



WASHINGTON NEW MEMBERS COMMITTEE

Washington New Members Committee

Washington New Members Committee Meeting | Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Saturday, September 26, 2026 | 10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m.

[Via Teams](#) | Meeting ID: 275 571 917 285 | Passcode: 6Pk68Td6

AGENDA:

1. Welcome & Introductions; Approval of August 5th (Special) and August 17th (Regular) Meeting Minutes – Alex
2. WSBA Updates –Jordan, Chelle
 - a. October MentorLink Mixer: New Members
3. FY26 Appointment Updates – Alex, Chelle
4. Member Attendance Review & Discussion – Alex, Chelle
5. Wellness Report Discussion – Kevin Plachy, WSBA Advancement Department Director; Dan Crystal, WSBA Member Wellness Program Manager
6. Team Updates and Regional Reports – All
 - a. Social Media – Ariel
 - b. Mentorship Project Team – Janta
 - c. CLE Team – Chawisa, Hanna
7. FY27 Meeting Schedule – Janta
8. New ideas for Next Meeting – Alex, Janta
9. Adjournment – Alex

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Washington New Members Committee

Washington New Members Committee Meeting
Microsoft Teams
Wednesday, August 5, 2026, | 12:10 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.
Meeting Minutes

WNMC Members Present: Alex Reaganson, Mackenzie Lloyd, Ariel Cook, Matt Rommelmann, Fatima Al-Rikabi, Mason Ji, Hanna Harrison, Janta Steele, Stephan Yhann (joined at 12:10 p.m.)

WNMC Members Absent: Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Chawisa Laicharoenwat (excused), Bethany Nolan (unexcused), Makenzie Spinks (unexcused)

Board of Governors Liaison: Jordan Couch

WSBA Staff: Chelle Gegax – WSBA Member Services and Engagement Staff Liaison, Vanessa Sweeney – WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator, Julianne Unite – WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager

Welcome, Introductions - Alex

Washington New Members Committee (WNMC) Chair, Alexander (Alex) Reaganson, called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m.

Discussion on WNMC Official Statement RE Bar Exam Cancellation

WNMC Member, Ariel Cook, proposed submitting the letter from examinees, with an amended cover letter, to the Washington State Supreme Court, and WNMC Member, Mackenzie Lloyd, seconded the motion; the group discussed the content and clarified the audience and purpose. Ariel and Alexander clarified that the cover letter would be amended to remove recommendations meant for the Board of Governors, making it suitable for the Supreme Court, and the examining perspective would be attached. On motion by Ariel, seconded by Mackenzie, the WNMC unanimously approved (9-0-0) to send the letter to the supreme court. Alex noted that background information on ABA resolutions would be included in the letter, and Ariel suggested moving relevant footnotes into the main text for clarity.

Alex led a detailed discussion with committee members including Ariel, Mackenzie, WNMC Member, Stephan Yhann, WSBA BOG Liaison, Jordan Couch, WNMC Member, Janta Steele, and WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager, Julianne Unite, on the content and recommendations for the committee statement regarding the bar exam cancellation, ultimately deciding to recommend a single path—admitting all qualified examinees to practice—after extensive debate and amendments, and approving the statement for submission to the Board of Governors. Ariel and others clarified that the recommendation would apply to all examinees who registered, qualified, and attempted to sit for the bar exam, including ABA graduates and APR 6 law clerks, with a footnote specifying eligibility. Julianne raised the issue of character and fitness checks, and the group agreed to include language ensuring completion of all admission requirements, addressing regulatory concerns. Stephan and others proposed amendments to clarify the responsibility of the Bar Association, resulting in revised language emphasizing fair and equitable admission processes. On motion by Mackenzie, seconded by Stephan, members unanimously approved (9-0-0) the amended statement, with Alexander confirming it would be submitted to the Board of Governors for review and public release upon approval.

Spokane Wildfire Support Discussion

Alex proposed authorizing the leadership team to explore fundraising or relief efforts for those affected by Spokane wildfires, with Chelle clarifying restrictions on official fundraising by WNMC and Stephan suggesting alternative ways to publicize relief effort. On motion by Alex, seconded by Ariel, the WNMC unanimously approved to authorize the leadership team to explore fundraising or relief efforts for Spokane wildfire victims. Chelle explained that WNMC cannot officially fundraise or donate funds except as permitted by GR12, and any relief efforts must be conducted personally, not as an official entity. Stephan suggested committee members could publicize relief efforts through blog posts or personal statements, with Chelle confirming this would be permissible if not officially tied to WNMC.

September Social

Chelle informed the committee about the possibility of a September make-up bar exam and requested approval to repurpose funds for a social event if the exam occurs; after discussion about timing and fund availability, on motion by Alex, seconded by Janta, the WNMC unanimously (9-0-0) approved to host a September After Bar Exam Social.

Adjournment – Alex

Alex adjourned the meeting at 1:15 p.m.

DRAFT

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Washington New Members Committee

Washington New Members Committee Meeting
Microsoft Teams
Monday, August 17, 2026, | 12:03 p.m. – 1:04 p.m.
Meeting Minutes

WNMC Members Present: Fatima Al-Rikabi, Steven Brown, Ariel Cook, Hanna Harrison, Michelle Hesse, Mason Ji, Mackenzie Lloyd (left 1:01 p.m.), Alexander Reaganson, Matthew Rommelmann, Janta Steele, Stephan Yhann (joined 12:18 p.m.)

WNMC Members Absent: Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Chawisa Laicharoenwat (excused), Bethany Nolan (unexcused), Makenzie Spinks (unexcused)

Board of Governors Liaison: Jordan Couch

Board of Governors Present: Chris Bhang

WSBA Staff: Chelle Gegax – WSBA Member Services and Engagement Staff Liaison, Vanessa Sweeney – WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator, Cate Schur – WSBA Assistant General Counsel, Paris Erikson – WSBA Manager of Volunteer Engagement

Welcome & Introductions – Alex

WNMC Chair Alexander Reaganson opened the meeting at 12:03 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance.

WSBA Updates – Chelle, Jordan

WSBA Member Services Liaison Chelle Gegax stated that the Washington New Members Committee (WNMC)'s July bar exam statement is available on the WNMC webpage and advised linking to it when referencing. The After-Bar-Exam Social will be held September 2 at 7 Seas Brewing in Tacoma, with committee representation needed. Sponsorship for alcohol is being pursued with the Tacoma Pierce County Bar Association.

Board of Governors (BOG) Liaison Jordan Couch provided a BOG update and noted that the BOG sent a letter to the supreme court following their decision regarding the July bar exam, however, their decision didn't change. The next BOG meeting will take place in September. There may be a motion to change or reverse the policy on state unaccredited law schools, which may be of interest to WNMC members.

Spokane Wildfires Assistance – Hanna, Alex

The group discussed the ongoing situation with wildfires in Spokane, noting that while conditions are improving, significant damage has occurred. WNMC Member Hanna Harrison mentioned sharing a list of organizations for donations and suggested reaching out to new members in the affected area to offer support and resources. Chelle agreed and suggested pull a roster of new members in that area, who are directly affected or impacted and go from there. The conversation also touched on the limitations of committee funds and the challenges of organizing physical donations, given the widespread response and logistical constraints. The group agreed to stay connected and continue supporting as needs arise.

Relevant FY 27 Appointment Decisions – WNMC Leadership Team

New WNMC At-Large Position Selection Criteria

Alex reported that the leadership team/recommendations subcommittee met last week to discuss upcoming appointments and shared the selection criteria for new, at-large, topic-specific position – the DEI at-large role in particular – to the WNMC for consideration and input. Governor Chris Bhang applauded the WNMC in creating the DEI at large position, and believes the position is a positive move and suggests keeping it flexible to ensure future success. Gov. Bhang recommends referring to existing documents like the ESG strategic plan and DEI Council materials for definitions, emphasizing the importance of "institutional fluency," so everyone shares a common understanding of terms. The committee reviewed appointment decisions and discussed selection criteria for the DEI at-large role. Members agreed the criteria should remain flexible initially, with definitions (e.g., "underrepresented populations") guided by existing organizational documents like the ESG strategic plan and DEI Council materials to ensure "institutional fluency."

On motion by Hanna, seconded by Janta, the WNMC approved the criteria in substance for the DEI at large position. (10-0-0). (WNMC Member Stephan Yhann arrived at 12:18 p.m. and was not present for the vote.)

ABA District 29 Rep – Janta, Chelle

The group revisited the previously approved split structure for the ABA Young Lawyers Division District Representative; following feedback from ABA staff favoring a single representative for continuity.

On motion by WNMC Member Mason Ji, seconded by WNMC Member Mackenzie Lloyd, and abstention by Alex, the WNMC approved Alex as the district representative for Washington and Oregon for the full two-year term (10-0-1).

Bylaw Amendments Discussion – Cate, Paris

WSBA Manager of Volunteer Engagement Paris Eriksen and WSBA Assistant General Counsel Catherine Schur presented an overview of proposed bylaw and election changes for Board of Governors positions—both congressional and at-large. The primary motivation for these changes is to address persistent challenges in the current process, aiming to make elections clearer, fairer, and easier to

administer. Misaligned timelines for congressional and at large seats have caused confusion among applicants, staff, and voters, with key deadlines conflicting with licensing ballot preparation, candidate campaigning, and board meetings. These issues have made it difficult for entities like the DEI Council and the WNMC to fulfill their responsibilities within compressed timeframes. The proposed changes are designed to increase fairness and clarity for applicants and voters, provide more realistic timelines for council and committee reviews, reduce administrative burden and costs (especially around runoff elections), maintain the entities' role in ensuring diverse representation, and support strong, equitable governance. By modernizing the timeline and simplifying the structure, the goal is to uphold transparency, accessibility, and consistency in leadership selection while honoring the critical contributions of review entities. Alex asked whether the DEI Council had already reviewed the proposal; Paris confirmed a meeting had occurred, noting the Council's main concern was the provision allowing applicants to apply for multiple positions. The Council felt strongly that applicants should pick a single position, as congressional and at large seats serve different purposes. The change from three to two nominees was discussed, with Jordan reflecting on past experiences and noting that while the option to submit three candidates was valuable, flexibility is important. The intention is to encourage contested elections and give both the board and committees more flexibility. Concerns were raised about the provision allowing candidates to apply for multiple positions, especially regarding commitment to representing specific communities. The pros and cons of ranked choice voting were discussed, with benefits including faster elections, reduced costs, and increased participation. The language change would permit ranked choice voting but not require it.

The group was encouraged to provide additional feedback in writing by Friday to help move the changes forward.

Team Updates and Regional Reports – All

October MentorLink Mixer - Chelle

Chelle mentioned that the first MentorLink Mixer of FY27 is slated for October and asked whether the WNMC would like to partner for the event to present on the general topic of “new members”. On motion by Mason, seconded by Mackenzie, the WNMC approved partnering for the October MentorLink Mixer (11-0-0).

Admissions Fee Discussion

WNMC Member Ariel Cook shared thoughts on the proposed changes to the Rule 9 legal intern fee, drawing from personal experience as a recent graduate. Ariel emphasized that Rule 9 legal interns are law students who, after two years of study and living on student loans, are required to pay a \$50 fee before starting their first compensated legal job—typically in public interest roles, not high-paying positions. Ariel noted that the proposed increase to \$200 far exceeds what would be justified by inflation, which would only raise the fee to \$90. Ariel also critiqued the discontinuation of the waiver for students in full-time law school clinics providing free legal services to low-income clients, arguing that the waiver serves an important purpose in promoting access to justice and should be expanded rather

than eliminated. Ariel concluded by recommending further outreach to current students for their perspectives, including connecting with student leaders at Seattle University, University of Washington, and Gonzaga University to gather direct feedback on these changes.

Janta proposed including a copy of the BOG materials that pertains to this topic in the email for reference.

On motion by Stephan, seconded by Ariel, the WNMC approved consent to send an email to active new members and law students (10-0-0). Alex asked if there were any objections to including BOG materials, and Stephan moved for unanimous consent to add copy of BOG materials to the email.

New Ideas for Next Meeting – All

Wellness Report Tee-Up for September Meeting

The wellness report will be discussed at the September meeting.

Adjournment

Alex adjourned the meeting at 1:04 p.m.

Some material in this document was generated using Microsoft Copilot and was reviewed and modified by Vanessa Sweeney, WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator.

FROM ISOLATION TO NORMALIZATION

The WSBA Well-Being Task Force looks to enhance the mental health of Washington's legal institutions

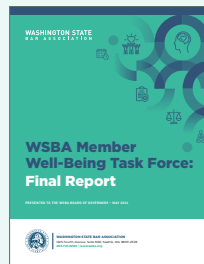
BY KEVIN PLACHY, DAN CRYSTAL, AND JUSTIN BINGHAM

In 2017, the American Bar Association's (ABA) Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs issued The Path to Lawyer Well-Being, a 73-page report that depicts how the legal profession falls far short in lawyer wellness and offers recommendations for the future. Instead of simply improving the counseling and educational features of state bar wellness programs, the ABA proposed broadly improving legal institutions. Included in its recommendations were well-being pledges for law firms; better mental health oversight for law students, judges, and public law practitioners; and court rules that are mindful of the pressures they place upon attorneys. Gradually states began forming committees to answer this call, and in 2024, Washington followed suit.

The WSBA's Well-Being Task Force was formed by the WSBA Board of Governors for a two-year tenure. Out of 42 applications, the task force's 11 members were drawn from big law, small law, the judiciary, including the Washington Supreme Court, and public members with mental health and other related backgrounds. Spokane City Prosecutor Justin Bingham, who has extensive experience supporting criminal practitioners throughout his career, chaired the task force. The endeavor was massive. In addition to 24 task force meetings, nine work groups focused on particular segments and issues within the legal profession. The work groups, which consisted of task force members as well as 19 additional ad hoc members appointed for their expertise, met twice a month to design surveys, hold feedback sessions, and issue findings. The ultimate goal was to submit a final report to the WSBA with tangible steps toward enhancing well-being among WSBA members and the broader Washington legal community.

What follows are short summaries of the findings and recommendations from each work group.

The WSBA Well-Being Survey Work Group. This five-member work group engaged Matthew S. Thiese, Ph.D., MSPH, from the University of Utah, to help design a comprehensive 40-question survey that was administered by the National Business Research Institute (NBRI). Sent to 10,000 WSBA attorneys, the survey received 903 responses. This yielded a 99.8 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error. The findings are too varied to summarize here, but largely reflected a daunting rate of burnout, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thinking among the membership. To read more about the survey results, please review the final report at www.wsba.org/well-being-report. The survey report can be found at Appendix C, p.44.



MORE ONLINE

Access the WSBA Well-Being Task Force Final Report at www.wsba.org/well-being-report.

If you would like to learn more about the WSBA Member Wellness Program and the services we provide, please visit www.wsba.org/wellness.

Kevin Plachy is the WSBA Advancement Department director.

Dan Crystal, PsyD, is the WSBA Member Wellness Program manager.

Justin Bingham is the Spokane city prosecutor and chair of the WSBA Well-Being Task Force.

Law Students and New Attorneys Work Group. This work group surveyed a small sample of law students and new members within Washington using law school channels and the WSBA New Member List Serve. The work group also leveraged information from the larger survey conducted by NBRI. The findings indicated that law students and new practitioners face acute stress during their transition into the profession, often exacerbated by intense workload expectations and a lack of early-career support. Many reported that the pressure to perform during their initial practice years contributed significantly to burnout and anxiety. The task force recommended integrating well-being programming directly into new lawyer orientations and 1L curricula to establish sustainable habits early. Additionally, the report advises providing students and new members with anonymous, low-barrier access to mental health resources and a structured mentorship program.

Private Practice Work Group. This work group examined private practices, including solo/small firms, mid-size firms, and big law. Feedback surveys were also completed by participants at the Solo and Small Firm Conference. The group also drew upon the findings of the membership survey that sought to address the pressures driven by the billable hour. Findings highlighted the significant impact of the billable hour model and a culture that often equates long hours with professional dedication. This environment can lead to social isolation, high rates of substance use, and a persistent stigma that prevents attorneys from seeking help. The report's primary recommendations focus on leadership accountability, urging firm leaders to demonstrate a personal commitment to well-being and to incentivize participation in wellness activities rather than leaving them as purely voluntary options.

The Government and Public Interest (GPI) Work Group. This work group found that GPI attorneys often contend with heavy, unmanageable caseloads and high exposure to vicarious trauma, which were identified as significant occupational hazards. Recommendations from the work group sought to create mentorship, mutual support programs, resources to address the unique

challenges faced by GPI lawyers such as secondary trauma and compassion fatigue, and improved court rules and caseload reduction.

The Judiciary Work Group. This work group engineered a survey of all judges in the state that received a dramatically high 23 percent response rate. In addition to 28 survey questions, 46 pages of qualitative responses were provided. Key struggles included profound professional isolation, exacerbated by the nature of the bench and the pressure to maintain an appearance of constant neutrality. Findings suggest that this isolation can deter judges from acknowledging mental health challenges or substance-use issues until they reach a crisis point. The task force recommended that courts develop specific policies for managing impairment to ensure both judicial well-being and public trust. Special attention was given to the impact of after-hours warrant duty, the pressures of the evaluation and election cycle, and threats made to judicial officers and their families online. Crucially, the report calls for judicial leadership to actively destigmatize help-seeking by openly communicating that well-being is a core judicial priority. Regular, anonymous judicial well-being surveys were proposed to better track progress and identify emerging needs within the courts.

The Suicide and Addiction Work Group. This work group researched Department of Health statistics on attorney fatalities by suicide. A 14-question survey was administered through WSBA sections, county bar associations, and affinity bar associations and offered opportunities for qualitative responses. The 195 responses provided over 18 pages of candor about the challenges of alcoholism, mental health distress, and burnout among WSBA attorneys. The work group's findings revealed that nearly 10 percent of Washington legal professionals experienced suicidal ideation or engaged in self-harm within the prior year, roughly double the rate found in the general adult population. Furthermore, approximately 85 percent of those affected stated that their legal work environment directly contributed to these thoughts. Regarding substance use, 20 percent said they feel concerned about how often they drink alcohol, compared with 10.9 percent reporting concern in the general U.S. adult population. To combat this, the task force

recommends expanding fully confidential, low-barrier clinical evaluation resources and peer-led intervention frameworks. Additionally, the work group advocates for mandatory education on recognizing early warning signs of impairment.

The Diversity Equity and Inclusion Work Group. This work group reviewed research, analyzed WSBA survey data, and identified systemic barriers impacting well-being. The work group reviewed literature and gained information from key sources. Findings indicated that members from historically

Ultimately, transforming the legal culture in Washington requires a unified effort to dismantle systemic barriers.

marginalized groups—including attorneys of color, LGBTQ+ practitioners, and lawyers with disabilities—face disproportionately higher rates of professional isolation, identity-based bias, and burnout. These systemic inequities directly compound existing occupational stressors, which often drive talented, diverse practitioners out of the profession prematurely. The report's primary recommendations focused on building a structured well-being resource hub and embedding mandatory equity-focused well-being education into standard professional development. The work group advised that the WSBA continuously track intersectional demographic data to identify, isolate, and address ongoing disparities in member wellness.

