

CHARACTER AND FITNESS  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ADMISSIONS DEPARTMENT  
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**1. Is there a separate fee for the background investigation?**

It depends. All eligible Attorney Applicants and General Applicants applying under [APR 3\(b\)\(4\)\(B\)](#) undergo an additional background investigation conducted by the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) and are required to pay an investigation fee to the NCBE. After review of your application by the WSBA office, the NCBE will contact you and provide you with NCBE payment and authorization and release forms that will need to be executed by you.

**2. If NCBE is conducting a character and fitness investigation, I would like to notify my references. Will NCBE only contact those references identified on my WSBA application? If not, who else will they contact?**

The NCBE is not limited to contacting only the individuals you name in your application when performing its investigation. The NCBE investigates and verifies the following on all domestic attorney applicants:

- a. Police record checks for domestic residences where the applicant resided for at least six months
- b. U.S. military duty or service
- c. College and university attendance and degree(s) conferred
- d. Law school attendance and degree conferred
- e. Employment history
- f. Professional licenses
- g. Civil actions (including continuing court orders, *e.g.* child support)
- h. Criminal actions
- i. Indebtedness
- j. Domestic traffic violations
- k. Applications for bar admissions and good standing information where licensed
- l. Disciplinary actions with education institutions, employment, licensing agencies, and bar associations
- m. Professional and personal references, if any

**3. What if the NCBE has not completed the investigation report by the 18-day deadline? Will I still be able to sit for the exam I applied for?**

Attorney and General Applicants applying under [APR 3\(b\)\(4\)\(B\)](#) will not be allowed to sit for the exam if the WSBA does not receive a report back from the NCBE at least 18 days prior to the first day of the exam. There are no exceptions to this rule. If the WSBA has not received an NCBE report for an Attorney or General Applicants applying under [APR 3\(b\)\(4\)\(B\)](#), the WSBA transfers your application and fee to the next exam.

**4. What if I fail to disclose information responsive to a question on my application?**

Provide the undisclosed but responsive information as a supplement to your submitted application as soon as possible and explain why you failed to disclose it previously. Failure to fully disclose requested information may be considered a reflection on an applicant's moral character and may itself result in denial of admission. It is an applicant's duty to advise the WSBA Admissions Team of any changes in or additions to the information provided in the application.



**5. How do I amend my application with additional documentation?**

Log on to your online application dashboard and click the “Create Supplemental Request” link in the Supplemental Application Information section in the lower right hand corner of your dashboard. A text box will appear and you will be able to enter a message and upload documents. You may use this tool at any time to make amendments to your application or to provide any additional information or documentation.

**6. What supporting materials should I provide when I disclose academic actions, criminal conduct, civil actions, alcohol/drug-related traffic violations, or a bankruptcy?**

Provide all related documentation. Depending on the type of incident being disclosed, this may include but is not limited to police reports, complaints, judgment orders, probation information (requirements and completion information), court docket, law school documents of incident; bankruptcy petition and order of discharge; documentation of satisfaction of debt or of steps taken to address outstanding debt. Applicants may also submit a clear and concise statement explaining a particular incident that they believe warrants additional explanation.

**7. Is fingerprinting a requirement to get admitted or licensed in Washington State?**

No.

**8. I had a character and fitness hearing in another jurisdiction and passed, does that mean I do not have to have another character and fitness hearing to become admitted in Washington?**

All applicants are subject to a character and fitness review prior to being admitted to practice law in Washington State. You may or may not be required to have a hearing.

**9. What is the typical length of time to review and respond to my application to determine my character and moral fitness?**

The length of time to complete a character and fitness review of an application varies by application. Washington requires resolution of all character and fitness issues at least 18 days prior to sitting for the exam. Applicants with information to disclose that may raise an issue of character or fitness are strongly encouraged to file their applications early in the registration period.

**10. I have had several DUI's within the last 5 years. Can I still take the exam?**

The Admission and Practice Rules (APR) do not provide for the automatic denial of admission based on conviction or traffic offenses. . Each application presents its own unique set of facts. Whether you are permitted to take the exam or not depends on the outcome of the character and fitness review of all of the information in your application. You are encouraged, however, to file your application early in the registration period.

All applicants are subject to a character and fitness review and are not permitted to sit for the exam until a final character and fitness determination has been made. In some cases, admission may be withheld pending a hearing before the Character and Fitness Board and final determination by the Washington Supreme Court regarding whether the applicants have met their burden of proving that they are of good moral character, fit to practice law and have met the Essential Eligibility Requirements. See APR 20-24.3. The Admissions staff and Bar Counsel consider the factors set forth in APR 21 when determining whether an applicant should be referred to the Character and Fitness Board.



**11. I have been convicted of a felony; does that make me ineligible to be admitted to practice law?**

No. See above response to FAQ No. 10.

**12. I have legal matters that happened over 10 years ago, and I cannot find the records or the exact dates. How should I proceed?**

Contact the relevant court to request copies of your records. Provide something in writing from the court indicating that your document request is in process or that the documents are no longer available. If you were represented, contact your attorney for that legal matter. Also, talk to your family and inquire if they have any additional information about the legal matter, especially if you were a juvenile at the time. Please describe the legal matter to the best of your ability, providing as much detail as possible, even if you are unable to find any documentation.

**13. Can I take the Washington Law Component now or do I have to wait for the character and fitness review to be completed?**

You may take the Washington Law Component (WLC) at any time after you submit your application and application fees. You do not need to wait for completion of the character and fitness review. But note that you must pass the WLC within one year of passing the lawyer bar exam.

**14. Do you do background checks in other states I have resided in?**

Yes, the WSBA may at its discretion complete additional checks, including but not limited to court cases, driving history, and criminal background, in any of the states an applicant has resided.

**15. I need to report a speeding ticket that I received several years ago but I am unable to find any documentation or information. What do I do?**

You are required to provide details of any violations, even if you are unable to find any documentation. Please be as accurate as possible with the information you provide in your application. Please answer the question to the best of your ability. See above response to FAQ No. 12.

