

# WSBA DISCIPLINE SYSTEM ANNUAL REPORT

Annually, the Washington State Bar Association publishes a report on Washington’s discipline system. This report summarizes the activities of the system’s constituents, including the WSBA’s Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) and Office of General Counsel (OGC), the Disciplinary Board, hearing officers, and the Client Protection Fund. The report also provides statistical information about discipline for those licensed to practice law in Washington for the calendar year. These pages provide an informal overview of the 2024 Discipline System Annual Report.



MORE ONLINE

For more information on the WSBA discipline system go to [www.wsba.org](http://www.wsba.org)

To view the full 2024 Discipline System Annual Report, scan the QR code below:



STRUCTURE

## How the Lawyer Discipline and Disability System Works

The Washington Supreme Court has exclusive responsibility and inherent authority over regulation of the practice of law in Washington. This authority includes administering the discipline and disability system. Many of the court’s disciplinary functions are delegated by court rule to the WSBA, which acts under the supervision and authority of the court. Under the Supreme Court’s mandate in General Rule 12.2, the WSBA is committed to administering an effective system of discipline in order to fulfill its obligations to protect the public and ensure the integrity of the profession. The prosecutorial and investigative functions of the discipline system are discharged by ODC, while the adjudicative functions are handled by the Disciplinary Board and hearing officers, which are administered by OGC.



WSBA Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC)

- Answers public inquiries and informally resolves disputes
- Receives, reviews, and may investigate grievances
- Recommends disciplinary action or dismissal
- Diverts grievances involving less serious misconduct
- Recommends disability proceedings
- Presents cases to discipline-system adjudicators



Hearing Officers (Administered by OGC)

- Conduct evidentiary hearings and other proceedings
- Conduct settlement conferences
- Approve stipulations to admonition and reprimand



Disciplinary Board (Administered by OGC)

- Reviews recommendations for proceedings and disputed dismissals
- Serves as intermediate appellate body
- Reviews hearing records and stipulations



Washington Supreme Court

- Has exclusive governmental responsibility for the system
- Conducts final appellate review
- Orders sanctions, interim suspensions, and reciprocal discipline



BY THE NUMBERS > PART II

1,822

Disciplinary  
Grievances  
Opened

1,802

Disciplinary  
Grievances  
Resolved \*

95

Non-Communication  
Matters Informally  
Resolved

49

File Disputes  
Informally  
Resolved

2,300

Public Inquiries,  
Phone Calls,  
and Emails

\* “Grievances resolved” include all grievances that are closed during the calendar year, including, but not limited to, grievances that were dismissed in intake or after investigation and those for which disciplinary action was imposed.

A CLOSER LOOK

## Number and Nature of Grievances

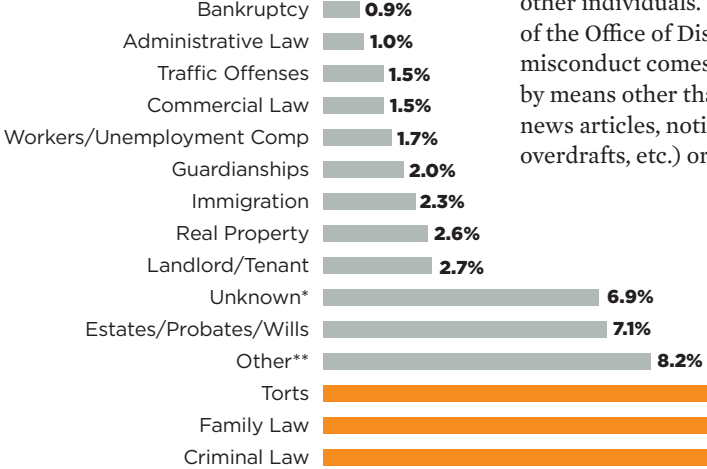
ODC’s intake staff receives all public inquiries and written grievances and conducts the initial review of every grievance.<sup>1</sup> After initial review, some grievances are dismissed, and others are referred for further investigation by ODC investigation/prosecution staff. Grievances that are not dismissed or diverted after investigation may be referred for disciplinary action. When warranted and authorized by a review committee of the Disciplinary Board, these matters are prosecuted by disciplinary counsel with the assistance of professional investigators and a support staff of paralegals and legal administrative assistants. In 2024, ODC opened 1,822 grievances.

NOTE

1. Conflicts Review Officers perform this review when required by ELC 2.7. In some cases not subject to ELC 2.7, initial review is assigned to independent Special Disciplinary Counsel under ELC 2.8(b).

Practice Areas of Grievances

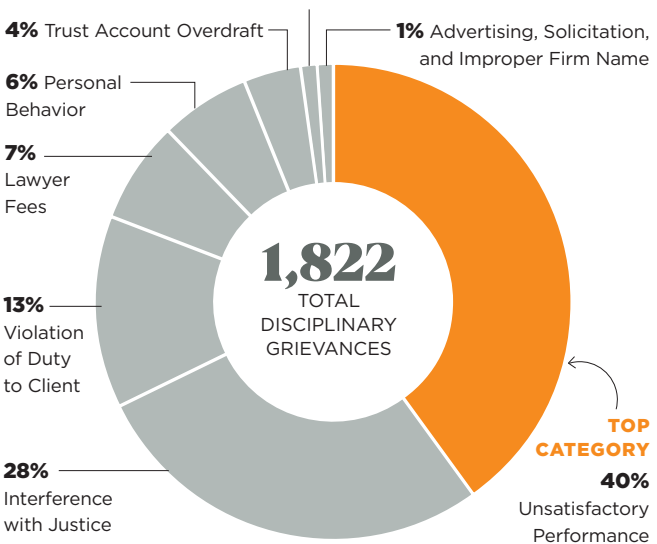
Top 15 (by highest percentage)



TOP 3 CATEGORIES

58.4% of grievances arose from criminal law, family law, and tort matters.