The Member Wellness Program Work Group. This work group found that while various individual wellness resources currently exist, they are underutilized due to lack of awareness or concerns over confidentiality. Crucially, many members expressed concerns that turning to the WSBA's Member Wellness Program for help could compromise their confidentiality or jeopardize their law license. This fear persists despite the fact that Admission and Practice Rule (APR) 19 explicitly ensures the confidentiality of these services and establishes a strict regulatory firewall between disci-

plinary counsel and the Wellness Program. To address this barrier, the task force recommends expanding the pool of available free or low-cost mental health consultations while educating members about the confidentiality protections of APR 19.

The Rules and Regulatory Work Group. This work group focused on institutional policies to support and avoid stigmatizing applicants and members facing mental health or substance use challenges. A key finding indicates that the current framework lacks structured, supportive entry pathways for applicants with a history of impairment, creating barriers to entry into the profession. To address this, the work group supports the implementation of a conditional admission process in Washington, with clear eligibility criteria and monitoring mechanisms. Additionally, the task force recommends exploring structural models like Oregon's State Lawyers Assistance Committee (SLAC) to provide a confidential and rehabilitative alternative to discipline designed to support lawyers whose performance or conduct may be impaired due to mental health challenges, substance use disorders, or other behavioral health issues. These targeted reforms aim to shift aspects of the regulatory environment from a reactive, disciplinary model toward programs focused on early intervention and restorative rehabilitation.

Ultimately, transforming the legal culture in Washington requires a unified effort to dismantle systemic barriers. By prioritizing the normalization of help-seeking to reduce stigma and building deeper community connections, we can counter the isolation experienced across various practices. Concurrently, addressing the structural drivers of stress through workload and regulatory reforms, while integrating equity and inclusivity into all strategies, ensures that systemic pressures are alleviated for all members. Finally, expanding access to holistic resources provides legal professionals with the comprehensive tools needed for long-term health and sustainability. The Board of Governors accepted the final report of the Well-Being Task Force at its May 2026 meeting with the goal of collaborating with WSBA staff and leadership to review and identify the recommendations for implementation. That process is underway. [BN](#)

WASHINGTON STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION



WSBA Member Well-Being Task Force: Final Report

PRESENTED TO THE WSBA BOARD OF GOVERNORS – MAY 2026



WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 600, Seattle, WA 98101-2539

206.727.8200 | www.wsba.org

Acknowledgments

This compilation of work would not be possible without the dedicated contributions of the members of the WSBA Member Well-Being Task Force.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS.

NAME	POSITION
Justin Bingham	Chair and WSBA Member
Emily Arneson	WSBA Member
Melissa Berry	WSBA Member
Darcel Lobo	WSBA Member
Bushra Rahim	WSBA Member
Kyle Sciuchetti	WSBA Member
Judge Michael Finkle, J.D., M.B.A.	Judicial Member
Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis	WA Supreme Court Justice
Susan Lee, Ph.D.	Public Member
Laura Moss, M.D.	Public Member
Sara Smucker Barnwell, Ph.D., M.Ed	Public Member
Dan Crystal, Psy.D.	Staff Liaison
Kevin Plachy, J.D., M.B.A., CWP	Staff Liaison
Adely Ruiz, LICSW	Staff Liaison
Nam Nguyen	Board of Governors Liaison
Allison Widney	Board of Governors Liaison



AD HOC MEMBERS

Arielle Adams,
WSBA Member

Kevin Bank,
WSBA Member

Nik Chourey,
OSB Member

Marci Comeau,
WSBA Member

Michele Carney,
WSBA Member

Rachelle Eason,
WSBA Member

Michelle Fontenot, M.Ed,
WSBA Member

Doug Ende,
WSBA Member

Gerald Heppler, J.D.

Melissa Jaffe,
WSBA Member

Susanna Kanther, Psy.D., M.S.

Miriam Korngold, J.D., LMHCA,
WSBA Member

Phillip Lentz, LMHC

Aaron Paker,
WSBA Member

Annasara Purcell, J.D., LMFT,
WSBA Member

Judge Sonia Rodriguez-True,
WSBA Member

Brian Seguin, MLIS

Jenn Stuber, Ph.D.

Jerry Thomas,
WSBA Member

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction to Findings and Recommendations	3
Purpose and Scope	3
Structure and Methodology	3
Survey Context	3
Law Students and Lawyer Practice Type	5
Law Student and New Member Workgroup	5
Private Practice Workgroup	7
Government and Public Interest Workgroup	10
Judiciary Workgroup	13
Critical Issues Across the Profession	17
Suicide and Addiction Workgroup	17
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workgroup	22
Bar Association and Regulatory	24
Member Wellness Program Workgroup	24
Rules and Regulatory	27
Looking Forward	32
A Shared Responsibility for Well-Being	32
Key Themes Across Workgroups	32
The Path Forward	33
Call to Action	33
Appendices	34
A. Well-Being Taskforce Charter	35
B. Summary of Recommendations	41
C. WSBA Well-Being Survey Report	44
D. Suicide and Addiction Supplemental Survey Results	64
E. Judiciary Supplemental Survey Results	71
F. Workgroup Literature Reviews	85

Executive Summary

This Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) Well-Being Task Force (WBTF) Final Report provides a comprehensive roadmap for improving the well-being of Washington legal professionals.¹

Formed in January 2024, the WBTF was charged with identifying systemic challenges and recommending actionable strategies aligned with national standards such as *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being*.²

Drawing on findings from eight specialized workgroups and the WSBA Well-Being Survey (WBS), the final report highlights widespread stress, burnout, and mental health concerns across the profession. Lawyers in private practice and government roles report the highest levels of strain, while early-career lawyers face compounded challenges from heavy workloads, imposter syndrome, and significant law school debt.

Alarmingly, ten percent of survey respondents disclosed suicidal thoughts in the past year, and twenty percent expressed concern about alcohol use. Despite the availability of well-being resources, fewer than half of WSBA members have utilized them, citing stigma, confidentiality fears, and lack of awareness.

Legal professionals from communities that have historically been excluded from the profession experience even greater stress and burnout, often compounded by microaggressions and underrepresentation. Judges face unique stressors, including isolation, decision fatigue, and security threats, while cultural norms in the legal profession discourage help-seeking.

FIVE RECOMMENDATION THEMES EMERGED ACROSS THE WORKGROUPS:

- 1 Normalize help-seeking** through clear, repeated communications and leadership modeling that reduce stigma and make it safe to use support without fear of disciplinary consequences.
- 2 Expand education and training**, including no- or low-cost continuing legal education programs (CLEs) and practical skills such as Mental Health First Aid, trauma-informed practice, boundary setting, and productivity as well-being.
- 3 Improve access to resources and protect confidentiality** by offering anonymous, easy-to-find referral directories; extending after-hours/telehealth options; and forging partnerships (e.g., gym/well-being discounts) that meet members where they are.
- 4 Build connection and mentoring at scale** — from structured mentorship for new lawyers and judges to peer support networks and small-group communities that reduce isolation, especially in solo/small practice and rural benches.
- 5 Pursue structural and policy reforms** like reasonable caseload/workload standards, court

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1. The term *legal professionals* encompasses judicial officers, lawyers, and law students.

2. Nat'l Task Force on Law. Well-Being, *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change* (2017), https://instwellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/path_to_lawyer_well_being.pdf.

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and regulatory updates (e.g., well-being aligned rules/comments), and an employer Well-Being Pledge—to align incentives with sustainable practice.

A complete, at-a-glance list of recommendations appears in the Summary of Recommendations in [Appendix B](#).

The path forward requires collaboration among WSBA, courts, law schools, employers, and affinity groups to measure progress. Above all, leadership must drive a cultural shift that treats well-being as integral to professional competence and ethical practice. By embracing these recommendations, Washington can lead the nation in creating a legal profession where well-being is not aspirational but foundational.

By embracing these recommendations, Washington can lead the nation in creating a legal profession where well-being is not aspirational but foundational.

Introduction to Findings and Recommendations

Purpose and Scope

The WSBA established the Taskforce in January 2024 with a clear mandate: to advance the well-being of Washington's legal professionals by identifying systemic challenges and recommending actionable strategies. The Charter emphasizes alignment with national standards, including *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being*,³ and recognizes that the well-being of legal professionals is essential to both competent and ethical practice. The WSBA Board of Governors (BOG) adopted member well-being as an organizational priority in November 2023, underscoring the importance of this work.⁴

This report represents the culmination of the Task Force's efforts and is presented to the BOG at the conclusion of the Taskforce's term in March 2026. It synthesizes findings and recommendations from eight specialized workgroups, each focused on a distinct area of concern, and provides a roadmap for improving well-being across the legal profession in Washington.

Structure and Methodology

The WBTF is committed to advancing the well-being of legal professionals, not only at the individual level, but also through systemic reforms within legal institutions that adversely affect professional health. To support this mission, the WBTF established eight workgroups covering a wide range of legal professionals and topics.

Four workgroups focused on distinct areas of legal practice: the Law Students and New Members Workgroup, Private Practice Workgroup, Government

and Public Interest Workgroup, and Judiciary Workgroup. Two workgroups addressed critical issues impacting the profession: the Suicide and Addiction Workgroup and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup. Two additional workgroups concentrated on bar association and regulatory matters: the Member Wellness Program Workgroup and the Rules and Regulatory Workgroup. Collectively, these workgroups provide a comprehensive framework for promoting well-being and fostering meaningful change across the legal community.

Each workgroup conducted research, reviewed relevant literature, and engaged stakeholders to identify challenges and propose solutions. Some work groups supplemented their analysis with targeted surveys to capture perspectives unique to their focus area. This report consolidates those findings and recommendations into a unified document, structured to present findings first, followed by actionable recommendations for each area.

Survey Context

A cornerstone of the WBTF's work was the WSBA Member Well-Being Survey ([Appendix C](#)), developed and deployed by the Member Survey Workgroup between late 2024 and early 2025. The survey was administered by the National Business Research Institute (NBRI) from January 28 to February 20, 2025, in collaboration with Professor Matthew S. Thiese of the

CONTINUED >

3. [National Task Force on Lawyer Well Being](#) (2017) *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*. American Bar Association.

4. WSBA Well-Being Task Force Charter, 2024.01.12; Retrieve here: [member-well-being-task-force-charter.pdf](#).

CONTINUED >

University of Utah School of Medicine. Professor Thiese attended workgroup meetings, actively contributed to the development of survey questions alongside Task Force members, and assisted with interpreting results and conducting demographic segmentation analysis. The Task Force does not claim statistical causality or correlation when discussing the results of the segment analyses. Further research and analysis of each segment would be necessary to draw those statistical determinations.

The survey achieved 903 responses (approximately 9% response rate) from a proportional sample of WSBA members across Washington, yielding a 99.8% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. This robust dataset provided critical insights into the well-being of Washington's legal professionals and informed the Task Force's recommendations. The survey also included segmentation analysis across practice settings, career stages, and demographics, revealing unique stressors for solo practitioners, government lawyers, and new members.

These findings underscore systemic challenges in workload, workplace culture, and access to support. Relevant findings from the survey will be referenced throughout the report in each workgroup section to provide context and support for recommendations.

Supplemental surveys conducted by other workgroups explored domain-specific issues; however, these should not be conflated with the primary survey administered in partnership with NBRI and Professor Thiese. Where applicable, results from the supplemental surveys will be discussed in the relevant workgroup section.



KEY FINDINGS

Stress and Burnout



Nearly **58%** of respondents reported feeling burned out regularly or occasionally, with **8.8%** experiencing burnout daily. Rates were highest among new members (**80%**) and lawyers in medium and large firms (**64.2%**).

Mental Health and Suicidal Ideation



15.7% reported persistent feelings of depression, and **56.8%** experienced anxiety symptoms. Alarming, **9.9%** disclosed suicidal thoughts or actions in the past year, with most attributing these to workplace factors.

Workload Pressures



The majority worked 40–59 hours per week, with new members and large-firm lawyers reporting significantly longer hours. **66.9%** experienced stress from billable hour expectations, and **36.5%** were expected to be available outside work hours regularly.

Financial Stressors



77.1% graduated with student loan debt, and over half reported that debt negatively impacted mental well-being. Among new members, **46.1%** carried debt exceeding \$150,000.

Resource Utilization



Despite high stress levels, only **43.5%** had used WSBA well-being resources, with stigma and lack of awareness cited as barriers.

Law Students and Lawyer Practice Type

Law Student and New Member Workgroup

Susan Lee (Chair), Bushra Rahim,
Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis,
Gerald Heppler, Phillip Lentz, Adely Ruiz

Overview

The Law Student and New Member Workgroup's approach incorporates a thorough review of existing research, new data collection via targeted outreach, and the formulation of actionable recommendations. As part of its research, the workgroup reviewed national and institutional studies. The full listing of literature reviewed can be found in [Appendix F](#).

WSBA Well-Being Survey Insights

Results for New Member respondents were segmented and compared to the responses for all respondents (general legal population). The analysis revealed significant well-being challenges for the New Member population compared to the general legal population:

- **Higher Workload:** New Member respondents reported billing 31-40 hours per week at a rate of **18.4%**, compared to **11.9%** of the general legal population. For 41-50 hours/week, **15.4%** of New Member respondents fell into this category compared to **6.3%** of the general legal population.
- **More Frequent Worry Over Billable Hours:** **30.4%** of New Member respondents reported worrying about billable hours daily, compared to **15.3%** of the general legal population.

- **Significantly Higher Law School Debt:** **46.1%** of New Member respondents reported graduating with more than **\$150,000** in law school debt, compared to only **14.9%** of the general legal population.

These results indicate an outsized burden on new lawyers, compounding the stressors identified in the literature and reinforcing the urgency of targeted well-being interventions.

Supplemental Survey Questions and Purpose

The survey aimed to identify key wellness challenges and opportunities in the legal field. The survey was also distributed to new practitioners within the broader WSBA community. We received 24 responses. Each question's rationale and purpose were discussed at length among workgroup members:

1. What does wellness mean to you?

Purpose: To establish a baseline understanding of how participants perceive wellness.

2. Do the available wellness services seem approachable? Why or why not?

Purpose: To evaluate accessibility and stigma surrounding existing wellness and mental health services.

3. Are there barriers preventing you from using wellness services?

Purpose: To identify obstacles, including work/office culture, billable hours demand precluding regular use of wellness services, and systemic expectations.

4. Has utilizing wellness services improved your performance as a student or practitioner? How?

Purpose: To determine if wellness services have a measurable impact on performance and resilience.

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5. How could the legal field better embrace your definition of wellness?

Purpose: To explore cultural and structural changes that could enhance well-being by expanding traditional definitions of wellness.

Supplemental Survey Distribution and Results

A link to the supplemental survey was shared with key stakeholders and specific individuals within our target demographic. Specifically, the survey went to law students from Gonzaga Law, Seattle University School of Law, and the University of Washington School of Law.

KEY INSIGHTS:

- Wellness defined as balance, mental clarity, and self-care
- Barriers included stigma, lack of time, institutional norms
- Desire for more visible and culturally integrated wellness support
- Positive impact of wellness services when accessed

The results underscored the importance of well-being for students and new members. Respondents consistently defined wellness as a state of overall health and balance—mental, physical, and emotional—supported by time, relationships, and freedom from overwhelming stress or financial strain. One participant captured this sentiment by stating that wellness allows individuals “to enjoy life and pursue fulfillment within one’s reality.”

Despite the shared value, the findings revealed notable barriers:

- **29%** of respondents reported gaps in access and awareness, saying they are “not sure what is available,” find it “intimidating to go the first time,” and expressed a desire for clearer paths to services.

- **20%** identified time and workload as obstacles, citing “no time to research,” an “overbearing work culture,” and the need for “stronger and stricter boundaries between school/work and personal life.”
- **16%** called for systemic and cultural reform, emphasizing the need to reduce stigma around therapy.” Another respondent reinforced this by urging the profession to “normalize therapy.”

Recommendations

The workgroup developed a four-stage progression and additional recommendations.

FOUR-STAGE PROGRESSION

1. Provide General Support

- Offer presentations on stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, suicidality, addiction, interpersonal effectiveness, empathy, community building, boundary setting, motivation and focus, sleep and diet hygiene
- Establish a calendar of events aligned with industry trends
- Develop mental health support packages for self-use

2. Foster Connection to Resources

- Explore and document targeted resources within and outside of WSBA
- Provide insight into legal culture to bridge communication with decision makers

3. Facilitate Community Building

- Collaborate intentionally on programming
- Recruit external experts for presentations (legal professionals, substance use consultants, organizational psychologists) targeted to support new members
- Develop peer support groups, yoga classes, allyship initiatives
- Explore a formal mentorship program for new members

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4. Cultivate Culture Change

- Encourage myth-busting and resilience models
- Provide opportunities for interpersonal mediation and crisis prevention
- Normalize holistic care for legal professionals
- The workgroup suggests WSBA flag these recommendations to the Washington New Member Committee and New Member Education Program

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Implement Well-Being Curriculum in Law Schools

- Mandatory well-being course at the start of law school and annually thereafter⁵

6. Provide Well-Being CLEs

- Deliver more CLE credits to support practitioner well-being

Private Practice
Workgroup

Annasara Purcell (Chair), Melissa Berry,
Dan Crystal, Darcel Lobo, Kyle Sciuchetti,
Melissa Jaffe, Aaron Paker.

Overview

The Private Practice Workgroup examined well-being challenges for lawyers in solo/small, medium, and large firms through survey data and a supplemental solo/small firm practice survey, and review of other states' initiatives. These findings informed recommendations aimed at addressing systemic and cultural barriers to well-being.

WSBA Well-Being Survey Results

The WSBA well-being survey results made clear that private practice is not a monolith and lawyers working for different types of private practice firms face significantly different issues. Lawyers running

their own solo practice, for example, report working slightly less hours than the general lawyer population and experiencing less depression on average. These lawyers, however, did report having fewer employer resources to help with well-being.

On the other end of the spectrum, lawyers who worked for medium to large firms were more likely to be expected to bill more than 1,701 hours per year, and lawyers with higher billing expectations were more likely to experience an array of negative well-being outcomes (including feelings of burnout, considering leaving the profession, and higher levels of concern about their substance use). Litigators reported having greater levels of distress when compared to non-litigator groups: they reported a higher rate of concern that work causes alcohol consumption, a 13% higher rate of exposure to traumatic content, and less sleep than the non-litigation group.

Nonetheless, two important commonalities emerged across all private practice lawyer sub-groups. First, stigma around mental health challenges or substance use disorder poses a major barrier to seeking treatment.

