WASHINGTON STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING MINUTES

Spokane, WA
September 24-25, 2026

Call to Order and Welcome

The meeting of the Board of Governors of the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) was called to order by President Francis Adewale on Thursday, September 24, 2026, at 9:03 a.m. at the Davenport Grand Hotel in Spokane, WA. Governors in attendance were:

Matthew Dresden
Tom Ahearne
Kevin Fay
Kristina Larry
Todd Bloom
Nam Nguyen
Allison Widney
Jordan Couch
Kari Petrasek
Emily Arneson
Parvin Price
Alain Villeneuve
Christopher Bhang
Mary Rathbone

Officers and Executive Staff in attendance were: President Francis Adewale, President-Elect Kari Petrasek, Executive Director Terra Nevitt, Deputy Executive Director Dua Abudiab, Chief Disciplinary Counsel & Parliamentarian Doug Ende, General Counsel Laurie Powers, Chief Communications and Outreach Officer Sara Niegowski, Chief Regulatory Counsel Renata Garcia, Director of Finance Tiffany Lynch, Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy, and HR Director & Chief Culture Officer Glynnis Klinefelter Sio.

Also in attendance were Aaron Pelley, Aderiike Shola-Dare, Allison Muth, Andrew Yi, Ashley Cummins, Betsylew Miale-Gix, Aziza Ozgoren, Shelly Bynum, Darlene Parker, Rex Nolte, Bobby Henry, Brian Anderson, Carlos Cepeda, Carolyn MacGregor, Catherine Schur, Cathy Biestek, Chelle Gegax, Chief Justice Debra Stephens, Christell Casey, Dean Anthony Varona, Dean Linda Jellum, Dean Martin Pritikin, Dean Tamara Lawson, Elena Zaitseva, Ezra Glanzer, Fabiola Jimenez, Fay Tavakolynia, Francis Scherry, Holly Crawford, Jill Coen, Joe Collen, John Tyler, Jordan Russell, Julianne Unite, Justice Steven González, Laura Sanford, Michael Clancey, Noah Baetge, Nancy Hawkins, Min Kang, Paris Eriksen, Sanjay Walvekar, Sean Coen, Sophie Ying, and Stephen Carpenter.

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Member & Public Comments

President Adewale opened the floor for member and public comments. Elena Zaitseva, Dean Martin Pritikin of Purdue Global Law School, Allison Muth, Joe Collen, Francis Scherry, Carlos Cepeda, Eric Bowles, Michael Clancey and Jordan Russel addressed the Board regarding the possible motion to rescind the Board's May 2026 action expanding the definition of "approved law school" to include state-approved institutions. Speakers opposing rescission, including graduates of and representatives from Purdue Global Law School, emphasized the accessibility and affordability of online legal education for non-traditional students and the potential for these graduates to help address legal service shortages, particularly in rural areas. Other speakers, including representatives of Veterans Education Success, expressed concerns about the quality of education at non-ABA-accredited law schools and the potential for exploitation by predatory institutions.

Consent Calendar

President Adewale presented the consent calendar. No governor requested the removal of any item. The consent calendar was adopted by unanimous consent.

President's Report

President Adewale delivered his final President's report, reflecting on the past year and the ongoing transition within the legal profession. He highlighted the importance of preparing Washington lawyers for the future and acknowledged the significant resources required to advance access to justice initiatives. President Adewale expressed his gratitude for the support he received during his term and encouraged continued support for incoming President Kari Petrasek to ensure a seamless transition of leadership.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Nevitt referred to her written report available in the meeting materials. No questions were raised.