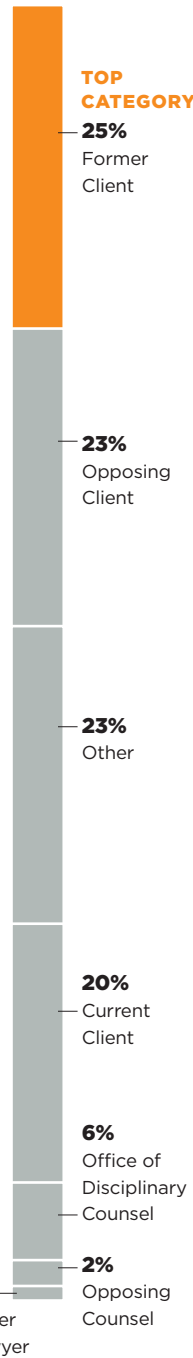
Nature of Grievances



NOTE: “Interference with Justice” may include improper contacts with represented parties or judicial officers and misrepresentations to the court. “Personal Behavior” may include criminal law violations and other conduct not necessarily related to the practice of law.



Sources of Grievances Filed



BY THE  
NUMBERS  
PART I

40,967

Licensed Lawyers  
(33,830 active)

29

Public Formal  
Complaints Filed

8

Disciplinary  
Hearings

51

Disciplinary  
Actions Imposed

53

Disciplinary & Disability  
Proceedings Opened

A CLOSER LOOK

## Disciplinary Actions Taken

Disciplinary “actions,” which include both disciplinary sanctions and admonitions, result in a permanent public disciplinary record. In order of increasing severity, disciplinary actions are admonitions, reprimands, suspensions, and disbarments. If a lawyer should be cautioned, review committees of the Disciplinary Board have authority to issue an advisory letter, which is neither a sanction nor a disciplinary action and is not public information. For less serious misconduct, ODC may divert a grievance from discipline if a lawyer agrees to a diversion contract, which if successfully completed results in dismissal of the grievance. In 2024, nine matters were referred to diversion.

In 2024, 50 lawyers were disciplined and one lawyer had more than one disciplinary action, for a total of 51 disciplinary actions:

- 11** Reprimands
- 16** Suspensions
- 9** Resignations in Lieu of Discipline
- 15** Disbarments

NEW IN 2024

### Updates to the Discipline and Disability Case System and Document Management Software

After four years of development, a new discipline and disability case management and document management system, Litify, went live in 2024. This new system, based upon a Salesforce platform, replaced a nearly 20-year-old in-house built software known as GILDA. This new system enables the WSBA to effectively track grievances, discipline, disability, reinstatements, custodianships, and proceedings for all licensed legal professionals in Washington state, including lawyers, limited practice officers, and limited license legal technicians.



BY THE  
NUMBERS >  
PART III

17

Programs were held on discipline and professional conduct where ODC lawyers and auditors appeared as speakers.



1,900

Calls providing ethics advice were fielded by Professional Responsibility Program staff in fiscal year 2024.



40

Ethics education programs were held around the state, including live, webinar, and webcast events.



OTHER COMPONENTS

## Adjunct Disciplinary Counsel Panel

The Adjunct Disciplinary Counsel (ADC) Panel is established by Rule 2.9 of the Washington Supreme Court’s Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct (ELC). Under ELC 5.3(c), disciplinary counsel may assign a grievance to an ADC for investigation under the supervision of the Office of Disciplinary Counsel. In addition, members of the ADC Panel may be called upon to serve as volunteers in the discipline system in a variety of other capacities.

In 2024, the ADC Panel consisted of 27 volunteer lawyer members. Members of the ADC Panel were assigned to two new disciplinary related probations and assisted ODC in resolving eight investigations.

> **MORE ONLINE:** Scan the QR code to learn more about the ADC Panel, or visit [www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Committees-Boards-and-Other-Groups/Adjunct-Disciplinary-Counsel-Panel](http://www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Committees-Boards-and-Other-Groups/Adjunct-Disciplinary-Counsel-Panel).



## LPO and LLLT Discipline System

Limited practice officers (LPOs) and limited license legal technicians (LLLTs) are also authorized to practice law in Washington, through regulatory systems administered by the WSBA. A Washington Supreme Court-mandated regulatory board oversees each limited license. Each licensee is subject to license-specific rules of professional conduct and disciplinary procedural rules. The WSBA administers a discipline system for each of these licenses. At the end of 2024, there were 706 LPOs and 77 LLLTs actively licensed to practice. In 2024, the WSBA received nine disciplinary grievances against LPOs and one disciplinary grievance against an LLLT. One disciplinary action of a reprimand was imposed on an LPO.

## Lawyer Disability Matters

Special procedures apply when there is reasonable cause to believe that a lawyer is incapable of properly defending a disciplinary proceeding, or incapable of practicing law, because of mental or physical incapacity. Such matters are handled under a distinct set of procedural rules. In some cases, the lawyer must have counsel appointed at the WSBA’s expense. In these cases, a determination that the lawyer does not have the capacity to practice law results in a transfer to disability inactive status. Although the procedural rules governing disability proceedings are contained in the ELC, the proceedings are not disciplinary in nature. In 2024, five lawyers were transferred to disability inactive status based on an incapacity to practice law. **BN**