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5. We note that ABA Standard 508 provides a law school shall provide all its students, regardless of enrollment or scheduling option, with information on law student well-being resources. [2025-2026 Standards Chapter 5](#)

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Respondents overwhelmingly stated that they would not consider disclosing any sort of mental health or substance use challenge to their colleagues for fear of repercussions. As one respondent put it, “Very bad idea to tell a supervisor you are struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues. Even an empathetic supervisor is looking at the bottom line, your productivity, and your potential replacement.” Thus, in spite of the increased emphasis that many employers have put on well-being in the past decade, most lawyers remain skeptical that their employer would offer meaningful support if that undermined profitability.

Second, while respondents offered suggestions for how to improve well-being within the profession, many respondents also stated that they viewed the problems as intractable. Many respondents suggested that the biggest barriers to well-being were not imposed by employers or courts but instead were the inevitable result of the legal profession attracting perfectionistic, high-stress individuals and putting them in adversarial proceedings against one another. As one respondent stated, “Depression and anxiety is inherent in the perfectionist adversarial system we work within. So long as the system remains the same, and lawyers have to fight with one another for their clients and be constantly concerned about making mistakes, the profession will continue to have lawyers struggling with depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.” These responses suggest that although offering new specific resources might be helpful for lawyers, it is equally important to systemically normalize mistake-making while also continuing to promote civility within the profession.

Private Practice Work Group Supplemental Survey Results

To supplement the Well-Being Survey the Work Group prepared and distributed a seven-question survey to attendees of the 2024 Solo/Small Practice conference and received twenty-six responses. The supplemental

survey provided deeper insight into unique stressors and resource gaps.

Respondents identified **practice management stress (50%)** and **isolation (31%)** as the most significant barriers to well-being. While many cited freedom and autonomy as positive aspects of solo practice, these benefits were overshadowed by the strain of running a business and the absence of collegial support.

Resource utilization patterns were telling: CLEs were the most commonly accessed WSBA resource. Very few respondents reported using peer advising or mental health services—largely due to stigma and confidentiality concerns. When asked what resources would most improve their well-being, lawyers expressed strong interest in **gym partnerships (53%)**, **anonymous professional directories (42%)**, and **published “stories from the trenches” (42%)** featuring candid narratives from peers.

Comments revealed the emotional toll of isolation and the desire for community:

“I often feel like I’m practicing in a vacuum. There’s no one to bounce ideas off or share the stress.”

“Managing the business side of my practice is overwhelming—I spend more time on admin than on law.”

These findings highlight the need for programs that reduce isolation, normalize help-seeking, and provide practical tools for managing both the emotional and operational demands of solo and small firm practice.

Common Themes and Conclusions

Several overarching themes emerged from both surveys and workgroup discussions. Stigma remains a pervasive barrier, preventing lawyers from seeking help for mental health or substance use concerns. Many respondents

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expressed fear that disclosure could harm their reputation or career, reinforcing the need for confidential and anonymous resources. Isolation, particularly among solo and small firm practitioners, was identified as a significant contributor to stress and burnout. Respondents emphasized that programs fostering connection, even those not explicitly well-being focused, can have a meaningful impact on well-being.

Additionally, cultural factors within the profession, such as adversarial norms, perfectionism, and billable hour pressures were repeatedly cited as drivers of stress. These systemic issues cannot be solved by individual effort alone; they require organizational and community-level interventions. The workgroup concluded that addressing these themes through education, mentorship, and employer engagement is essential to creating a sustainable culture of well-being.

Recommendations

1. Make more CLEs focused on well-being available and make one such CLE per year mandatory

Through well-being-focused CLEs, law firms and WSBA can equip lawyers with tools and knowledge they need to maintain their mental health and resilience in the face of an inherently high-stress career. These CLEs could address topics such as stress management, mindfulness, burnout prevention, and work-life balance. The WSBA currently offers four complementary programs each year: a one-credit free CLE on well-being ethics, two Legal Lunchbox CLEs, and a free CLE during Well-Being in Law Week. At minimum, WSBA should maintain this level of free programming and explore expanding it further. A WSBA well-being MCLE requirement of at least one well-being CLE credit annually would help reduce stigma and signal that mental health is as important as legal skills, encouraging lawyers to seek support without fear of judgment.

2. Publish “Stories from the Trenches”

Access to real-life narratives from lawyers about their struggles and successes with well-being through publication in *Bar News* or the WSBA website (anonymous or attributed) would help members feel less isolated and foster a culture of openness. These stories should cover diverse topics, including mental health, substance use, and resilience strategies.

3. Make well-being resources available without a login

Fear of stigma prevents many lawyers from accessing WSBA well-being resources that require login or direct contact. Publishing a list of vetted well-being professionals—therapists, counselors, coaches—without login requirements that could appear in *Bar News* or on the WSBA website would ensure confidentiality and ease of access.

4. Create programs to build community and support for Small/Solo Practices

Isolation was cited as a major barrier by 31% of solo/small firm respondents. The WSBA should create programs that foster connection, such as small-group coaching, local networking events, and WSBA-sponsored discounts for well-being services like gyms and counseling. These initiatives would provide both professional and personal support, reducing loneliness and stress.

5. Develop a mentorship program for new lawyers

Mentorship is a proven strategy to reduce isolation and support new lawyers. The WSBA should create a structured mentoring program pairing all newly minted lawyers with experienced lawyers for 12–18 months. Features should include CLE credit for participants, a uniform curriculum, individualized plans, and mentor training that incorporates [Mental Health First Aid](#). Group mentoring options should also be offered to build community.

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6. Implement a Well-Being Pledge with resourcing from WSBA

Employer policies significantly influence lawyer well-being. The WSBA should adopt a program modeled

on [Colorado's Well-Being Pledge](#), which provides resources, guidance, and recognition for firms that commit to promoting flexibility, civility, and mental health support. This initiative would encourage systemic change and accountability within private practice environments.

Government and Public Interest Workgroup

Judge Michael Finkle (Chair), Melissa Berry, Justin Bingham, Marci Comeau, Marlene Otero, Kevin Plachy, Kyle Sciuchetti.

Overview

The Government and Public Interest Workgroup focused on identifying well-being issues specific to lawyers in government or legal aid settings. This includes criminal prosecution and defense, civil practice representing government entities, legal aid, and other public interest contexts, including Qualified Legal Service Providers within Washington. These lawyers are referred to throughout this report as “GPI lawyers.”

Government lawyers work in environments that differ markedly from private practice. Public interest lawyers often deal with difficult subject matter, including criminal law, family defense, immigration, and other areas that place enormous strain on the lawyer. As one survey respondent stated:

“We can’t discuss our client issues with mental health professionals because of client confidentiality. It all just lives in my head... what people have done to each other eats at my soul like cancer.”

The GPI carried out its mission with a two-pronged approach:

1. Examine the results of the WSBA Well-Being Survey and determine whether there were significant differences in survey answers between GPI lawyers and all other lawyers answering the survey (“general population”).
2. Develop a supplemental well-being survey that explored issues unique to GPI lawyers.

Key Findings from WSBA Well-Being Survey

The workgroup gleaned some important information by exploring marked differences in how GPI lawyers responded to the general survey compared to the general population (i.e. all respondents). Those differences highlight both well-being drawbacks to GPI lawyers and well-being advantages for GPI lawyers compared to their counterparts.

- **Demographics:** Higher proportion of younger and women lawyers in GPI roles; lower percentage of White lawyers than general population.
- **Work Schedule:** GPI lawyers reported working a standard work week of 40-44 hours
- **Burnout:** GPI lawyers considered leaving the profession at rates 10% higher than general population lawyers.
- **Stress and Trauma:** GPI lawyers experience more job-related trauma and compassion fatigue, impacting well-being outside of work.
- **Financial Strain:** Student loan debt and low salaries significantly affect well-being.

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- **Positive Factors:** Mission-driven work, job stability, and camaraderie were cited as supports for well-being.

GPI Supplemental Survey Questions and Methodology

The supplemental survey explored multiple dimensions of lawyer well-being. It asked respondents to assess how they prioritize well-being, the impact of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, and to identify factors negatively affecting their well-being from a provided list. Respondents ranked their current level of burnout on a scale of 1-10 and evaluated how organizational funding and personal finances — including student loan debt, cost of living, and lower salaries — affect stress and well-being. The supplemental survey also examined participation in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program and its influence on well-being. The survey was distributed across multiple channels and list serves targeting government and public interest lawyers and received 53 responses.

The supplemental survey reveals a profession marked by both deep fulfillment and persistent strain. Respondents emphasized that mission-driven work, job stability, and supportive colleagues were central to their well-being, helping to balance the pressures of their roles. Many found meaning in serving the public and valued the opportunity to do impactful legal work. The PSLF program played a notable role, with a majority citing it as either a motivator for entering the field or a crucial support that made staying in public service feasible. However, concerns about the current state of PSLF and its reliability raise significant well-being implications for public service lawyers.

At the same time, the data points to systemic impediments that hinder sustainability in these roles. Lawyers reported low salaries, long hours, and emotional exhaustion as major stressors—conditions compounded by underinvestment in well-being

infrastructure and inequitable workplace expectations. Chronic underfunding and lack of institutional support contribute to burnout and turnover. While purpose drives this workforce, meaningful reform is needed to ensure that public interest lawyers can continue to serve effectively and sustainably.

Key Findings

Several key drivers of professional satisfaction emerged as significant supports for practitioner well-being. A substantial majority of respondents (**83%**) identified mission-driven work as a primary contributor to their mental health, while **77%** cited the importance of job stability. Furthermore, **71%** of those surveyed highlighted professional camaraderie as a critical factor in maintaining a healthy work environment. Financial incentives also play a structural role in retention and stability, with over **60%** of respondents noting that the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program directly influenced their decision to remain in public service roles.

The following data highlights the primary negative factors and systemic stressors currently undermining attorney well-being and retention. A significant majority of respondents (**76%**) identified low salary as a primary barrier to professional sustainability, while **69%** cited the prevalence of long work hours as a recurring challenge. Beyond these structural issues, the emotional toll of legal practice is evident: **62%** of practitioners reported burnout stemming from compassion fatigue, with **33%** specifically noting its negative impact on their overall well-being. Additionally, **29%** identified vicarious trauma as a significant factor impeding their professional health, suggesting a critical need for enhanced psychological support and trauma-informed management within the bar.

Common Themes and Conclusions

The supplemental survey underscores a dual reality: public interest lawyers derive profound meaning from their work yet face structural and emotional challenges

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that threaten long-term sustainability. Mission-driven work and collegial support are strong protective factors, but they are offset by chronic underfunding, high caseloads, and low salaries. Compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma are prevalent, particularly among those handling sensitive or traumatic cases, and these stressors often lead to burnout and attrition.

Financial strain, including student loan debt and cost-of-living pressures, further compounds stress, even for those participating in PSLF. Respondents expressed concern about the uncertainty surrounding PSLF and its impact on career decisions. Additionally, stigma around mental health persists, with lawyers fearing that seeking treatment could jeopardize their license or professional standing. Addressing these systemic issues requires coordinated efforts to improve working conditions, provide targeted well-being resources, and advocate for structural reforms that reduce excessive workloads and inequitable expectations.

Recommendations

The GPI identified potential areas for increasing lawyer well-being that encompass the whole person. Recommendations include:

1. Improve Working Conditions and Court Rules

Advocate for reforms in court rules to reduce unhealthy filing deadlines and conflicting trial schedules. Increase judicial training to enhance professionalism and civility in the courtroom, reducing stress for GPI lawyers.

2. Develop Well-being Support Programs Targeted to GPI Lawyers

Focus WSBA Member Wellness Program resources on addressing secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. Provide robust education and support tailored to the unique challenges faced by GPI lawyers, including tools for managing emotional exhaustion.

3. Create Mutual Support Programs

Recruit and train WSBA peer advisors to help GPI lawyers manage stress, burnout, and trauma. Maintain an accessible directory of organizations offering mutual support programs, such as Washington Lawyers Assisting Lawyers, to foster community and resilience.

4. Expand Mental Health Education and Resources

Provide education to dispel stigma and clarify that seeking mental health treatment will not result in disciplinary action. Promote mental health resources broadly and accessibly. As one supplemental survey respondent noted, *“There seems to still be a feeling among Bar members with mental or behavioral health disorders that taking leaves of absence, seeking alternative treatments, or admitting to needing treatment... may lead to a determination that they are unfit to practice law.”* WSBA should communicate clearly—through rules, standards, and outreach—that seeking help is safe and encouraged.

5. Offer Physical Well-being Support Programs

Examine the feasibility of partnering with gyms or well-being providers to offer discounted memberships. Encourage physical activity as a proven method to reduce stress and burnout, contributing to increased effectiveness in legal practice. Nearly 55% of public interest lawyers indicated this resource could support their well-being.

6. Reduce Caseloads

Advocate for manageable caseload standards to alleviate stress and improve retention. High caseloads are driving many public interest lawyers, particularly prosecutors and public defenders, out of the field. WSBA has issued updated criminal defense caseload standards, and the Washington Supreme Court has revised its standards. While

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implementation remains challenging, WSBA can convene stakeholders—including public defense employers and judicial administrators—to address these issues and emphasize the link between excessive workloads and lawyer burnout, suicide, and substance use.

Judiciary Workgroup

Judge Michael Finkle (Chair), Emily Arneson, Dan Crystal, Susannah Kanther, Judge Sonia Rodriguez-True, Sara Smucker Barnwell.

Overview

The Judiciary Workgroup focused on identifying well-being issues unique to judges across all levels; Municipal, District, Superior Courts, the Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court. Two workgroup members also serve on the Judicial Assistance Services Program (JASP) which provides confidential peer support to judges facing mental health, substance use, or other challenges. The workgroup's mission was to develop recommendations to improve judicial well-being through a multi-pronged approach: creating a supplemental survey to explore issues unique to judges, analyzing WSBA Well-Being Survey data for judicial trends, reviewing extensive written comments for qualitative insights, and conducting a literature review of judicial well-being research.

7. Develop Best Practices Toolkit

Create toolkits for GPI lawyers outlining client expectations, timelines, and strategies for managing trauma and stress. Partner with Qualified Legal Service Providers and agencies like Office of Public Defense to deliver training and practical resources.

Overlapping Concerns that Affect the Judiciary

Judges serve in courts with varying resources, creating disparities in administrative support and access to specialized proceedings. On-call warrant duty often requires judges to be available 24/7, disrupting sleep and family life. Governance structures based on seniority can leave newer judges feeling excluded from decision-making. Security concerns remain pressing, with judges exposed to threats and lacking adequate protections such as secure parking or courthouse access.

Literature Review

National and international studies corroborate these findings. The ABA's *Stress and Resiliency in the U.S. Judiciary* (2020)⁶ and the United Nations' *Global Judiciary Integrity Network Survey* (2022)⁷ highlight similar stressors: isolation, decision burden, and safety concerns. Both studies emphasize the need for confidential mental health support and cultural change to normalize help-seeking. Washington's JASP program aligns with these recommendations, offering peer counseling and professional therapy as valued resources.

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6. *Stress and Resiliency in the U.S. Judiciary*, Journal of the Professional Lawyer (2020).

7. *Exploring Linkages Between Judicial Well-Being and Judicial Integrity*, United Nations 2022 Survey, Office of Drugs and Crime – Global Judiciary Integrity Network (March 2022).

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In the [State of Judges Well-Being: a Report on the 2019 National Judicial Stress and Resiliency Survey](#)⁸ the survey revealed distressing degrees of trauma, insomnia, depression, burnout and suicidal ideation among judges. This led the workgroup to ask specific questions in drafting a supplemental survey.

Judicial Themes Reflected in the WSBA Well-Being Survey

Survey data and narrative responses reveal a judiciary deeply committed to public service but operating under conditions of chronic stress, isolation, and structural barriers to help-seeking.

Burnout among judges shows a polarized pattern: nearly one-third report feeling burned out daily or regularly, while a similar proportion report burnout rarely or never. This suggests a culture that suppresses moderate expressions of distress, leaving judges either to normalize chronic pressure or endure it until severe.

Despite high stress levels, judges are less likely than lawyers to consider leaving the profession, constrained by structural factors such as fixed terms, re-election pressures, pension systems, and public visibility. Financial stress plays a smaller role for judges compared to lawyers, but economic security does not protect against trauma exposure or suicidal ideation.

Narrative responses reflected experiences of heightened scrutiny, interruptions, and reputational risk when seeking help. One judge noted, “Judges who talk about stress are seen as weak.” Another shared, “I have a mental illness I keep to myself because it would end my career.” These comments underscore the stigma surrounding mental health care. These experiences were more pronounced among, though certainly not limited to, women judges.

Institutional factors—such as relentless workloads, after-hours warrant duty, limited administrative support, and inconsistent onboarding—compound stress and erode work-life boundaries. Judges reported impaired concentration, decision fatigue, and intrusive rumination following high-stakes rulings, symptoms consistent with chronic occupational stress and secondary trauma. As one judge described, “*The emergency conditions never end... you work extra hard every day just to keep up.*” Another added, “*Decision fatigue. In a high-volume court, there is little time for research, contemplation and deliberation in decision-making.*”

Isolation is a defining feature of judicial distress. Many judges lack meaningful collegial connection or mentorship, particularly in single-judge courts or among judges from communities that have been historically excluded from the profession. “*I expected a supportive bench; instead, I found silence,*” wrote one respondent. Others expressed frustration with inconsistent onboarding and mentorship, noting, “*Every new judicial officer should have a mentor/support on their bench and another mentor/support outside of their bench.*”

Personal safety concerns and public scrutiny further exacerbate stress, with **80%** of judges reporting disturbing communications or threats and **60%** fearing for their families’ safety. One judge shared, “*I was doxed after a release decision; the threats were terrifying.*” Another lamented, “*It is frustrating being mischaracterized or attacked in the media and not being able to defend myself.*”

In sum, judicial well-being is not simply a matter of personal resilience but of institutional design. Structural lock-in, stigma, and isolation magnify risk, underscoring

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8. *The State of Judges’ Well-Being: A Report on the 2019 National Judicial Stress and Resiliency Survey*, Judicature Vol. 107 No. 1 (2023).

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the need for systemic, preventive, and culturally anchored reforms.

Supplemental Survey Findings

The Judiciary Workgroup Survey was designed to capture factors influencing judicial well-being, including workload, mental health, collegiality, and institutional culture. Distributed to 631 judicial officers statewide in collaboration with WSBA, the Superior Court Judges Association, and the District and Municipal Court Judges Association, the survey achieved a strong **25%** response rate (156 responses).

KEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS INCLUDE:

- Superior Court judges accounted for **49%** of responses
- District Court judges for **27%**
- Municipal Court judges for **14%**
- **40%** of respondents had served less than five years
- **27%** had served 6–10 years
- **23%** had served 11–20 years
- **29%** of judges identified as members of underrepresented or marginalized groups, highlighting the importance of equity considerations in judicial well-being initiatives

While **92%** of judges reported being “very satisfied” or “mostly satisfied” with their career choice, the data reveal significant challenges to mental health and work-life balance. Judges described chronic stress, heavy caseloads, and emotional fatigue as defining features of their work. Reduced sleep was reported by 59% of respondents, compassion fatigue by 54%, and intrusive thoughts about decisions by 55%. Many judges noted that vacations offer little relief, as time off often results in overwhelming backlogs upon return. One judge observed: “When I take time off, I have a choice of

working during vacation or facing a HUGER backlog when I return.”