Budget and Committee Items

FY27 Budget

Treas. Nam Nguyen and Director of Finance Tiffany Lynch presented the final draft of the FY27 budget, highlighting changes from the first draft, including the addition of section budgets and adjustments to indirect expenses. The General Fund budget reflects a $1.4 million use of reserves which is an increase of approximately $155,000 from the first draft, primarily attributable to additional indirect expenses for a new full-time equivalent public trust liaison position. The Board discussed the historical use of reserves and the rationale for approving a deficit budget, including fiscal prudence and the strategic use of accumulated reserves. Gov. Petrasek moved to approve the FY27 budget. The motion passed unanimously. Gov. Couch, Gov. Rathbone, and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Proposed License Fee Policy Revisions

Treas. Nguyen and Director of Finance Lynch presented the second read of the proposed revisions to the WSBA license fee policy to include other license types beyond attorneys fees, which were first presented at the July 2026 meeting. No further feedback was received. Gov. Villeneuve moved to approve the proposed license fee policy revisions. The motion passed unanimously. Gov. Couch, Gov. Rathbone, and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Proposed Admissions Application Fees

Chief Regulatory Counsel Garcia presented the second read of the proposed changes to admissions application fees, which were first presented at the July 2026 meeting. No further feedback was received. Gov. Dresden moved to approve the proposed admissions application fees. The motion passed unanimously. Gov. Couch, Gov. Rathbone, and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Regulatory Proposals

Proposed Amendments to APR 1(e) Re Definition of Active Legal Experience

Chief Regulatory Counsel Garcia presented the proposed amendments to APR 1(e) clarifying the definition of "active legal experience." The amendments are intended to provide clearer standards for WSBA members and applicants regarding admission by motion, applications, qualifications, and status changes. The Board discussed the inclusion of legal experience gained in positions that involve the practice of law, even where a law license is not expressly required for the position. Concerns were also raised regarding the exclusion of experience gained in non-common law jurisdictions. Gov. Bhang moved to approve the proposed amendments as presented. The motion passed 13-1. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Proposed Amendment to WSBA Admissions Policies Re Selection of Third-Party Entity to Complete Investigations

Chief Regulatory Counsel Garcia and Associate Director Bobby Henry presented a proposed amendment to the WSBA Admissions Policies that replace a specific reference to the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) with a neutral reference to external third-party entity selected by the WSBA for completing investigations related to admissions applications. Gov. Dresden moved to approve the proposed amendment. The motion passed unanimously. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Proposed Amendments to the WSBA Admissions Policies to Conform to APR 4(b)

Chief Regulatory Counsel Garcia presented proposed amendments to align the WSBA Admissions Policies with APR 4(b), which would give the WSBA discretion regarding the publication of bar exam pass lists. The Board discussed whether publication of pass lists is necessary and the potential impact on law schools and new admittees. Gov. Couch moved to approve the proposed amendments. The motion passed unanimously with one abstention. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council Five-Year Assessment

STAR Council Chair Kari Petrasek, Chair-Elect Ashley Cummins, and Advancement Department Director Plachy presented the five-year assessment of the STAR Council. The Council was established in 2021 to support rural legal practice and improve access to justice in rural communities. The report highlighted the Council's annual STAR Summits, Legal Lunchbox CLEs, and internship grant program. Survey results indicated moderate awareness of STAR programs among rural practitioners, and ongoing challenges were identified in mentorship, succession planning, and infrastructure. The Council plans to increase outreach, strengthen partnerships, and explore economic incentives for rural practice. No action was taken.

First Reading: Governance Committee Proposed Amendments to the WSBA Bylaws Re Section Voting and Review

Gov. Fay, Chair of the Governance Committee, presented proposed amendments to the WSBA Bylaws regarding section voting and review for a first reading. The amendments would permit section executive committees to conduct votes by email, a change that received positive feedback from section leaders. The Committee also proposed removing the mandatory section viability review from the Bylaws and replacing it with a policy assigning responsibility to the Member Engagement Council to support section wellness, which would allow more flexible reviews without requiring Supreme Court approval for future changes. Governors raised questions about the email voting process, including a suggested minimum period for objections and the need for transparency. No action was taken; the proposed amendments will return to the Board for a second reading.

