



Board of Governors Meeting Recap

March 21–22, 2025

A summary prepared by the WSBA of the Board of Governors (Board) meeting March 21-22, 2025, in Shelton. The agenda, materials, and video recording from this Board meeting are posted [online](#). The next regular meeting is May 2-3, 2025, in the Olympia area. 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.

TOP TAKEAWAYS

In Support of an Independent Legal Profession. A theme of the meeting was the need for the WSBA to act—to give unified voice to legal practitioners—in defense of the profession and against any erosion to the rule of law. Toward that end, Board members agreed to submit an amicus brief—at the appellate level—in this [Perkins Coie lawsuit](#) that will address the WSBA's interest in protecting the public via an independent judiciary and legal profession. They referenced the Board's March 12, 2025, [Statement In Support of an Independent Legal Profession Free From Government Retaliation](#) to reiterate their viewpoint: The rule of law, the bedrock principle of our democracy, depends on lawyers being able to represent all interests and to challenge government overreach without fear of retribution. Relatedly, the Board joined more than 50 bar associations as co-signers of an [ABA statement in support of the rule of law](#). The WSBA is also launching a Rule of Law Ambassador Program, in the works for more than a year, to equip legal professionals to educate their local communities about the importance of an independent legal profession as a cornerstone of the U.S. democracy and to build relationships to increase trust and confidence in the rule of law. Be on the lookout soon for more information, and email ambassadors@wsba.org to join the distribution list.

License fee philosophy. After almost a decade of fiscal prioritization and strategic actions to keep the license fee essentially flat, the Board is considering a license-fee philosophy focused on future sustainability and predictability for members and the association. The philosophy would have the Board annually start with the assumption that the fee should be adjusted by a market factor (Washington State's L&I cost-of-living-adjustment); any increase would then be offset by revenue or cost-saving initiatives or strategic use of reserve funds. The overall goal is to create a "soft landing" for members—that is, the license fee should keep pace with actual costs of business annually to avoid significant, intermittent fee increases. The Board is seeking feedback before codifying and putting the philosophy to use. [Learn more and provide your thoughts](#).

Setting a New Course for Equity and Justice. Leaders of WSBA’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council presented a [draft Equity and Justice Plan](#) to fulfill WSBA’s purpose of regulating the legal profession and improving the quality of legal services. “This is a plan for every member of the public and for every member of the bar,” said WSBA President Sunitha Anjilvel. The plan is based on a comprehensive, decennial membership study that provided wide-ranging data about the composition of Washington’s legal profession and member experiences in the workplace. After receiving much feedback from members, the Council prepared the current draft with three goals: 1. Strengthen the legal profession by building community and fostering belonging; 2. Advance a fair, inclusive, effective, and accessible legal system for all people in Washington; and 3. Deepen and broaden the WSBA’s leaderships’ ongoing commitment to address inclusion, belonging, and equity issues. If approved, the Equity and Justice Plan will include specific steps to take in the next 5 years to achieve success in each goal area. “We’re talking about justice for all here, and all means all,” said Gov. Tom Ahearn. The Board is expected to review and potentially adopt the plan at its May meeting. ([See page 52.](#))

Expansion of License Fee Hardship Exemptions. After considering member feedback, licensing data, and economic statistics, the Board considered a recommendation from the Budget & Audit Committee to increase the number of times a member is eligible for the hardship exemption from two to three, and to raise the eligibility threshold from 200% to 270% of the federal poverty level. The Budget & Audit Committee will fine tune the proposal and bring it back for Board action soon. ([See page 97.](#))

The Board also:

- Held its annual meeting with the Washington Supreme Court, discussing topics such as the WSBA’s draft Equity and Justice Plan, implementation of the Court’s new alternatives to the bar exam, implementation of the Court’s entity regulation pilot program, and [WSBA’s clean annual audit report](#) and overall fiscal health. [Watch the meeting.](#)
- Discussed the idea to create seats on the Board of Governors for public (non-legal licensee) members. Governors expressed feedback and concerns, including the need to gather member-wide feedback if this idea were to come forward as a full proposal. ([See page 67.](#))
- Heard an update from the WSBA’s Council on Public Defense regarding new standards for indigent defense — the Legislature and local jurisdictions are encountering implementation challenges with the [WSBA’s newly adopted standards](#), and the Washington Supreme Court is currently considering whether to update its own standards that would be codified in court rules’
- Created a Board of Governors Governance Committee to systemically review governing documents to ensure cohesion and consistency. ([See page 88.](#))

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