After-hours warrant duty emerged as a major stressor, with **79%** of judges handling search warrants outside normal hours. Nearly half (**48%**) reported reduced sleep quality as a result, and **23%** indicated decreased work performance the following day. Judges expressed frustration with this expectation, noting “*I hate doing search warrants,*” and emphasizing the need for rest to maintain judicial performance: “*Individuals deserve a judge in the courtroom who is fully alert.*”

Emotional fatigue and vicarious trauma were also prevalent. Judges presiding over child welfare, sexual assault, and criminal cases reported symptoms consistent with secondary trauma, including depression, anxiety, and decision fatigue. **29%** of judges reported weekly challenges with concentration, and **7%** reported daily or continual struggles. One judge shared: “*Sometimes we know the back story, but the jury doesn’t... it’s emotionally exhausting.*” Another reflected: “*When harm follows a decision I made, it affects me deeply even if it was legally correct.*”

Isolation and lack of collegial connection were recurring themes. Judges in single-judge courts or from communities that are underrepresented and marginalized in the profession often feel socially and professionally disconnected. While most have colleagues they can call, time pressures and cultural norms in the legal profession limit meaningful interaction. Mentorship programs were described as inconsistent or ineffective, leaving new judges vulnerable to a “sink or swim” culture. Stigma around mental health remains a powerful inhibitor. Only **20%** of judges reported using sick leave for mental health, and just **15%** rely on mental health professionals. Many fear that seeking help could damage their reputation or re-election chances.

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Institutional culture and leadership gaps further compound stress. Some benches were described as toxic or cliquish, with poor communication and favoritism. Judges requested feedback systems and presiding judge evaluations to prevent misuse of authority. Comments included, *“Presiding judges can be tyrants; there’s no check on that,”* and *“Our culture rewards martyrdom—whoever works the most is seen as the best.”*

Finally, personal safety and public scrutiny emerged as significant concerns. Elected judges reported heightened anxiety during election cycles, with 57% endorsing impacts on family life. These findings paint a vivid picture of a judiciary that remains deeply committed to public service but faces systemic and cultural challenges that demand urgent attention.

Recommendations

1. Establish Onboarding and Mentorship

Adopt a formalized mentorship program for new and experienced judges. Pair mentors and mentees based on needs and experience, even across different court levels, to provide consistent support and guidance.

2. Expand Judicial College

Extend Judicial College to two weeks, possibly split into two one-week sessions. Include sessions on caseload management, mindfulness, and court calendar administration, along with practical training on what judges can do—not just what they should avoid.

3. Address Warrant Duty

Develop rotating schedules for after-hours warrant duty across all judges in a county, ensuring on-call duty counts as a judicial day. Encourage courts to allow judges time off the following morning to recover, promoting safety and performance.

4. Enhance Security and Safety

Add Judicial College sessions on handling threats and disturbing communications. Consider statewide tracking of threats through the Administrative Office of the Courts and explore security upgrades such as cameras and secure parking.

5. Study Workload and Advocate for Resources

Conduct a study tracking hours worked beyond court sessions to quantify workload demands. Use this data to advocate for additional judicial resources and staffing.

6. Expand Access to Resources for Smaller Jurisdictions

Support legislation enabling courts to contract across jurisdictions for specialized proceedings, such as competency hearings and therapeutic courts, ensuring equitable access to resources statewide.

7. Promote Respectful Appellate Opinions

Encourage appellate courts to adopt language that respects trial judges when overturning decisions. Communicate this cultural shift through articles and judicial trainings.

8. Prioritize Judicial Well-being

Integrate well-being sessions into judicial conferences as plenary topics. Encourage monthly gatherings for judges within each county to foster collegiality. Broaden JASP’s role to include confidential problem-solving and support for new judges.

Conclusion

Serving as a judge is a high-pressure job that combines public visibility with profound solitude. These recommendations aim to address the unique challenges judges face, beyond those experienced by lawyers, by fostering systemic reforms and cultural change to improve judicial well-being.

Critical Issues Across the Profession

Suicide and Addiction Workgroup

Emily Arneson (Chair), Dan Crystal, Laura Moss, M.D., Aaron Paker, Annasara Purcell, Bushra Rahim, Sara Smucker Barnwell, Jenn Stuber.

Overview

The Suicide and Addiction Workgroup was formed to examine the prevalence of substance use disorders and suicide among lawyers in Washington State.

Unlike workgroups focused on practice domains, the workgroup addressed urgent forms of suffering in the profession. As a supplement to the WSBA Well-Being Survey, the workgroup designed and implemented a confidential survey focused on suicide and addiction.

The purpose of which was to better understand the scope and nature of suicide risk, alcohol, and substance use in the profession — issues often underreported due to stigma, fear of professional consequences, and cultural norms emphasizing self-sufficiency and not asking for help.

Exploring the Interrelationships

Research indicates strong correlations among burnout, anxiety, depression, substance misuse, and suicidal thinking. Among physicians, burnout is tightly linked to depression, anxiety, suicidality, and substance abuse.⁹ Preventive interventions that address early-stage distress are therefore essential to reduce later-stage substance misuse and suicidal behavior. Suicidal behavior is best understood as a continuum running from ideation, intent, attempt to completion. Notably, between one quarter and one half of individuals in treatment for substance use disorders report suicidal ideation,¹⁰ and substance use disorders amplify suicidal behavior in the general population, with lifetime suicide attempt rates ranging from 16%–60% among those diagnosed.¹¹

Suicide in the Profession

Lawyers face elevated risk of death by suicide. Nationally, the suicide rate among lawyers is eighth among working professionals.¹² In Washington, Department of Health data (inclusive of legal professionals such as paralegals and legal assistants) identified **55 suicides** between 2018 and 2023, meaning **30–36%** of injury-related deaths among legal professionals were suicides—markedly higher than

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9. Ryan (2023). *The relationship between physician burnout and depression, anxiety, suicidality and substance abuse: A mixed methods systematic review* – PubMed.

10. Andersson (2022). *Suicidal Ideation Among Inpatients with Substance Use Disorders: Prevalence, Correlates and Gender Differences* – ScienceDirect.

11. Leza (2024). *Substance Use Disorder and Lifetime Suicidal Behaviour: A Scoping Review* – PubMed.

12. Sussell A., Peterson C., Li J., Miniño A., Scott K.A., Stone D.M. *Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation — National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021*. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2023;72:1346–1350. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7250a2>.

13. WA Statewide Suicide Deaths, 2018–2023 (Years Combined), Demographics Compared to All Other Industry Suicides. Washington State Death Certificate Data. Washington State Department of Health.

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the 15–25% seen in the general population.¹³ Lawyers are significantly more likely to report suicidal ideation “several days” or “more than half the days” compared to the general population.¹⁴ In addition, 17.5% of lawyers met criteria for Major Depressive Disorder versus 8.3% in the general population.¹⁵ Converging evidence identifies high work overcommitment, perceived stress, and loneliness as key predictors of suicidal thinking.¹⁶ Studies also show that legal professionals are less likely to seek help—partly due to fear of discipline or reputational harm.¹⁷ The workgroup’s findings among WSBA members corroborates these patterns.

Substance Use Among Lawyers

In 2016, Krill et al. surveyed 12,825 lawyers across 15 states and found that 20.6% reported problematic drinking, versus 11.8% of the general population.¹⁸ Granular data on illicit drug use remains limited. Krill’s follow-up, *Stress, Drink, Leave*, surveying 2,863 California and D.C. lawyers, found women reporting greater severity of mental health symptoms and alcohol use than men; women with problem drinking were more likely to consider leaving the profession (25% vs. 17% for men).¹⁹ Reasons diverged by gender: women cited work–family conflict most often; men cited work overcommitment.

WSBA Well-Being Survey Results

The WSBA Well-Being Survey included six questions

on alcohol, substance use, and suicide. One alarming finding: when asked, “*In the past 12 months, have you had suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm?*” 10% said **yes** and 3% preferred not to disclose. While ideation is more common than intent, it is a clear precursor and warrants clinical attention. Moreover, a 10–13% ideation rate is more than double the rate in national studies.²⁰

Of those endorsing suicidal ideation, 85% indicated their work **somewhat** or **significantly** contributed to these thoughts. Alcohol-related responses were also concerning. To “*Do you ever feel concerned about how much or how often you drink alcohol?*” 20% said **yes** and 2% preferred not to disclose, compared with 10.9% concern in the general U.S. adult population.²¹ 22% reported abstaining from alcohol—dramatically lower than the 38% national abstinence rate.²²

Regarding the prevalence of alcohol at work events, 9% said alcohol was *always* present at work social events, 61% said *often or some of the time*, and 30% said *never*. Comments from the survey suggested a shift from heavy social drinking to more private, at-home use. For instance, one respondent commented that “In this particular region, the culture of drinking heavily with colleagues is a thing of the past (1980s–early 2000s). ... What I do see a bit of is people drinking or smoking at home after work, often alone.”

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14. Thiese, M.S., Allen, J.A., Knudson, M., Free, K., Petersen, P. (2021). *Depressive Symptoms and Suicidal Ideation Among Lawyers and Other Law Professionals*. American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, pp. 381–386.

15. [NIMH 2023 Major Depression](#) – National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

16. Patrick Krill et al., *Stressed, Lonely, and Overcommitted*, 11 *Healthcare* 536 (2023).

17. Organ, J., Jaffe, D., Bender, K. [Suffering in Silence: The Survey of Law Student Well-Being and the Reluctance of Law Students to Seek Help for Substance Use and Mental Health Concerns](#). *Journal of Legal Education*. 66:116–56.

18. Krill, P.R., Johnson, R., Albert, L. (2016). *The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Lawyers*. *J Addict Med*. 10:46–52.

19. Krill (2021). [Stress, Drink, Leave: An Examination of Gender-Specific Risk Factors for Mental Health Problems and Attrition Among Licensed Lawyers](#). PubMed.

20. Angelone, K.M. (2024) [U.S. National Trends and Disparities in Suicidal Ideation, Suicide Attempts, and Health Care Use](#). Pew Research Center.

21. [Alcohol Use Disorder \(AUD\) in the United States: Age Groups and Demographic Characteristics](#), National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

22. Brenan (2023) [More Than Six in 10 Americans Drink Alcohol](#).

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Drug use was present but less prevalent. When asked, “In the past 12 months, have you used drugs other than those prescribed for a current medical condition (i.e., recreational use)?” 13% said **yes** and 3% preferred not to disclose. As with alcohol, 20% expressed concern about their use. Despite perceptions of cannabis as lower risk, evidence links cannabis to worsened depression and anxiety and to cognitive impairment—challenging the assertion that it is safer relative to alcohol.

**Suicide and Addiction
Supplemental Survey Findings**

To understand stressors and barriers more deeply, the workgroup conducted a 14-question confidential mini-survey (distributed via WSBA affinity and county bar listservs and sections), yielding 195 responses. While not randomized, the qualitative dataset was rich. Unlike the general WSBA survey, where 7% of responses came from lawyers in their first decade, 52% of mini-survey respondents were in their first ten

years, suggesting a younger cohort. Many comments provided granular insights into distress, stigma, and help-seeking preferences.

**Legal Practice and
Professional Stressors**

In Figure 1 below, participants identified multiple contributors to poor mental health and substance risk.

The top five were:

- 76.9% adversarial process and incivility
- 72.8% long work hours
- 59% financial pressures
- 55.4% culture of perfectionism
- 34.4% unreasonable client demands

As one lawyer put it: “Too many people treat the unreasonable demands of the profession like fraternity hazing—they had to go through it so everyone else should too, even though it’s detrimental.”

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FIGURE 1. Top Challenges Contributing to Mental Health/Substance Use Challenges



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Respondents indicated workload intruded on home life: *“The main issue in my marriage is how much time I spend working and it has nearly led to divorce.”*

Concerns over confidentiality contributed to isolation: *“I have no one I can talk to about what I’m going through.” “When I am at home, I can’t shut off my brain. I replay the horrible things I’ve seen and heard in my cases.”*

Despite clear needs, formidable obstacles limited help-seeking. Barriers to support were related to fear of stigma and repercussions:

- **76.9%** time constraints
- **70.3%** stigma concerns
- **67.2%** denial
- **47.2%** cost of treatment
- **39%** concerns of professional consequences

In terms of care, respondents preferred:

- **81.5%** counseling
- **63.6%** family/friends
- **48.2%** general practitioner
- **57.9%** internet self-help
- **31.8%** peer conversations

Willingness to use WSBA resources was low:

- **16.9%** have utilized AA/NA or Peer Advisors
- **14.4%** have utilized WSBA Member Wellness Program
- **12.8%** have utilized formal rehab (12.8%)

These results suggest mistrust of institutional supports or misalignment with needs. As one lawyer remarked: *“Speaking with anyone at work or associated with WSBA could expose disclosure and retribution.”*

Further reinforcing both the need for resources and the fear of open dialogue, a taskforce member’s *Bar News* article sharing their own struggles with suicidal ideation prompted more than a dozen members to

reach out, share their struggles, and express that fear of consequences made open dialogue feel risky.

Comfort and Safety in the Workplace

37% would **not** feel comfortable taking medical leave for mental health or substance issues; another **20%** neither agreed nor disagreed. **27%** expected negative consequences (e.g., exclusion from advancement, demotion/dismissal, social exclusion) if they took leave, underscoring structural deterrents to care.

Nowhere to Turn

When asked about trusted contacts in the event of self-harm or suicidal thoughts: **11%** reported **none**; **11%** reported **one**; **17%** reported **two**; **15%** reported **three**; **46%** reported **more than three**. Thus, a majority trusted **three or fewer** individuals with a topic as serious as suicide—highlighting isolation. One task force member recounted repeated suicide attempts before finding trusted allies who would not impose unwanted interventions; progress began when they chose to speak openly and seek help during difficult times.

Calls for Systemic Reform and Cultural Change

Despite cynicism, many respondents expressed hope that WSBA could play a transformative role—providing trauma-informed resources, disentangling well-being from discipline, addressing workload imbalance, and increasing transparency. Suggestions included reinstating statewide in-person recovery gatherings, mandating mental health CLEs, and focusing on inclusion and equity. Overall, the qualitative data reveal real harm—painful isolation, unresolved trauma, and norms that discourage vulnerability—amplified by limited time, money, and trusted referrals. Many lawyers nonetheless offered concrete ideas: reshape employer expectations, expand WSBA trainings and services, and shift culture away from perfectionism and relentless demand.

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Recommendations

1. Promote Communications & Culture Change

Normalize mental health and addiction conversations across the legal community, with firm leaders, judges, and bar section chairs modeling vulnerability and discussing well-being and recovery openly. Publicize confidentiality and the boundaries of WSBA well-being services to address mistrust, clarifying that Member Wellness Program services are separate from disciplinary bodies. Launch a WSBA-wide public education campaign using plain, inclusive language—reaching rural lawyers and lawyers of color—and make support services easily accessible without requiring direct contact with WSBA staff. Promote and expand the Well-Being Pledge so employers publicly commit to psychologically safe, non-punitive environments. Include firearm safety (lethal means safety and voluntary secure storage) in well-being messaging. Address professional isolation by facilitating spaces for connection, especially for solo practitioners, rural lawyers, and historically excluded groups. Reduce stigma around leave-taking by promoting model policies that explicitly protect behavioral health leave.

2. Develop Training & Education

Offer [Mental Health First Aid](#) regularly and at subsidized rates. Provide training in trauma-informed legal practice, especially for criminal, family, and public-service roles with high vicarious trauma exposure. Incorporate bystander intervention and peer support strategies into CLEs to empower colleagues to recognize and respond to distress. Incentivize well-being CLEs. Support supervisory training so leaders can identify burnout and respond supportively—not punitively.

3. Increase Access to Resources

Create an anonymous online directory of Washington-based therapists, prescribers, treatment

centers, and support groups—without requiring access requests or identification. Expand after-hours and text-based crisis support to match long lawyer workdays. Subsidize mental health care via grants or partnerships (e.g., Department of Health, foundations), prioritizing legal professionals from underrepresented and marginalized communities and/or legal professionals from communities with highest barriers to receiving legal services, such as rural communities. Develop non-12-step and identity-responsive peer options (secular, culturally competent, affinity-based). Facilitate regional and identity-specific recovery networks to reduce isolation while protecting confidentiality.

4. Workplace and Structural Reform

Encourage offices to reform leave policies to explicitly cover mental health and substance use conditions and remove stigmatizing language. De-center alcohol in networking and professional events—provide guidance and alternatives for firms and bar sections. Promote workload/caseload reform, supporting WSBA and court-led efforts to examine excessive demands, particularly among public defenders and solo practitioners. Model supportive policies within WSBA leadership (mental health leave, flexible scheduling, well-being evaluations).

5. Policy and Research Initiatives

Use WSBA's convening power to promote reasonable workloads by engaging public-service employers and judicial administrators on connections among excessive workloads, burnout, suicide, and substance use. Integrate well-being considerations into WSBA policy reviews and strategic planning (licensing, ethics, professional responsibility, discipline). Track and publish member well-being trends, using Task Force surveys as a baseline and repeating every 3–5 years to measure progress. More effectively communicate the strength

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of the firewall between the WSBA Member Wellness Program and discipline. Leverage CLE authority to incentivize or require anti-stigma, help-seeking,

and risk-recognition programming. Advocate for workplace mental health as a professionalism issue, framing chronic distress and substance use as competence concerns best addressed through support rather than punishment.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workgroup

Susan Lee (Chair), Darcel Lobo, Adely Ruiz, Brian Seguin, Jerry Thomas.

Overview

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup developed recommendations to enhance the well-being of historically marginalized and underrepresented members of the legal profession. The group reviewed research, analyzed WSBA survey data, and identified systemic barriers impacting well-being. The workgroup reviewed literature and gained information from key sources. A full listing of the literature and key sources can be found in [Appendix F](#).

Key Findings from the WSBA Well-Being Survey

The survey highlights significant disparities²³ in well-being among different population groups within the Washington legal profession. Members who identified as part of a community that is underrepresented in the profession (which includes respondents who indicated their race/ethnicity as

something other than White/European Descent), reported the following:

- Higher rates of stress, burnout, and emotional distress
- Greater negative impact from exposure to distressing material.
- Lower utilization of available mental health and well-being resources

Key findings include:

Daily/Regularly experience mental health struggles:

- Minority group: 10% (daily)/24.8% (regularly)
- General respondents: 8.8% (daily)/21.5% (regularly)

Considering leaving the profession due to mental health:

- Minority group: 54.4%
- General respondents: 49.7%

Regular anxiety symptoms:

- Minority group: 20.9%
- General respondents: 18.5%

Work significantly contributing to suicidal thoughts/self-harm:

- Minority group: 54.5%
- General respondents: 36.9%

Exposure to distressing material:

- Minority group: 39.4%
- General respondents: 38.2%

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²³ The WSBA Equity and Justice Glossary defines disparity as an inequality in experiences or outcomes within the legal profession that historically impacts communities that have been historically excluded from the legal profession. These communities are of particular importance because they are known to experience social and economic disadvantage at higher rates than other populations due to documented histories of discrimination and marginalization within U.S. society.

