities authorized and prohibited by the Court. The General Rule is incorporated into Article I of the [WSBA Bylaws](#). The internal affairs of the WSBA, including its membership, governance, and operations, are established by the WSBA Bylaws.

The WSBA is a mandatory bar (also sometimes referred to as an “integrated” or “unified” bar), meaning that legal professionals licensed to practice in Washington are required to be members and pay an annual license fee, and that admission, regulation, and disciplinary functions are combined in one organization along with other activities to benefit WSBA members and the profession.

The WSBA is governed by the Board of Governors, the members of which are elected by members. The WSBA President, elected by the Board of Governors, and the Executive Director serve as the spokespersons for the Bar.

The Board of Governors selects the Executive Director, who directs the daily operations of the organization and manages a staff of approximately 140 WSBA employees. The WSBA staff provide services to the WSBA’s members, carry out the WSBA’s regulatory and disciplinary functions under the supervision and oversight of the Washington Supreme Court, and provide support to the various groups of volunteers that work on Bar matters.