

## 2025 WSBA EQUITY AND JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

The Washington State Bar Association recognizes the importance of having a legal profession that reflects the rich tapestry of the communities it serves. All Washingtonians are better off when our State's legal system and legal community are fair and welcoming to everyone. The Washington State Supreme Court, under General Rule 12.2(a)(6)<sup>1</sup> has delegated the responsibility "to promote diversity and equality in the courts and the legal profession" to the Washington State Bar Association.

The Action Plan is informed by data collected in the 2024 Membership Demographic Study which tells us that our profession still has work to do to ensure that our legal community better reflects the public we serve. This Study shows continued marginalization of our underrepresented legal professionals who report that they are less likely to experience positive and satisfying workplace environments. Further, from addressing legal professional shortages in rural areas to increasing the number of legal professionals who understand clients varied lived experiences, legal services are more accessible when the legal profession reflects the communities we serve. The Action Plan's goals are lawful and necessary to affirm WSBA's unwavering commitment to its mission—to serve the public and members, ensure the integrity of the profession, and champion justice.

With its open letter, published in June 2020, our Washington State Supreme Court reaffirmed the responsibility of legal professionals to promote diversity and equity in the courts and legal profession as set forth in GR 12.2(a)(6). In that letter, the Court acknowledged that "our institutions remain affected by the vestiges of slavery," and declared that "the legal community must recognize that we all bear responsibility for this on-going injustice." Citing it as our "moral imperative," the Court unanimously called "on every member of our legal community to reflect....and ask ourselves how we may work together to eradicate racism." Our Action Plan seeks to answer the Court's call, to further WSBA's stated mission, and extend our commitment with an expanded awareness of all barriers that inhibit access to legal services and inclusion in the legal profession.

Our vision of success for the Action Plan is to foster and support a legal system that 1) is committed to ensuring that everyone in our State needing legal services can realistically access those services, and 2) assures everyone in our State interested in entering the legal field has a realistic opportunity to achieve success in our profession.

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted effective July 19, 1987; amended effective December 10, 1993; September 1, 1997; formerly GR 12, renumbered as GR 12.1, effective September 1, 2007.

## EQUITY AND JUSTICE ACTION PLAN'S THREE GOALS



### **GOAL #1: Strengthen the legal profession by building community and fostering belonging.**

**VISION FOR SUCCESS:** The legal profession will more accurately reflect all the various communities we serve, and every legal professional will feel that they belong in the legal community and are able to thrive inclusive of their social identity and background.

#### **STRATEGIES** *(in no particular order):*

1. Partner with affinity bar associations; educational institutions from elementary schools, middle school, high schools, community colleges, universities and law schools; underrepresented and/or marginalized communities; and community-based organizations to identify and implement policies and programs that promote inclusion and belonging in the profession.
2. Leverage and improve data collection, analysis, and reporting processes, in order to identify and address actual or potential disparities and inequities in the regulation of the profession, and to better track member attrition from the profession.

3. Equip legal leaders\*, including employers and the judiciary, with better tools to meaningfully remove barriers to inclusion and belonging for all legal professionals.
4. Design and implement a process to identify and address gaps in training regarding inclusion and belonging, with a view toward creating accountability.
5. Support opportunities that promote wellness, mentorship, leadership, accessibility and community for all members regardless of their social identity and background.
6. Explore and foster innovative pathways to the profession, including alternatives to bar licensure, and potential regulatory pilot programs designed to open opportunities and increase access to the legal profession.

## **GOAL #2: Advance a fair, inclusive, effective, and accessible legal system for all people in our State.**

**VISION FOR SUCCESS:** All Washingtonians will have realistic access to high quality and affordable legal services, from legal practitioners who apply an informed perspective of individual circumstances, including an intention to identify and ameliorate the effects of bias.

### **STRATEGIES** *(in no particular order):*

1. Support innovative legal services delivery models that provide more affordable legal services to the most underserved and marginalized communities in our State including people living in rural areas, undocumented communities, people who have limited English proficiency, tribal communities, people with disabilities, and people experiencing poverty, and systemic oppression.
2. Support and implement changes that make WSBA and the legal system more accessible, through continued exploration of the benefits of developing court rules that do not vary from county to county, where technology is uniform and accessible, for both the public and legal professionals.
3. Support policymaking and sustainable, long-term, funding efforts that improve the consistency of quality legal services available to the public.

## **GOAL #3: Deepen and broaden WSBA leaderships'\* ongoing commitments to addressing inclusion, belonging and equity issues.**

**VISION FOR SUCCESS:** WSBA leaders\* will represent a diversity of social identities, backgrounds, lived experiences and perspectives that demonstrate a culture of inclusion and belonging, and will make decisions that result in fairer outcomes, and increase public trust and confidence in the legal profession.

**STRATEGIES** *(in no particular order):*

1. Promote participation from all social identities, backgrounds, lived experiences and perspectives within the membership of WSBA entities.
2. Support initiatives that create a welcoming environment so that marginalized communities can express their concerns and ideas and be confident that WSBA leadership\* carefully considers their perspectives.
3. Encourage the Board of Governors to regularly collaborate and communicate with affinity bar associations, and facilitate a culture of belonging and inclusion among all WSBA leaders\*.
4. Create a process to respond, in a timely and thoughtful way, to inclusion and belonging issues that arise within the legal community and assure that those issues are acknowledged.
5. Collaborate to create policies that enhance equity in the legal system and legal profession.
6. Continue equity education including communication training for WSBA leadership.
7. Identify measures for accountability, work with the Board of Governors to track progress toward meeting the plan's goals, identify challenges and solutions, and draft easy to understand reports.

Achieving the goals set forth in the Action Plan will require a dynamic implementation strategy that will continuously track and measure success and adapt to ensure these goals are reached. This Action Plan will be paired with a more detailed Implementation Plan which will extend our development with a more granular set of practical applications. Acknowledging that there are, often, a variety of solutions, the WSBA will continue to seek input from members of WSBA and the public from across the State on ways we can implement the Action Plan and collectively achieve equity and justice.

With the guidance of our Supreme Court, WSBA invites each of us, as legal professionals, to expand our efforts to undertake this important work, providing equity and justice for all Washingtonians. WSBA believes that every community of Washington State benefits from these efforts when each and every member of the legal profession takes part.

\*References to "leaders," or "leaderships," are meant to include – but are not limited to – individual leaders as well as groups of leaders of committees, councils, commissions, sections, boards, local bar associations.