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Significant impact of distressing material:

- Minority group: **27.3%**
- General respondents: **20.3%**

Use of well-being resources:

- Minority group: **47.8%**
- General respondents: **51.4%**

**KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED
FROM LITERATURE REVIEW**

- Persistent discrimination and exclusion contribute to discouragement and burnout.
- Progress in diversity remains slow and does not reflect Washington's demographics.
- Microaggressions and fear of retaliation are common barriers to reporting harmful experiences.

Recommendations

1. Expand Research on DEI Experiences

- **Develop an ongoing, anonymous survey** capturing lived experiences of minority and marginalized legal professionals statewide.
- **Conduct a longitudinal study** to track progress, emerging challenges, and WSBA initiative impact.
- **Explore cultural factors** such as perfectionism, imposter syndrome, and their effect on well-being. Survey data shows minority lawyers experience higher stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation than peers, underscoring the need for continuous monitoring and targeted interventions.

2. Create a Centralized WSBA DEI and Well-Being Resource Hub

- **Develop a dedicated platform** within the WSBA website centralizing resources on DEI, mental health, affinity groups, mentorship, and cultural competency.
- **Partner with affinity bar associations and law schools** to expand offerings and highlight exemplary programs. Minority lawyers report lower utilization of well-being resources; a centralized hub can improve access and visibility.

3. Offer Free CLEs and Trainings on DEI and Well-Being Issues

- Example: DiversityEDU's program on microaggressions, including pre- and post-assessments on unconscious bias, inclusion communication, and diversity engagement. CLEs can normalize conversations about bias and inclusion, reduce stigma, and equip lawyers with tools to foster equitable workplaces.

Bar Association and Regulatory

Member Wellness Program Workgroup

Laura Moss (Chair), Melissa Berry, Dan Crystal,
Rachelle Eason, Michelle Fontenot.

Overview

The Member Wellness Program Workgroup evaluated WSBA's Member Wellness Program, its history, services, survey feedback, and comparative models from other states. The goal was to identify strengths, gaps, and actionable improvements to better support WSBA members in a way that builds trust, increases utilization, and addresses systemic barriers to mental health care.

Background: The Member Wellness Program

WSBA's Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP), established in 1990, was renamed the Member Wellness Program in 2015 to reflect its broader availability to non-lawyer members and its emphasis on holistic well-being. Initially focused on alcohol abuse, LAP provided long-term therapy near WSBA's Seattle offices and trained Peer Advisors to support lawyers struggling with addiction and other mental health challenges. An annual Chelan conference served as a key networking event for Peer Advisors, often including AA meetings.

Funding reductions in the 2010s led to staffing cuts and relocation under WSBA's Human Resources Department. For six years, clinical services were delivered through Employee Assistance Program

contracts. In 2020, the program moved to the Advancement Department for greater alignment and was consolidated in 2021 with Professional Responsibility and Practice Management Assistance Programs to form the Ethics, Wellness, and Practice Team, whose mission is to enhance WSBA members' professional competence in service to the public.

Recent improvements include hiring a dedicated clinical staff member in 2020, adding lawyer-specific expertise, and adopting telehealth via Doxy for statewide access. Today, the Member Wellness Program team includes Dan Crystal, PsyD, Member Wellness Program Manager, and Adely Ruiz, LCSW, Clinical and Outreach Program Lead, under the leadership of Kevin Plachy, Advancement Department Director, a licensed lawyer, and Certified Wellness Practitioner (CWP).

The Member Wellness Program serves members, law students, prospective members, and retired lawyers. Services include individual clinical support and online groups such as:

- **Healing Minds** – Support for WSBA members
- **Pathways to Productivity** – Task management strategies
- **Career Guidance** – Job search support
- **Zen Meditation** – Noon-hour mindfulness

Education is central to the Member Wellness Program's mission. WSBA sponsors four free CLE programs annually, attracting an average of 1,500 online participants, and delivers 20+ presentations each year to law firms, government agencies, law schools, and county bars statewide.

The Member Wellness Program also maintains a

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network of 61 trained Peer Advisors who assist lawyers with issues ranging from addiction, the most common concern, to workplace hostility, career transitions, burnout, and retirement. The program supports the Office of Disciplinary Counsel Diversion Program by conducting evaluations and serving as Diversion Administrator, guiding respondents through compliance requirements such as counseling, CLEs, and ethics consultations.

In late 2024, **Washington Lawyers Assisting Lawyers (WaLAL)** was founded. WaLAL is a nonprofit that recruits Peer Advisors, hosts CLEs, and provides statewide presentations. This dual model—bar program plus nonprofit—exists in several states. The Member Wellness Program collaborates actively with WaLAL, sharing Peer Advisor resources and featuring Hagin as a CLE speaker.

Member Well-Being Survey Findings

Survey data revealed widespread mental health challenges among WSBA members:

- **Burnout: 58%**
- **Anxiety: 56.8%**
- **Exposure to distressing material: 38.3%**
- **Alcohol concerns: 20.4%**
- **Depression: 15.7%**
- **Suicidal ideation: 9.9%**

These numbers confirm the urgent need for accessible, trusted, and culturally competent well-being resources.

Limited awareness and utilization: Only **43.5%** of respondents have used WSBA well-being resources. These include CLEs on well-being related topics; mental health consultations/brief therapy; peer advising; and referrals for services. Top reasons for non-use include lack of awareness, skepticism about effectiveness, and preference for other resources. Visibility and trust are critical barriers to engagement.

The **Suicide and Addiction Supplemental Survey** asked more direct questions about member perceptions of the Member Wellness Program. When asked which among ten resources they would turn to, **81.5%** indicated they would participate in counseling, but only **14.4%** endorsed using the Member Wellness Program. In addition, only **16.9%** of members indicated they would be willing to meet with a Peer Advisor or attend an AA meeting.

Confidentiality concerns: Despite APR 19(b) guaranteeing confidentiality, many members fear disciplinary repercussions. Comments included:

“I would never contact the WSBA Member Wellness Program due to confidentiality and privacy concerns and potential impact on my license.”

“I would have concerns accessing a program sponsored by the bar association for fear of information being provided to disciplinary boards.”

“Speaking with anyone at work or associated with WSBA. Stigma, reputational damage, and impact on license and livelihood.”

This mistrust is rooted in WSBA's dual role as regulator and well-being provider. While confidentiality guarantees are advertised, members clearly do not trust or understand them, underscoring the need for stronger messaging.

To address these concerns, the Member Wellness Program follows a wellness-based model built on positive psychology principles. The program delivers presentations on imposter syndrome, confronting stigma, understanding perfectionism, managing high conflict workplaces, and cultural competency to name a few topics in this realm.

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Desire for broader resources: Members requested gym discounts, statewide referral lists, and more programming on practical topics like productivity, imposter syndrome, and boundary setting. Members want holistic support beyond crisis intervention.

Contrasting the Washington Member Wellness Program with Other States

Comparing state Lawyer Assistance Programs (LAPs) is challenging due to variations in bar structure, funding, and membership size. The ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs last conducted a comprehensive survey in 2014, leaving gaps in current comparative data. Key observations from neighboring and comparable states include:



Oregon: Integrated bar with highly staffed program with five Lawyer-Counselors holding dual degrees and specialized expertise. Funded through the Professional

Liability Fund and housed separately from the bar for added confidentiality. Offers frequent support groups, seasonal workshops, and robust outreach.



Idaho: Integrated bar with smaller membership. LAP managed by Southworth Associates, which handles calls of concern and refers to statewide treatment providers.

Supported by a 16-member volunteer lawyer committee.



Michigan: Integrated bar with four counselors and strong ties to disciplinary diversion programs. Provides 50+ presentations annually and comprehensive evaluations for lawyers of concern.



Texas: Large integrated bar with extensive programming, including monthly virtual wellness CLEs, recovery story series, docket assistance pilot, and a private trust for treatment funding. Operates alongside a nonprofit

(Texas Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers) hosting weekly addiction support meetings.

Compared to these programs, Washington's Member Wellness Program reflects a model that addresses multiple issues but lacks the depth of better-funded programs:

- **Clinical Emphasis:** Relies primarily on licensed staff clinicians as opposed to volunteers.
- **Presentation-Driven Outreach:** Offers free presentations but unclear if these increase service utilization.
- **Integrated Bar Structure:** Placement within WSBA generates skepticism due to confidentiality concerns.
- **Addiction Services:** Provides consultations but depends on external resources like Unbar and WaLAL for recovery groups.
- **Concerned About a Lawyer Cases:** Responds to reports but does not deploy volunteers for in-person outreach.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Confidentiality Messaging and Trust-Building

- Prominently display APR 19(b) confidentiality guarantees on the Member Wellness Program homepage and all outreach materials.
- Add a confidentiality tagline in every CLE, newsletter, and Bar News article.
- Consider branding adjustments to reduce perceived linkage to discipline.
- Include a clear FAQ on confidentiality and disciplinary separation.

2. Expand Education and Community Engagement

- Increase free CLE offerings on topics such as:
 - > Task Management as Mental Health Management
 - > Perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome
 - > Boundary Setting

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- > Mental Health First Aid
- > Stories from the Trenches

- Restart the Annual Peer Advisor Conference to foster connection and normalize help-seeking.
- Organize MWP-coordinated service days with nonprofits to build community and reduce isolation.
- Collaborate with local bar associations for in-person networking and wellness events.

3. Improve Access to Referral Information

- Create a statewide directory of mental health providers accessible without contacting WSBA.
- Include guidance for culturally competent and identity-responsive providers.
- Assign responsibility for maintaining and updating the directory annually.

4. Promote Physical Well-Being

- Explore statewide gym discount partnerships

and brand them as Member Wellness Program offerings (within the bounds of GR12 and Keller).

- Encourage local bar associations to host walking, hiking, biking, or running clubs.
- Sponsor step challenges or wellness competitions to promote engagement and camaraderie.

5. Address Cultural and Psychological Barriers

- Deliver presentations on imposter syndrome, perfectionism, and career progression cycles to normalize common struggles.
- Frame wellness as integral to competence and professionalism, not as a sign of weakness.

6. Rebuild Peer Support Infrastructure

- Expand Peer Advisor recruitment and training to include topics beyond addiction (e.g., burnout, workplace hostility, career transitions).
- Create warm handoff protocols between Peer Advisors and clinicians for seamless support.

Rules and Regulatory Workgroup

Kyle Sciuchetti (Chair), Arielle Adams, Justin Bingham, Kevin Bank, Nik Chourey, Doug Ende, Kevin Plachy.

Overview

The Rules and Regulatory Workgroup was tasked with examining court rules and regulatory functions that impact the legal profession in Washington and other jurisdictions. The goal was to develop recommendations that promote the well-being of legal

professionals. Areas of review included:

- **Regulatory Functions:** Processes such as discipline, admissions, and character and fitness evaluations.
- **Policy and General Rules:** Broader rules that shape the profession (e.g., APR 19, Rules of Professional Conduct).

The workgroup's approach incorporated a thorough review of existing research, new data collection, and the formulation of actionable recommendations. The findings of the workgroup's research are provided below, followed by recommendations.

Findings Discipline

As of 2023 approximately 35 U.S. jurisdictions have

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programs under which lawyer discipline complaints may be resolved through non-disciplinary diversion agreements.²⁴ These programs are typically contractual, requiring the lawyer to agree to conditions like:

- Professional counseling (for mental health/substance abuse).
- Practice monitoring.
- Continuing Legal Education (CLE) tailored to the specific misconduct (e.g., trust accounting or office management).

This approach allows for a remedial resolution without a permanent public disciplinary record, aligning with the ABA's goal of regulation that protects the public while rehabilitating the lawyer.

The Washington Supreme Court adopted diversion rules in 2002.²⁵ For less serious misconduct, the WSBA Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) may divert a grievance from discipline if the lawyer agrees to a diversion contract. A successfully completed diversion results in dismissal of the grievance. If the lawyer fails to complete the diversion contract, the grievance is reinstated and may result in public disciplinary action.

From 2020 to 2024 ODC opened 18, 16, 12, 14 and 9 new diversions.²⁶ Generally, the number of new diversions opened each year is declining. Because diversions allow members to complete a contractual agreement that could include completion of counseling programs, mental health treatment and other rehabilitative measures, the discipline system should

prioritize identification of respondents with less serious misconduct who would benefit from a diversionary contract focused on rehabilitative measures. Additional findings regarding the discipline system can be found in the annual report.²⁷

Admissions and Character and Fitness

The workgroup received a presentation from WSBA Regulatory Counsel which outlined the steps the Regulatory Services Department has taken to address concerns with admissions procedures. After a review of these areas the workgroup found that Washington has already made significant progress, including:

- Removal of mental health questions in 2016 (APR 22.1(e) now governs follow-up inquiries related to health diagnoses and substance use)
- Addition of explanatory preambles to application sections
- Updates to application questions and response formats, including eliminating requirements for applicants or law schools to disclose leaves of absence
- Codifying the confidentiality of application materials under APR 1(d) and APR 24.1(d).

Conditional Admission

Conditional admission is a process that allows bar applicants to be admitted to practice law under specific conditions for a limited period, typically up to five years, while demonstrating continued good conduct. This approach is used in approximately 29 jurisdictions and is generally applied in cases involving substance abuse, mental health challenges, criminal history, or

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24. State Bar of California, *Recommendations for Codifying a Formal Disciplinary Diversion Program* (Apr. 1, 2024), available at <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/reports/Recommendations-for-Codifying-a-Formal-Disciplinary-Diversion-Program.pdf>.

25. See [Title 6 of the Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct](#).

26. Washington State Bar Association. *Washington Discipline System Annual Report*. Seattle, WA: WSBA. 2022 and 2024 editions. Available at [2022-discipline-system-annual-report.pdf](#) and [2024-wa-discipline-system-annual-report.pdf](#).

27. Washington State Bar Association. *Washington Discipline System Annual Report*. Seattle, WA: WSBA. 2022 and 2024 editions. Available at [2022-discipline-system-annual-report.pdf](#) and [2024-wa-discipline-system-annual-report.pdf](#).

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financial issues. The goal is to provide a rehabilitative pathway for applicants who may have past conduct that raises concerns, but who show promise and a commitment to professional standards.

The Washington State Bar Licensure Task Force, through its Subcommittee on Ethics/Character and Fitness, recommended the implementation of a conditional admission process in Washington.²⁸ The recommendation was based on feedback from Character and Fitness Board members who expressed frustration at having to deny applicants they believed could succeed under monitored conditions. The Subcommittee emphasized that conditional admission would not be a barrier but rather a supportive mechanism for applicants on the cusp of full admission. This recommendation is currently under consideration by the Washington State Supreme Court.

Policy and General Court Rules

The workgroup focused on several areas within this category including:

- Rules of Professional Conduct (RPCs) for potential revisions or commentary to raise awareness that well-being can affect a practitioner's ability to represent clients.
 - **RPC 1.1** (Competence)
 - **RPC 1.3** (Diligence)
 - **RPC 1.16** (Declining or Terminating Representation)
 - **RPC 8.3** (Reporting Professional Misconduct)
- Note: The workgroup included Lawyer, Limited License Legal Technician and Limited Practice Officer RPCs within its scope of review.*
- Researched and received information about Oregon's State Lawyers Assistance Committee.

Rules of Professional Conduct Findings RPC 1.1 (Competence)

The American Bar Association (ABA) proposed adding Comment [9] to Model Rule 1.1 of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct to explicitly recognize that a lawyer's mental, emotional, and physical well-being may impact their ability to competently represent clients. The comment aimed to raise awareness about the connection between lawyer well-being and professional competence, without imposing new obligations.

The proposal was grounded in extensive research and policy work, including the ABA's 2018 Resolution 105 and the [National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being's](#) report, which emphasized the need to destigmatize help-seeking and promote wellness as a core component of professional responsibility.²⁹

The proposal was ultimately withdrawn before reaching the floor of the ABA House of Delegates. Concerns were noted that the proposal could perpetuate stereotypes that lawyers with physical, mental, or emotional conditions are less competent and tying physical, mental, and emotional health with competence could be viewed as ableist.

Several jurisdictions have already taken steps to incorporate lawyer well-being into their professional conduct rules. For example:



[Virginia](#) added Comment [7] to its Rule 1.1, stating that a lawyer's mental, emotional, and physical well-being impacts their ability to represent clients and make responsible choices in practice.

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²⁸. Washington State Bar Licensure Task Force Subcommittee on Ethics/Character Fitness. *Washington Character and Fitness Rules and Process: Analysis & Proposed Changes*. Submitted May 24, 2023. Available at [Washington Character and Fitness Rules and Process Analysis Proposed Changes 101123.pdf](#).

²⁹. ABA CPR Joint Initiative Working Group, et al., *Model Rule 1.1 – Proposed New Comment [9] Discussion Draft Resolution and Report* (Discussion Draft, Am. Bar Association).

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Vermont adopted Comment [9] to its Rule 1.1, emphasizing that well-being is essential to competence and encouraging lawyers to engage in self-care and preventive strategies.



California went further by incorporating well-being directly into the black letter of Rule 1.1(b), defining competence to include the mental, emotional, and physical ability necessary for legal service.

These examples demonstrate a growing recognition among state courts that lawyer well-being is integral to professional competence and public protection.

RPC 1.3 (Diligence)

Model Rule 1.3 of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct creates a duty that a lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness when representing a client. This duty requires the lawyer to pursue a client's matter despite personal inconvenience or opposition, demonstrating commitment and dedication to the client's interests with professional zeal. Comment [5] specifically addresses the duty of a sole practitioner regarding their well-being and the continuity of client matters. To prevent client neglect in the event of the lawyer's death or disability, Comment [5] says the duty of diligence may require a sole practitioner to prepare a plan designating another competent lawyer to review files and notify clients of the situation. The comment demonstrates that this planning step should be considered a critical part of maintaining the duty of diligence and safeguarding client interests.

Many states, including [Iowa](#) and [Massachusetts](#), have adopted language identical or very similar to Comment [5], stating that a sole practitioner's duty of diligence may require them to prepare a plan to prevent the neglect of client matters in the event of their death or disability. Furthermore, some jurisdictions like [Arizona](#) and [Iowa](#)

have gone beyond the ABA's comment by making a form of succession or contingency planning an affirmative court rule requirement for private practitioners, ensuring client protection upon the lawyer's sudden inability to practice. The workgroup notes that WSBA, as part of a large-scale revision to the Washington RPCs, suggested in 2003 that the Washington Supreme Court adopt Comment [5]; instead, the Court reserved Comment [5] without explanation.