Discussion with Law School Deans and Law Clerk Board Leadership

The Board held its annual discussion on legal education with Gonzaga University School of Law Dean Linda Jellum, University of Washington School of Law Dean Tamara Lawson, Seattle University School of Law Dean Anthony Varona, and Law Clerk Board Chair Christell Casey. Dean Jellum reported record enrollment and improved bar passage rates at Gonzaga. Dean Lawson described University of Washington initiatives, including coverage of bar preparation costs and a new admissions pathway that does not require standardized test scores. Dean Varona highlighted Seattle University's diverse student body and new programs, including a Creativity Law Clinic. Chair Casey outlined recent rule amendments to expand tutor capacity and outreach for the Law Clerk Program. The discussion addressed the role of scholarships, experiential learning, and partnerships in addressing legal deserts and supporting diverse pathways into the profession.

Washington State Bar Foundation Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Washington State Bar Foundation (WSBF) was called to order by President Brian Anderson. President Anderson reported that the WSBF approved distributing $230,000 to the WSBA for public service, pro bono, and equity and justice programs for FY27, with additional funds raised to support the 2027 Powerful Communities Grants. He noted that the WSBF awarded 12 grants for legal aid projects across Washington, three more than the prior year.

President Anderson presented the proposed slate of trustees for FY27, including new trustees Sophie Ying, Christopher Bhang, and Francis Adewale. Gov. Petrasek moved to approve the Board of Trustees. The motion passed unanimously. Govs. Allison and Rathbone were not present for the vote.

Court Rules & Procedures Committee Proposed Charter

Court Rules and Procedures Committee Chair Andrew Yi presented a proposed charter for the Committee, which would allow the Committee to provide technical comments during the pre-screening stage of court rule proposals, with a procedure for governors to object. Gov. Couch moved to approve the proposed charter. The motion passed unanimously. Govs. Petrasek, Allison and Rathbone were not present for the vote.

Suggested Amendments to RAP 16.10, RAP 18.17, and RAP 18.8

Chair Yi presented suggested amendments to RAP 16.10, RAP 18.17, and RAP 18.8. The amendments clarify word limits for personal restraint petitions, establishing a combined limit of 12,000 words for the

petition and its supporting brief, and allow a streamlined 30-day extension for filing briefs in personal restraint petitions. Gov. Couch moved to approve the suggested amendments. The motion passed unanimously. Gov. Petrasek, Gov. Rathbone, and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.

Motion to Rescind a Prior Action of the Board to Approve Changes to WSBA Admissions Policies Re Definition of Approved Law School

Gov. Fay moved to rescind the Board's May 2026 action approving changes to the WSBA Admissions Policies regarding the definition of approved law school. Gov. Fay stated that the original decision was made without sufficient data and cited concerns raised by legal education stakeholders regarding the potential impact of the policy. The Board discussed the rationale for ABA accreditation, the concerns about predatory law schools, and the need for additional lawyers in rural areas. Gov. Couch noted the extensive process that preceded the original decision, while other governors expressed concerns about the pace of the decision-making process and about individuals who have relied on the policy change.

Gov. Fay moved to amend the motion so that the rescission would take effect beginning with the summer 2027 bar exam. The motion to amend failed with six votes in favor and eight against.

The underlying motion to rescind failed with three votes in favor and eleven against. Several board members indicated an interest in continuing to evaluate the impact of the policy.

Swearing In of FY27 Governors and Officers

Executive Director Nevitt facilitated the swearing in of the FY27 governors and officers. Chief Justice Debra Stephens and Justice Steven González administered the oaths of office. Kari Petrasek was sworn in as WSBA President and spoke about her commitment to fostering a thriving volunteer community within the WSBA. Outgoing governors and officers, including President Francis Adewale, were recognized for their service.

RECESS

There being no further business for the day, the meeting recessed at 5 p.m**.** on September 24, 2026.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2026

The meeting reconvened at **9:04 a.m.** on Friday, September 25, 2026, with President Adewale presiding.