RPC 1.16 (Declining or Terminating Representation)

Washington [RPC 1.16 \(a\)\(2\)](#) requires withdrawal if "the lawyer's physical or mental condition materially impairs the lawyer's ability to represent the client." [RPC 1.16\(b\)](#) provides a list of circumstances under which a lawyer may withdraw from representation and [RPC 1.16\(b\)\(7\)](#) states a lawyer may withdraw if "other good cause for withdrawal exists." The workgroup members discussed the viability of an advisory opinion that would help to further explain what would constitute "other good cause" under the rule with particular emphasis on whether maintaining psychological well-being would qualify. It is the workgroup's understanding that the Committee on Professional Ethics has formed a subcommittee to explore this question.

RPC 8.3 (Reporting Professional Misconduct)

During its research, the workgroup discovered the majority of U.S. jurisdictions require the mandatory reporting of professional misconduct by other lawyers, following the ABA Model Rule. Washington is part of a very small minority (including Georgia and, until recently, California) that uses the permissive word "should." Washington's [RPC 8.3\(a\)](#) states that a lawyer "should inform the appropriate professional authority."

Oregon State Bar's State Lawyers Assistance Committee Findings

The [Oregon State Bar's State Lawyers Assistance Committee](#) (SLAC), established by legislative action

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under [ORS 9.568](#), is a confidential and rehabilitative program designed to support lawyers whose performance or conduct may be impaired due to mental health challenges, substance use disorders, or other behavioral health issues such as gambling or sex addiction. SLAC operates under the authority of OSB Bylaws and Policies and has jurisdiction when there is a nexus between the impairment and the lawyer's ability to practice law. The program provides supervision, conducts assessments, and develops individualized remedial action plans. It also monitors lawyers on disciplinary probation, in diversion, or those conditionally admitted or reinstated. Importantly, SLAC's proceedings are confidential and exempt from public records laws, ensuring a safe and private pathway for intervention. However, if a SLAC respondent is found by SLAC to be noncompliant, such respondent would be referred to the OSB Disciplinary Counsel's Office for consideration of a formal and public disciplinary proceeding for failing to cooperate with SLAC, under Oregon Rule of Professional Conduct 8.1(c).

Washington State currently lacks a SLAC-equivalent program. While the WSBA Member Wellness Program offers voluntary support, it cannot compel engagement, and concerned parties have limited options; either report the lawyer to discipline or encourage the lawyer to voluntarily seek help. Given that Washington is not a mandatory reporting state, the absence of a formal mechanism to assist impaired lawyers represents a significant gap. A SLAC-style program would provide a structured, confidential, and rehabilitative alternative to discipline.

Practice-Oriented Court Rules Findings

The workgroup examined whether to recommend changing filing deadlines from midnight to standard business hours. After research and discussion, the workgroup decided not to pursue this change, recognizing that flexible deadlines accommodate diverse work schedules and may better support practitioner well-being.

Recommendations

1. Discipline

The WSBA Office of Disciplinary Counsel should evaluate accessibility and utilization of diversion programs, prioritizing cases where mental or physical conditions or substance abuse contributed to less serious misconduct.

2. Admissions

WSBA Regulatory Services Department should continue refining application questions; no further changes recommended at this time.

3. Conditional Admission

Support implementation of a conditional admission process in Washington, with clear eligibility criteria and monitoring mechanisms.

4. RPC 1.1 (Competence)

Investigate adopting a similar comment in Washington, engaging ethics committees and disability rights stakeholders.

5. RPC 1.3 (Diligence)

Explore adopting Comment [5] and consider expanding its scope to all private practitioners.

6. RPC 1.16 (Declining or Terminating Representation)

Support development of an advisory opinion clarifying "good cause" and "material impairment."

7. RPC 8.3 (Reporting Professional Misconduct)

Retain permissive language but consider adding commentary referencing a SLAC-style committee if created.

8. SLAC

Explore creation of a SLAC-equivalent in Washington through Supreme Court rulemaking; maintain MWP alongside SLAC as complementary programs.

Looking Forward

A Shared Responsibility for Well-Being

The findings across all workgroups reveal a fundamental truth: well-being in the legal profession is not an individual issue alone but rather a systemic imperative. Lawyers, judges, law students, employers, institutions, and professional organizations all share responsibility for creating environments that support mental health, resilience, and inclusion.

The recommendations in this Final Report are not isolated fixes; they form an interconnected framework for cultural and structural change. From Private Practice to Judiciary, from Law Student and New Member to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and through the Member Wellness Program, each section underscores the need for coordinated action.

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KEY THEMES ACROSS WORKGROUPS

- 1 Normalize Help-Seeking and Reduce Stigma.** Stigma remains the most significant barrier to accessing mental health resources. Recommendations from the Suicide & Addiction and Member Wellness Program sections call for transparency, confidentiality assurances, and leadership modeling to dismantle fear and shame.
- 2 Build Community and Connection.** Isolation is a recurring theme; from solo practitioners to judges in single-judge courts. Initiatives like mentorship programs (Judiciary, Law Student/New Member) and peer support networks (Private Practice, Member Wellness Program) are essential to fostering belonging.
- 3 Address Structural Drivers of Stress.** Overwork, unpredictable schedules, and lack of resources are systemic issues. Recommendations for caseload reform (Government & Public Interest, Judiciary) and policy changes (Rules & Regulatory) aim to create sustainable workloads and institutional accountability.
- 4 Integrate DEI into Well-Being Strategies.** Underrepresented lawyers face compounded stressors. Equity must be embedded in all well-being initiatives to ensure inclusivity and fairness.
- 5 Expand Access to Holistic Resources.** Members want more than crisis intervention—they seek tools for productivity, physical health, and cultural competence. Recommendations for CLEs, physical well-being programs, and resource hubs reflect this broader vision.

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The Path Forward

Implementing these recommendations will require the WSBA, courts, law schools, employers, and affinity groups. To measure progress and ensure accountability, the WSBA should employ longitudinal surveys and data dashboards. Leadership at every level must champion well-being as integral to professional competence and ethical practice.

Through engagement with these recommendations, Washington can lead the nation in creating a legal profession where well-being is not aspirational— it is foundational.

Call to Action

Legal professionals, institutions, and employers are urged to:

- Review and adopt the recommendations relevant to their sphere of influence;
- Commit to the Well-Being Pledge and model transparency around mental health; and
- Invest in programs that foster connection, equity, and resilience.

By embracing this shared responsibility, Washington can make significant strides toward a healthier, more sustainable legal profession—one where lawyers and judges thrive, and justice is served with integrity and humanity.

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AI DISCLOSURE: *The development of this report was assisted by Co-Pilot and checked for accuracy by the Final Report Writing Work Group of the Member Well-Being Task Force.*

Appendices

[APPENDIX A:](#) Task Force Charter

[APPENDIX B:](#) Summary of Recommendations

[APPENDIX C:](#) WSBA Well-Being Survey Report

[APPENDIX D:](#) Suicide and Addiction Workgroup Supplemental Survey Results

[APPENDIX E:](#) Judiciary Workgroup Supplemental Survey Results

[APPENDIX F:](#) Workgroup Literature Reviews and Key Sources

APPENDIX A

Task Force Charter

CHARTER

Well-Being Task Force

Adopted: January 12, 2024.

Background

The Task Force seeks to (1) study well-being among WSBA members and the broader legal community in Washington and (2) make recommendations to enhance well-being for those same individuals and thereby improve the provision of legal services.

The Task Force will draw on the considerable and influential existing body of work compiled by national and state legal organizations, most prominently [*The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*](#), authored by the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, a coalition of organizations including the National Organization of Bar Counsel (NOBC), the Association of Professional Responsibility Lawyers (APRL) and the [*American Bar Association's Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs*](#) (CoLAP). Following publication of the report in 2017, both the ABA and the Conference of Chief Justices passed resolutions urging all states to review and consider the report's 44 recommendations. Subsequently, 26 states have formed well-being committees and another eight states have held well-being conventions or "summits."

In November 2023, at the recommendation of the Member Engagement Council (MEC), the WSBA Board of Governors (BOG) voted to adopt member wellness as an organizational priority. Creating a Well-Being Task Force (which was also part of the MEC's recommendation) is the first step in acting on that priority.

Task Force Objectives

The Task Force's primary objective will be to create a report synthesizing the Task Force's research and recommending tangible steps WSBA can take to enhance well-being among WSBA members and the broader legal community in Washington. This objective will be achieved by accomplishing two subsidiary objectives:

1. Create Workgroups to Research Well-Being Across the Various Sectors of the Legal Profession in Washington and the U.S.

By the end of its second meeting, the Task Force will establish multiple workgroups to research well-being across various sectors of the legal profession. The workgroups will be comprised of Task Force members and additional non-voting members if desired, such as WSBA employees and members of relevant associations (e.g., Superior Court Judges Association, District and Municipal Court Judges Association, and Appellate Judges Association). The workgroup members will be appointed by the Chair of the Task Force, with consent of a majority of the task force members.

Each workgroup will focus on one or more sectors of the legal profession, with the goal of bringing recommendations to the Task Force of how to raise awareness and/or prioritize well-being within those sectors. Examples of sectors could include types of practice (e.g., private practice, in-house, judiciary, public/government practice), law schools/law clerk programs, member wellness programs, professional

liability insurance carriers, and professional regulatory systems.¹ Topics of workgroup focus could include substance use, structural and systemic oppression, student loan challenges, marginalization and experiences of othering, discrimination or bias, balancing work and family life, the impact of remote work, and other concerns. The foregoing examples of sectors and topics are not exhaustive, and the term “sectors of the profession” should be interpreted broadly.

Workgroups will be tasked with:

- recruiting relevant contributors, both within the profession, and outside of the profession, to participate in each workgroup’s research;
- conducting outreach to and receiving feedback from sectors of the profession relevant to the workgroup;
- reviewing well-being recommendations nationwide and determining which appear most relevant to legal practice in Washington;
- understanding the state of research regarding mental health; and
- providing a final report to the full Task Force, containing its findings and recommendations.

2. Create a Workgroup to Investigate Well-Being Among WSBA Members

The Task Force will also form a workgroup to investigate well-being among WSBA members. This workgroup’s primary goal will be to develop and deploy a member survey by no later than the end of the Task Force’s first year. Areas of inquiry for the survey may include the relative well-being of members, the identification of challenges in legal practice, the occurrence of mental health conditions or illness, and suggestions for the Task Force. The workgroup may also solicit member feedback through listening sessions, focus groups, and other forms of interaction. The workgroup will provide a final report to the full Task Force, containing its findings and recommendations.

Timeline

The Task Force will have a duration of two years from the date of its first meeting and will meet monthly or at other intervals determined to be appropriate by the Chair. The Task Force will provide quarterly reports to the Member Engagement Council, an interim written report to the Board after its first year of operation, and a final report to the Board at conclusion of its two-year duration. The Task Force may also report to the Member Engagement Council or the Board on an interlocutory basis if urgent issues arise.

¹ In adopting this Charter, the Board of Governors recognizes that Washington State’s professional regulatory systems for legal practitioners are created by and answerable to the Washington Supreme Court exclusively. To the extent the Task Force has ideas or recommendations that would implicate regulatory processes, procedures, policies, or rules, the Task Force should work collaboratively with the pertinent stakeholder(s) and direct any recommendations to the appropriate regulatory staff or board, the Disciplinary Advisory Round Table, and/or the Supreme Court.

Composition

The Task Force shall consist of nine voting members and two non-voting judicial members, as follows:

- Chair (voting)
- 1 Current or Former BOG Member (voting)
- 4 WSBA Members (voting)
- 1 Member of the State Supreme Court (non-voting)
- 1 Adjudicative Officer in Washington State (non-voting)
- 1 Law School Representative (student or employee; voting)
- 2 Public Members (voting)

Further membership criteria is detailed in the appendix below.

Nominations and Appointment

Except for the State Supreme Court member, who will be determined by the Supreme Court, the WSBA President will appoint Task Force members in accordance with WSBA Bylaws Art. IX.B.2 taking into account the recommendation of the Co-Chairs of the Member Engagement Council. The President shall appoint the Task Force Chair taking into account the recommendation of the Co-Chairs of the Member Engagement Council. The WSBA Executive Director will designate the WSBA staff liaison(s).

Terms

Task Force members will serve for the two-year duration of the Task Force. The WSBA President will appoint any replacement members (if necessary) taking into account the recommendation of the Co-Chairs of the Member Engagement Council.

Final Report

At the end of its duration, the Well-Being Task Force will issue a final report to the Board of Governors. The report will (1) evaluate the scope and efficacy of the Task Force's achievements, and (2) provide feasible recommendations to improve well-being within the legal profession in Washington State.

APPENDIX

The following non-exclusive criteria shall be prioritized for membership on the Task Force:

Practice Types and Venues

The Task Force seeks participation from attorneys from various practice types and venues. Solo attorney participation will be important to prioritize the pressure they face in running their business, marketing, and having support staff to help manage their client base. Attorneys in mid-size or large firm settings face very different wellness challenges in keeping up their billable hour requirements and responding to management pressures upon their performance. Civil legal aid lawyers and public defenders face challenges of secondary trauma from working with clients who experience poverty and other forms of oppression. Government attorneys face challenges with unique bureaucratic responsibilities, and in house counsel face the demands of the companies they support.

Years of Bar Licensure

The Task Force seeks participation from attorneys at all stages of their careers. Early career attorneys face major pressures as they adapt to a profession that they were typically not trained for in law school. Mid-career attorneys often struggle with transitioning to a more hospitable work environment or to use a skill set more to their liking. Late career attorneys handle the question of when to retire and to manage, in some cases, changes in mental capacity.

Experience or Interest in Well-Being

The Task Force seeks participation from legal professionals with an interest in enhancing the well-being of the profession. Those who have original insights into what they think legal professionals need to feel more engaged and at ease will be prioritized. Those with volunteer experiences or connection to mental health venues will also be an asset.

Mental Health Professionals

The Task Force seeks participation from experienced mental health professionals who are not lawyers but have familiarity with the legal profession. Their expertise will inform the Task Force's recommendations and decision making.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Task Force seeks participation from people from marginalized communities (e.g., people of color, people from the LGBTQ2S+ community, people with disabilities). Having a diverse group of members is vital to promote diversity, equity and inclusion goals, particularly given that these communities disproportionately experience mental health challenges and other wellness-related issues due to historical and ongoing marginalization, discrimination, access to healthcare, and other reasons.

Geography

Geography The Task Force seeks participation from legal professionals and others throughout Washington to ensure consideration of wellness issues in all parts of the state , with particular attention to the different issues in rural and urban areas. To obtain geographic diversity, at least two Task Force members

must reside east of the Cascades and at least one other member must reside outside of King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties.

APPENDIX B

Summary of Recommendations

Appendix B: Summary of Recommendations

This is a summary of more detailed recommendations found in the chapters for each workgroup.



Confidentiality and Normalizing Help Seeking

- Law schools and WSBA communicating to law students and members, through rules, standards and outreach, that help seeking will be an asset and not an obstacle towards graduation, admittance to the bar, and in one's career as a lawyer.
- Encourage bar leaders, firm leaders and judges to share stories of vulnerability through presentations and articles.
- Creating a communications campaign promoting the confidential features of the Member Wellness Program for lawyers and the Judicial Assistance Services Program for judicial officers. Emphasize the lack of connection of those programs to disciplinary processes.
- Implement a Well-Being Pledge with resourcing from WSBA for firms that commit to promoting flexibility, civility, model policies for mental health leave, and mental health support. Demonstrate these policies at WSBA.



Building Community and Mentorship Opportunities

- Develop a formal mentorship program for new members with a structured curriculum and CLE credit as well as a similar program for new judges.
- Create community through the creation of peer

support groups, yoga classes, allyship initiatives, as well as hosting walking, hiking, biking, or running clubs with events like step challenges/wellness competitions.

- Create small-group coaching and local networking events for solo/small practice attorneys; rural attorneys; historically excluded groups; as well as monthly gatherings for judges in small and/or rural court systems or who are members of historically excluded groups..
- The Member Wellness Program can create coordinated service days with non-profits.
- De-center alcohol in networking and professional events.
- Develop non-12-step and identity-responsive peer options.



Training and Continuing Legal Education Courses

- Create separate presentations on well-being and resilience for the following populations: law students and new members; government and public interest lawyers; and judges.
- Create CLEs on the following focus topics:
 - > Stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, suicidality, mental health first aid, addiction, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout prevention

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- > Interpersonal effectiveness, perfectionism, task management as mental health management, imposter syndrome, motivation and focus, boundary setting, and empathy
- > Anti-stigma, DEI and Well-Being, career progression cycles, community building.
- > Sleep, diet hygiene, and the advantages of exercise for mental health and productivity.
- Advocate for workplace mental health as a professionalism issue by framing chronic distress and substance use as competence concerns.
- Provide trainings for supervisors to recognize and address burnout in employees.
- Create a Centralized WSBA DEI and Well-Being Resource Hub centralizing resources on DEI, mental health, affinity groups, mentorship, and cultural competency
- Extend Judicial College to two weeks with specific curriculum ideas and incorporating judicial well-being into plenary sessions at conferences.



Access to Well-Being Resources

- Make culturally competent referral resources (counselors, prescribers, treatment programs, coaches, supportive groups like WaLAL) available to members and law students without a login (PPWG).
- Offer WSBA-sponsored discounts for wellness services like gyms and counseling.
- Create toolkits for lawyers outlining client expectations, timelines, and strategies for managing mental health, trauma and stress.
- Subsidize mental health and addictions care via grants or partnerships.
- Support legislation enabling courts to contract across jurisdictions for specialized proceedings.
- Broaden the Judicial Assistance and Services

Program role to include confidential problem-solving and support for new judges.

- Administer member well-being and DEI and Well-Being surveys on a regular 3-5 year basis that tracks trends over time.



Institutional, Rule, and Policy Changes

- Make annual wellness based CLEs mandatory for members, and wellness based CLEs required for law students.
- Advocate for reforms in court rules to reduce unhealthy filing deadlines and conflicting trial schedules.
- Increase judicial training to enhance professionalism and civility in the courtroom and recommend ways to reduce stress for government and public interest lawyers.
- Reduce Caseloads: WSBA can convene stakeholders—including public defense employers, solo practitioners, and judicial administrators—to emphasize the link between excessive workloads and attorney burnout, suicide, and substance use.
- The Judicial Workgroup recommended specific solutions to address the fatigue associated with warrant duty; ways to enhance the security and safety of judges; consideration for trial judges in the drafting of appellate opinions; and a method for tracking judicial workload statewide. They also promoted enabling courts to contract across jurisdictions for specialized proceedings.
- Integrate wellness considerations into WSBA policy reviews and strategic planning (licensing, ethics, professional responsibility, discipline).
- The Rules and Regulatory Workgroup provided recommendations regarding discipline, conditional admission, and the creation of a State Lawyers Assistance Committee. In addition, recommendations were made for RPCs 1.1 (Competence), 1.3 (Diligence), 1.16, and 8.3.

APPENDIX C

WSBA Well-Being Survey Report

WASHINGTON STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

WSBA Member Well-Being Survey Report: Preliminary Findings

DRAFT REPORT PREPARED AUGUST 2025



WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 600, Seattle, WA 98101-2539

206.727.8200 | www.wsba.org

Contents

Introduction	1
Segment Analysis Methodology	1
Purpose	2
Survey Demographics	3
Personal Information	3
Practice Location and Experience	4
Primary Area of Practice and Work Organization	4
Key Survey Findings	5
Total Work Hours (Billable and Nonbillable)	5
Billable Hours	6
Employer Expectations	6
Remote Work	7
Burnout and Leaving the Profession	7
Student Loan Debt and Financial Stressors	8
Physical Activity and Sleeping Habits	9
Depression and Anxiety	9
Suicidal Thoughts and Actions	9
Alcohol and Drug Use	10
Exposure to Distressing Material, Experiences, or Trauma	11
Workplace Wellness Programs	12
WSBA Wellness Resources	12
Rule, Court, or Institutional Changes	12
Analysis and Key Takeaways	13
All Respondents	13
Solo and Small Firm (SSF) Respondents	13
Medium and Large Size Firm (MLSF) Respondents	14
Government and Public Interest (GPI) Respondents	14
New Member Respondents	15
Next Steps for the Task Force	16

Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from the WSBA Member Well-Being Survey (The Survey), providing an overview of the WSBA Member Well-Being Task Force's (Task Force) analysis and next steps.

The Survey was prepared by the Member Survey Workgroup of the Task Force with support from Professor Matthew S. Thiese from the University of Utah School of Medicine, WSBA staff, and National Business Research Institute (NBRI). The anonymous survey was administered by NBRI from January 28-February 20, 2025. The survey received responses from 903 members (9% response rate), yielding a 99.84% confidence level with a 5% sampling error.

SEGMENT ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The Task Force was able to segment certain practice areas and other demographics and compare the results of those particular segments to the results of survey respondents.

The segments analyzed were:

1. Respondents working in medium- and large- size firms.
2. Respondents working in solo and small firms.
3. Respondents working in government and public interest organizations.
4. Respondents designated as new members.
5. Respondents who reported their primary practice area as litigation (civil or criminal).
6. Respondents who reported minimum billing hour requirements of 1751 per year and over.
7. Respondents who reported their license type as Judicial.
8. Respondents who indicated their race/ethnicity as something other than White/European Descent.

The definitions of 1-4 are provided in footnotes as they are first mentioned in this report. These segments are aligned with the workgroups formed by the task force. The workgroups were established to study various segments and demographics of the profession including private practice, government and public interest, law student and new member, judicial, and intersection of diversity, equity and inclusion and well-being.

The results from the segment analysis are being used to draw inferences regarding the different segments based on the differences in response percentages of each segment when compared to the percentages of all respondents. The Task Force does not claim statistical causality or correlation when

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discussing the results of the segment analyses. Further research and analysis of each segment would be necessary to draw those statistical determinations.

PURPOSE

In November 2023 the Board of Governors (BOG) adopted four strategic priorities for FY24. One of those priorities was to study member well-being and expand and improve resources for, and assistance to, legal professionals and the legal community. In furtherance of this organizational priority, the BOG approved the charter for the Task Force in January 2024.

The Task Force consists of 11 members, with additional ad hoc members recruited to support the workgroups.

The Task Force is specifically tasked to:

- (1) study well-being among WSBA members and the broader legal community in Washington and
- (2) make recommendations to enhance well-being of those same individuals and thereby improve the provision of legal services.

The Charter calls for the formation of a workgroup to investigate well-being among WSBA members (i.e. Member Survey Workgroup). The Member Survey Workgroup's primary goal was to develop and deploy a member survey. Areas of inquiry for the survey include the relative well-being of members, the identification of challenges in legal practice, the occurrence of mental health conditions or illness, and suggestions for the Task Force.

Survey Demographics



Personal Information

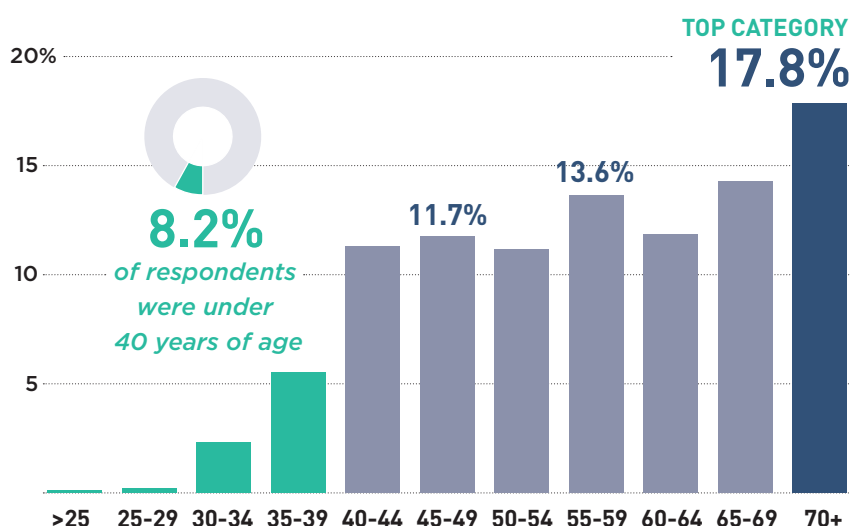
The survey was distributed to 10,000 WSBA members proportionally across all congressional districts. Respondents represented a wide range of age groups, with the majority being 50 or older. Notably, 73% of respondents in private practice were 50 or over, 90% of judiciary respondents were 50 or over, while 58% of those in government and public interest practice were 50 or over.

In terms of gender identity, 51% of respondents identified as male, 43.2% as female, and a small percentage as transgender, non-binary/non-conforming, or preferring not to disclose. There were higher percentages of males in private practice and females in government and public interest practice.

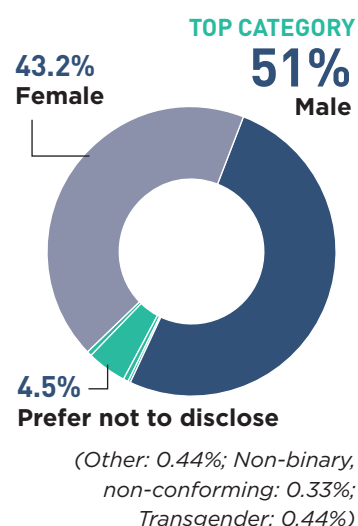
The majority of respondents identified as White/European Descent (82.3%), followed by Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, Multi Racial/Bi-Racial, and Black/African American/African Descent. Government and Public Interest¹ (GPI) respondents had a higher percentage of non-white attorneys.

Most respondents were married or in a committed relationship (77%), and 40.09% indicated they have caregiving responsibilities. The majority identified as heterosexual (81.7%), with smaller percentages identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or preferring not to disclose.

What is your age group?



What is your gender?



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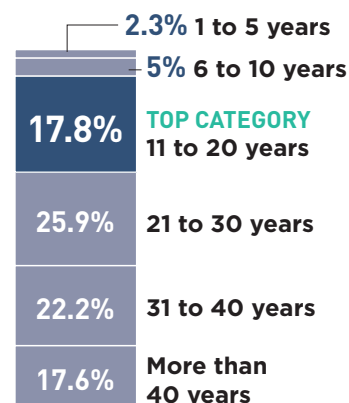
1. Government and Public Interest (GPI) respondents indicated they work for government, public service, or non-profit organizations.



Practice Location and Experience

Respondents were asked to select their primary practice location from a list of counties, with the majority located in the largest population centers of King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, or Clark counties (56.5%). Most respondents have been practicing law for over 10 years, with a little over half having practiced for 11-30 years. The majority of respondents were licensed as attorneys (97.7%), with a smaller percentage holding licenses as judicial officers. Among those with a judicial license type, the responses varied widely, with some having sat on the bench for only a few years, while others had decades of experience. The majority indicated that they serve in Superior, District, or Municipal Courts (71.4%), with smaller percentages in Appellate Courts, Juvenile Courts, Tribal Courts, Administrative Law Judge positions, or as Magistrate Judges.

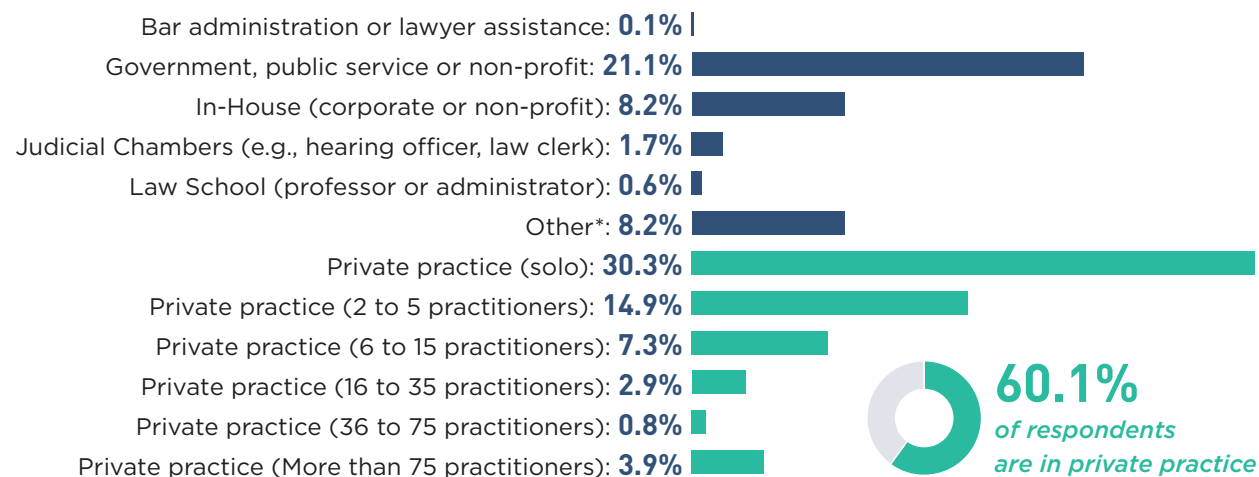
How many years have you been practicing law?



Primary Area of Practice and Work Organization

Respondents with an attorney license type were asked to describe their primary area of practice: 33.6% indicated that they work in litigation (civil or criminal), 19.6% in transactional, 16.9% in administrative/government/regulatory, and 8.1% in family law. The remaining percentage designated "other." The majority (60.1%) indicated that they work in private practice (solo or in firms of various sizes). The remainder work in judicial chambers, government/public service/non-profit organizations, in-house corporate roles, law schools, bar administration, or other settings. A little over 79% of respondents in private practice are Solo and Small Firm.²

Which of the following best describes the organization where you work?



2. Solo and Small Firm (SSF) include respondents who indicated they work in private practice firms with one to five practitioners.

Key Survey Findings

The Survey provided the opportunity for WSBA members to report on their well-being, focusing on various aspects such as demographics, practice location, work hours, stress levels, financial concerns, physical and mental health, and the availability and utilization of wellness programs.

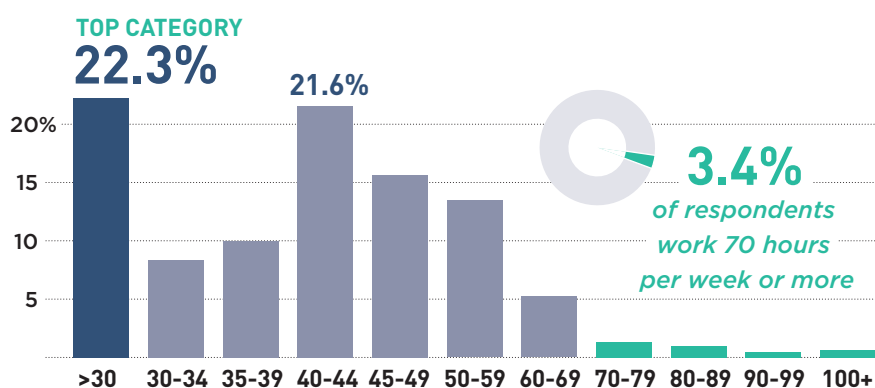
The survey aims to identify key stressors and challenges faced by legal professionals and to highlight areas where improvements can be made to enhance their overall well-being.

Highlights of the findings include:

Total Work Hours (Billable and Nonbillable)

- The majority of respondents reported working between 40 and 59 hours per week (including billable and nonbillable hours).
- Medium and Large Size Firm³ (MLSF) respondents were much higher in the 50-59 hours worked category and higher in all of the categories 60 hours and above.
- Solo and Small Firm (SSF) respondents were higher in the 30-34 and 35-39 hours worked categories and lower in the 40-79 hours categories.
- New Member⁴ respondents reported working more hours than the general population.⁵ The percentage of the general population working between 40-44 hours a week was 21.5% whereas new members working 40-44 hours was 27.6%. In addition, almost 7% more of New Members are working 60-69 hours compared to the general population.
- The number of GPI respondents working 40-44 hours per week was 15.79% higher than the general population.

In the past month, how many hours did you work in an average week? Include billable and non-billable time.



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3. Medium and Large Size Firm (MLSF) include respondents who indicated they work in private practice firms with six to more than 75 practitioners.

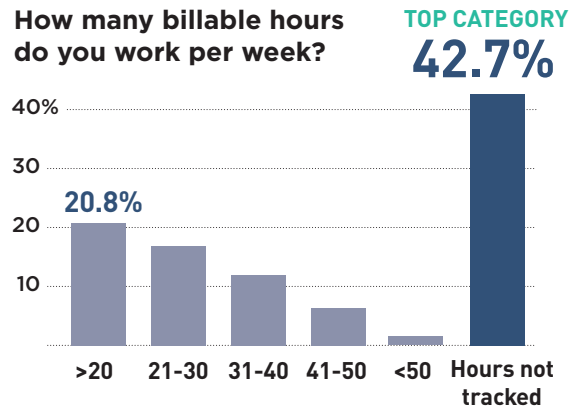
4. New Member respondents are those who indicated they have been in practice for ten years or less.

5. General population refers to all respondents.

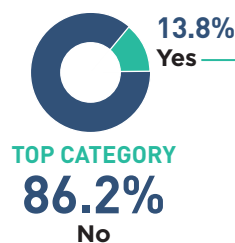
Billable Hours

- **About 14%** of respondents indicated their employer has a minimum billable hour requirement.
- **52.2%** of MLSF respondents indicated their employer has a minimum billable hour requirement.
- **57.3%** of respondents reported they track billable hours.
- **82.8%** of MLSF respondents track billable hours.
- **74.5%** of SSF respondents track billable hours.
- **74.3%** of MLSF respondents have minimum billable hour requirements between 1501 to 2000 hours per year.
 - New Members are billing more hours per week compared to the general population. **33.8%** of the New Member group is billing 31 to 50 hours per week compared to **18.2%** of the general population.
- **66.9%** of respondents experience stress due to billable hour expectations occasionally, regularly, or every day/nearly every day.
- **77.1%** of MLSF respondents experience stress due to billable hour expectations either occasionally, regularly, or every day/nearly every day.
- **82.6%** of the New Member group experiences stress due to billable hour expectations occasionally, regularly or every day/nearly every day.

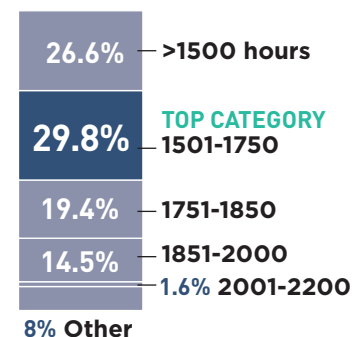
How many billable hours do you work per week?



Does your employer have a minimum billable hour expectation?



If yes, what is the expectation per year?



Employer Expectations

- **36.5%** of respondents indicated that they are expected to be available outside of work hours regularly or always and **45.5%** said they are expected to be available occasionally.
- **40.3%** of MLSF respondents indicated that they are expected to be available outside of work hours regularly or always and **48.5%** said they are expected to be available occasionally.
- **40.3%** of SSF respondents indicated that they are expected to be available outside of work hours regularly or always and **43.8%** said they are expected to be available occasionally.
- **36.9%** of New Member respondents indicated that they are expected to be available outside of work hours regularly or always and **53.6%** said they are expected to be available occasionally.

CONTINUED >

Remote Work

- **45%** of respondents indicated they can work remotely full-time.
- **44%** of respondents indicated they can work remotely part-time or on certain days.
- **11%** of respondents indicated they cannot work remotely.

When asked how their ability (or inability) to work remotely affects their well-being respondents answered as follows:

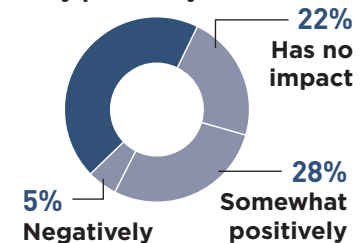
- 44% said it affects their well-being very positively.
- 22% said it affects their well-being somewhat positively.
- 28% indicated it has no impact on their well-being.
- 5% indicated it impacts their well-being somewhat or very negatively.

How does working remotely affect your well-being?

TOP CATEGORY

44%

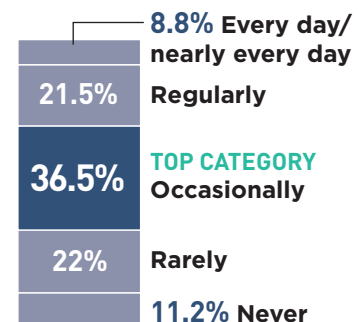
Very positively



Burnout and Leaving the Profession

- **58%** of respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally.
- **8.8%** of respondents reported feeling burned out from their work every day/nearly every day.
- **64.2%** of MLSF respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally.
- **60.5%** of GPI respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally.
- **80%** of New Member respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally.
- **57.4%** of SSF respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally.
- **49.7%** of respondents reported they have considered leaving the profession due to stress, burnout, or mental health issues.
 - SSF and MLSF respondents considered leaving due to stress, burnout, or mental health issues at slightly lower rates compared to the general population.
- **58.4%** of GPI respondents reported they have considered leaving the profession due to stress, burnout, or mental health issues.
- **53.7%** of respondents reporting their primary practice area as litigation (civil or criminal) have considered leaving the profession due to stress, burnout, or mental health issues.

How often do you feel burned out from work?

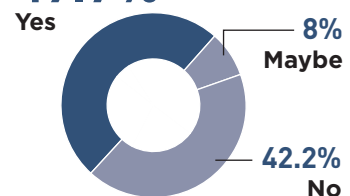


Have you ever considered leaving the legal profession due to stress or burnout?