Member Engagement Council Recommendations for Sections Viability Reviews

Member Engagement Council Co-Chair Gov. Dresden and Advancement Department Director Plachy presented the Council's recommendations following viability reviews of the Legal Assistance to Military Personnel (LAMP) Section; the Liquor, Cannabis, and Psychedelics Law Section; and the Animal Law Section. All three sections exceeded the 75-member threshold and demonstrated a commitment to enhancing member engagement and leadership. The Council recommended maintaining all three sections, with periodic check-ins for the LAMP Section and the Liquor, Cannabis, and Psychedelics Law Section, and quarterly reviews for the Animal Law Section. Gov Arneson moved to approve all three recommendations. The motion passed unanimously. Govs. Price, Nguyen, Rathbone, Widney and Couch were not present for the vote.

Executive Session

At 9:50 a.m., the Board entered executive session to conduct the Executive Director's annual performance evaluation and to receive and discuss legal advice regarding the 2027 Keller deduction. The session concluded at 11:15 a.m.

2027 Keller Deduction

Upon returning from executive session, Gov. Couch moved to approve Option B for the Keller deduction, which was provided as confidential materials. The motion passed 10-2. Govs. Rathbone, Widney, Fay, and Price were not present for the vote. The methodology for the Keller deduction will be published for public transparency.

Governor Roundtable and Meeting Feedback: Rose, Thorns & Bud

Governors expressed appreciation for the meeting's location in Spokane and the engagement with the Spokane County Bar Association. Gov. Larry highlighted the value of volunteering with the WSBA. Gov. Ahearne highlighted the role of the YMCA High School Mock Trial Program in diversifying the legal profession and encouraged participation as coaches. The Board also discussed the need for modern communication tools, such as a mobile app, to engage members more effectively. Departing Govs. Larry and Dresden were recognized for their contributions to the Board.

Adjournment

There being no further business, President Adewale adjourned the meeting at 11:43 a.m. on September 25, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Terra Nevitt

Terra Nevitt
WSBA Executive Director & Secretary

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Board of Governors Meeting – Motions List
Spokane, WA
September 24-25, 2026

1. Approve the consent calendar. Passed unanimously. Govs Widney and Rathbone were not present.
2. Approve the FY27 budget. Passed unanimously; Govs. Couch, Widney and Rathbone were not present for the vote.
3. Approve the proposed license fee policy revisions. Passed unanimously; Govs. Couch, Widney and Rathbone were not present for the vote.
4. Approve the proposed admissions application fees. Passed unanimously; Govs. Couch, Widney and Rathbone were not present for the vote.
5. Approve proposed amendments to APR 1(e) re definition of active legal experience. Passed 13 to 1. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.
6. Approve proposed amendment to WSBA Admissions Policies re selection of third-party entity to complete investigations. Passed unanimously. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.
7. Approve proposed amendments to the WSBA Admissions Policies to conform to APR 4(b). Passed with one abstention. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.
8. Approve WSBF FY27 Board of Trustees. Passed unanimously. Gov. Rathbone and Gov. Widney were not present for the vote.
9. Approve Court Rules & Procedures Committee proposed charter. Passed unanimously; Govs. Petrasek, Allison and Rathbone were not present for the vote.
10. Approve suggested amendments to RAP 16.10, RAP 18.17, and RAP 18.8. Passed unanimously. Govs. Petrasek, Allison and Rathbone were not present for the vote.
11. Amend the motion to rescind a prior action of the Board to approve changes to WSBA Admissions Policies re definition of approved law school to take effect beginning with the summer 2027 bar exam. Failed 6 to 8.
12. Rescind a prior action of the Board to approve changes to WSBA Admissions Policies re definition of approved law school. Failed 3 to 11.
13. Approve Member Engagement Council recommendations for sections viability reviews. Passed unanimously; Govs. Price, Nguyen, Couch, Allison and Rathbone were not present for the vote.
14. Approve 2027 Keller deduction (Option B). Passed 10 to 2; Govs. Fay, Price, Rathbone and Widney were not present for the vote.

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