TOP CATEGORY

49.7%

Yes



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Student Loan Debt and Financial Stressors

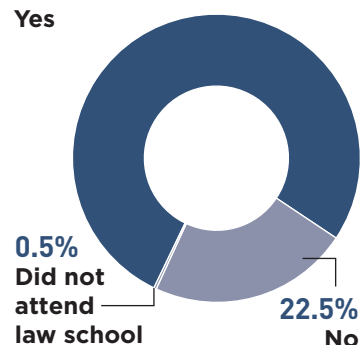
- **77.1%** of respondents indicated that they graduated law school with student loan debt.
 - 29.6% of respondents had over \$100k in student loan debt, 24.5% had \$50 to \$100k, and 24.8% had \$20k to \$50k.
 - New Member respondents reported their law school debt is comparatively larger. 46.1% of New Member group respondents are graduating with more than \$150,000 compared to 14.9% of the general population.
- **52.8%** of respondents with student loan debt reported that it has somewhat or significantly negatively affected their mental wellbeing.
- **60.4%** of GPI respondents with student loan debt reported that it has somewhat or significantly negatively affected their mental wellbeing.
- **86.5%** of New Member respondents with student loan debt reported that it has somewhat or significantly negatively affected their mental wellbeing.
- **52.6%** of all respondents are stressed by their financial situation occasionally, regularly, or every day/nearly every day.
- **26.5%** of all respondents have wanted to make a career change but didn't because of student loan debt.
- **40.4%** of New Member respondents have wanted to make a career change but didn't because of student loan debt.
- **35.2%** of GPI respondents have wanted to make a career change but didn't because of student loan debt.

Did you graduate law school with student loan debt?

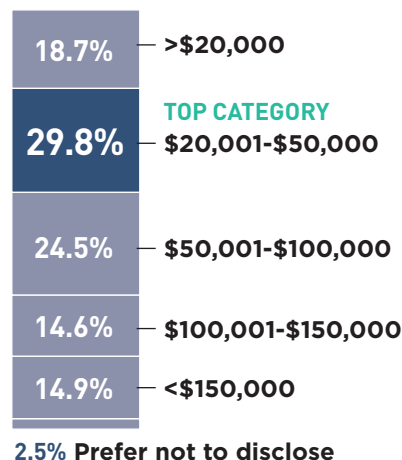
TOP CATEGORY

77.1%

Yes



How much debt did you have upon graduation?

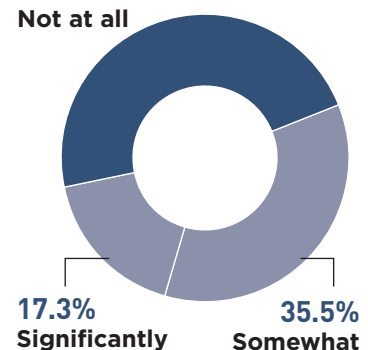


To what extent has the debt negatively affected your well-being?

TOP CATEGORY

47.3%

Not at all



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Physical Activity and Sleeping Habits

- **53.6%** of respondents are engaged in at least 20 minutes of physical activity for 4-7 days per week.
- **64.2%** of all respondents reported getting about 6 to 7 hours of sleep on an average night and 20% reported getting 8 hours of sleep at night.
- **11.4%** of all respondents get 4 or 5 hours of sleep per night.
- **74.2%** of all respondents reported waking up feeling rested and restored sometimes, regularly, or always.
- **25.8%** of all respondents reported they wake up feeling rested and rested rarely or never.
- **68.8%** of GPI respondents reported waking up feeling rested and restored sometimes, regularly, or always.
- **30.2%** of GPI respondents reported waking up feeling rested and restored rarely or never.

Depression and Anxiety

- **15.7%** of all respondents reported feeling sad, depressed, or hopeless in the past month regularly or every day/nearly every day and 27.1% reported feeling the same occasionally.
 - Higher rates among New Member (23.4%) and GPI (20.6%) respondents.
- **56.8%** of all respondents reported feeling nervous, on edge, worried, or panic in the past month occasionally, regularly, or every day/nearly every day.
 - Higher rates among New Members (84.4%), civil/criminal litigators (63.2%), and GPI (68.8%) respondents.
- **57.2%** of Judicial respondents reported feeling nervous, on edge, worried, or panic in the past month occasionally, regularly, or every day/nearly every day.

Suicidal Thoughts and Actions

- **9.9%** of respondents choosing to answer the question (739 respondents) indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm in the past 12 months.
 - Among those who reported having suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm, the 83.6% indicated that their work environment somewhat or significantly contributed to these thoughts or actions.
- **13.3%** of MLSF respondents indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm in the past 12 months and 86.7% of those who reported having suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm, indicated that their work environment somewhat or significantly contributed to these thoughts or actions.
- **9.5%** of SSF respondents indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm in the past 12 months and 81.3% of those who reported having suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm, indicated that their work environment somewhat or significantly contributed to these thoughts or actions.
- **16%** of New Member respondents indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm in the past 12 months and 100% of those who reported having suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self-harm, or acts of self-harm, indicated that their work environment somewhat or significantly contributed to these thoughts or actions.

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Alcohol and Drug Use

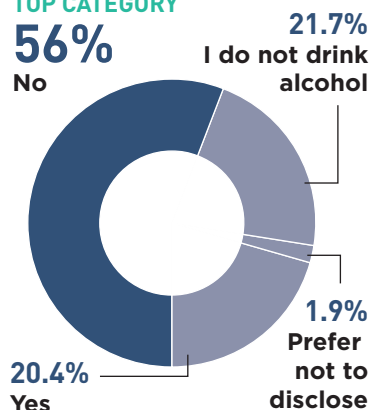
- **20.4%** of all respondents indicated that they feel concerned about how much or how often they drink alcohol. Results were similar for SSF, New Member, and GPI respondents.
- **26.9%** of MLSF respondents indicated that they feel concerned about how much or how often they drink alcohol.
- **13.4%** of all respondents indicated that they have used drugs other than those prescribed for a current medical condition in the past 12 months.
 - Among those who reported recreational drug use, 20.83% indicated that they feel concerned about how much or how often they use drugs.
- **20.4%** of all respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the stress of their job and/or the culture at their workplace cause them to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs more than they otherwise would.
- **28.1%** of New Member respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the stress of their job and/or the culture at their workplace cause them to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs more than they otherwise would.
- **19.7%** of GPI respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the stress of their job and/or the culture at their workplace cause them to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs more than they otherwise would.
- **24.1%** of MLSF respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the stress of their job and/or the culture at their workplace cause them to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs more than they otherwise would.
- **69.7%** of all respondents indicated that their workplace social events include alcohol some of the time, often, or always. Only 30.31% reported that their workplace events never include alcohol.

Do you ever feel concerned about how much or how often you drink alcohol?

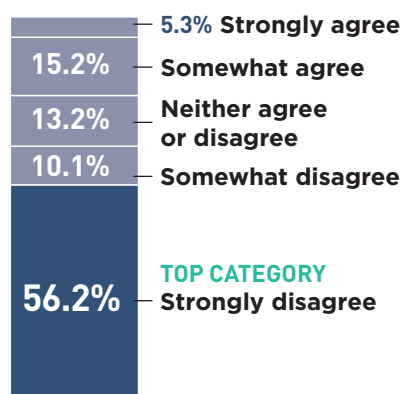
TOP CATEGORY

56%

No



The stress of my job and/or the culture at my workplace cause me to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs more than I otherwise would:

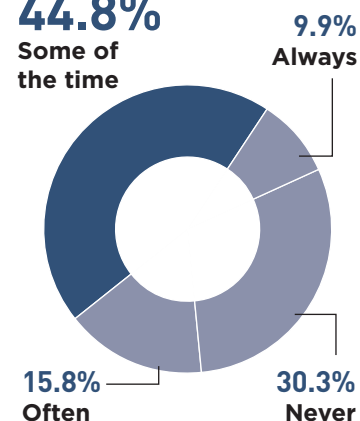


My workplace social events include alcohol:

TOP CATEGORY

44.8%

Some of the time



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Exposure to Distressing Material, Experiences, or Trauma

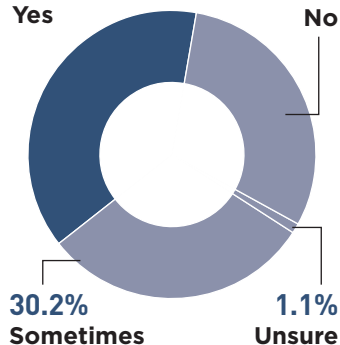
- **38.3%** of respondents are exposed to distressing material, experiences, or trauma related to clients or others they encounter in doing their job.
 - Another 30.2% indicated they are *sometimes* exposed to distressing material, experiences, or trauma related to clients or others they encounter in doing their job.
 - 90% of all respondents reported they find themselves thinking about work-related distressing material, experiences, or trauma outside of work some of the time, often, or always.
- **43.9%** of SSF respondents are exposed to distressing material, experiences, or trauma related to clients or others they encounter in doing their job.
- **49.5%** of GPI respondents are exposed to distressing material, experiences, or trauma related to clients or others they encounter in doing their job.
 - 90.7% of GPI respondents reported they find themselves thinking about work-related distressing material, experiences, or trauma outside of work some of the time, often, or always.
- **20.3%** of all respondents reported that exposure to distressing material, experiences, or trauma from work has a significant impact on their mental health or well-being.
- **27.8%** of GPI respondents reported that exposure to distressing material, experiences, or trauma from work has a significant impact on their mental health or well-being.

Are you exposed to distressing material, experiences, or trauma related to your clients or others you encounter in doing your job?

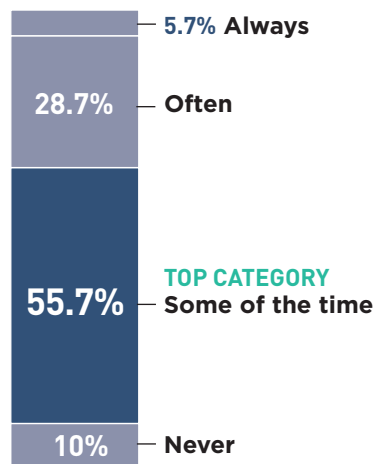
TOP CATEGORY

38.3%

Yes



How often do you find yourself thinking about work-related distressing material, experiences, or trauma outside of work?

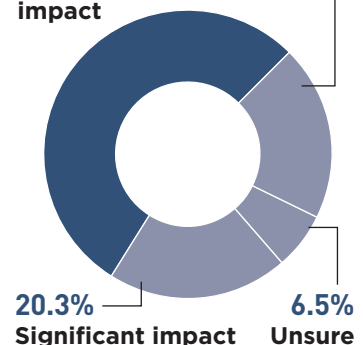


How much of an impact does this traumatic exposure from work have on your mental health or well-being?

TOP CATEGORY

53.4%

Slight impact



CONTINUED >

Workplace Wellness Programs

- **40.2%** of respondents indicated that their employer offers wellness programs or resources.
- **51.4%** of respondents indicated that they have utilized wellness programs offered by their employer.
 - Respondents reported that their employers offer various wellness resources, including educational content on well-being, memberships or subscriptions to wellness resources or apps, direct financial support for well-being activities, flexible options for mental health leave, access to or referrals for external wellness resources, and whole office mental health opportunities.
 - Among those who have not utilized wellness programs, the primary reasons included they haven't needed them, not having time to utilize the services, and they utilize services not offered by their employer. Other reasons included stigma or reputational/confidentiality concerns, fear it will affect their path to promotion, and doubt that these offerings will make a difference.
- **79.9%** of SSF respondents reported they do not have access to employer wellness programs and resources.

WSBA Wellness Resources

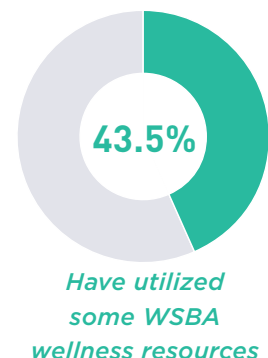
- **43.5%** of respondents have utilized some WSBA wellness resources.
- **46.4%** of SSF respondents have utilized some WSBA wellness resources.

The top four WSBA wellness resources utilized by all respondents were:

- CLEs on well-being related topics
- Mental health consultations/brief therapy
- Peer advising
- Referrals for services.

The top four reasons respondents don't use WSBA wellness resources were:

- Haven't needed the resources
- Unaware of the resources
- Utilize other resources not provided by WSBA
- Doubt the offerings will make a difference and no time to utilize the resources were essentially tied for 4th.



Rule, Court, or Institutional Changes

- Respondents were asked to consider various possible rules, court, or institutional changes and their potential impact on well-being. The majority indicated that changes such as making court filing deadlines earlier than midnight, standardizing court rules/preferences across counties, and consistent consequences for abusive/demeaning tactics within hearings would somewhat or significantly improve their well-being.

The Washington State Bar Association Member Well-Being Survey Descriptive Statistics provides a full breakdown of the data, including visuals, demographic trends, and quantitative insights.

Analysis and Key Takeaways

Building on the survey findings, the WSBA Member Well-Being Task Force has conducted an initial analysis, highlighting the unique challenges and stressors faced by the legal profession overall and various segments within the legal profession.

All Respondents

The Survey results demonstrate that legal professionals in Washington struggle to maintain work life balance. Respondents reported working long hours to meet client demands, billable hour requirements, and complete nonbillable hour duties.

The rates of burnout, depression, and anxiety reported among legal professionals is concerning and the Task Force is using the information gained from the survey to assess how the legal profession in Washington compares to the general population and other highly educated professionals.

The Task Force has similar concerns around alcohol and drug usage among Washington legal professionals. Moreover, the rates of suicidal thoughts and actions within the profession raise serious questions about the stresses and challenges associated with the legal profession, particularly when the suicidal thoughts and actions are tied closely to work environment.

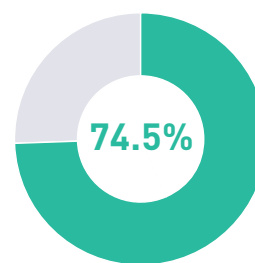
The Task Force will use the results from the survey to further target its study and research of well-being among the legal profession in Washington and to ground the recommendations in our final report.

Solo and Small Firm (SSF) Respondents

Solo and Small Firm respondents reported working fewer hours compared to the general population of lawyers. They were higher in the 30-34 and 35-39 hours worked categories and lower in the 40-79 hours categories. This indicates that SSF respondents may have more flexibility in their work schedules.

Only 8.13% of SSF respondents reported having a billable hour requirement. However, **74.5%** of SSF respondents track billable hours, which is higher than the general population.

When considering burnout rates, 57.4% of SSF respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally, which is slightly lower than the general population.

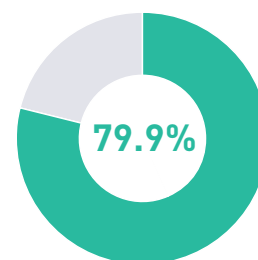


Track billable hours

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However, 9.5% of SSF respondents indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions in the past 12 months, and 81.3% of those reported that their work environment contributed to these thoughts or actions. This highlights the need for better mental health support for SSF respondents.

Moreover, **79.9%** of SSF respondents reported they do not have access to employer wellness programs and resources, underscoring the importance of WSBA wellness resources to this segment of the legal profession. Of concern is that the 2nd top reason that SSF respondents do not utilize WSBA resource is because they are unaware of them. WSBA will need to focus on raising awareness of its resources among members.



*Do not have access
to employer wellness
programs*

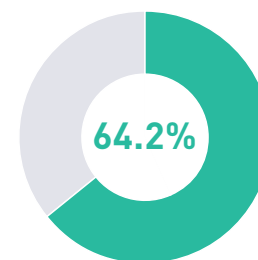
Medium and Large Size Firm (MLSF) Respondents

Medium and Large Size Firm respondents reported working more hours compared to the general population. They were much higher in the 50-59 hours worked category and higher in all of the categories 60 hours and above.

Additionally, 52.2% of MLSF respondents indicated their employer has a minimum billable hour requirement, and 82.8% of MLSF respondents track billable hour. 77.2% of MLSF respondents experience stress due to billable hour expectations either occasionally, regularly, or every day/nearly every day which is significantly higher compared to the general population. This suggests that MLSF respondents face increased pressure associated with work requirements.

In terms of stress and burnout, **64.2%** of MLSF respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally, which is higher than the general population.

Furthermore, 13.3% of MLSF respondents indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions in the past 12 months, and 86.7% of those reported that their work environment contributed to these thoughts or actions. This underscores the need for better opportunities for work-life balance along with expanded mental health and wellness programs for MLSF respondents.



*Feel burned out from
their work regularly
or occasionally*

Government and Public Interest (GPI) Respondents

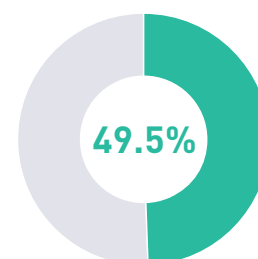
Government and Public Interest respondents reported working more hours in the 40-44 hours per week category compared to the general population.

Additionally, 60.5% of GPI respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or

CONTINUED >

occasionally, which is slightly higher than the general population. GPI respondents also experience depression and anxiety at higher rates when compared to the general population.

49.5% of GPI respondents are exposed to distressing material, experiences, or trauma related to clients or others they encounter in doing their job which is higher compared to the general population. 27.8% of GPI respondents reported that exposure to distressing material, experiences, or trauma from work has a significant impact on their mental health or well-being which is higher compared to the general population. This indicates that GPI respondents may face unique stressors and challenges in their work environment that require targeted resources.



*Are exposed to
distressing material,
experiences, or
trauma at work*

When it comes to financial stressors, 60.4% of GPI respondents with student loan debt reported that it has somewhat or significantly negatively affected their mental wellbeing. Additionally, 35.2% of GPI respondents wanted to make a career change but didn't because of student loan debt. This highlights the financial pressures faced by GPI respondents and the need for better financial support and resources.

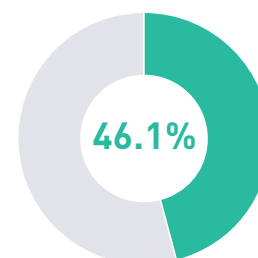
New Member Respondents

New Member respondents reported their law school debt is larger compared to the general population and a higher percentage of New Member respondents have wanted to make a career change but didn't because of student loan debt.

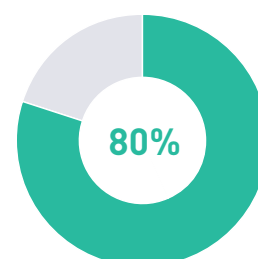
New Member respondents reported working more hours compared to the general population. The percentage of New Members working 40-44 hours was 27.6%, compared to 21.5% of the general population. Additionally, almost 7% more of New Members are working 60-69 hours compared to the general population. This suggests that New Members may face higher work demands and expectations.

In terms of stress and burnout, **80%** of New Member respondents reported feeling burned out from their work regularly or occasionally, which is significantly higher than the general population. New Member respondents also experience depression and anxiety at higher rates when compared to the general population.

Furthermore, 16% of New Member respondents indicated they have had suicidal thoughts or actions in the past 12 months, and 100% of those reported that their work environment contributed to these thoughts or actions. This underscores the need for better mental health and targeted wellness programs for New Member respondents.



*New members
graduated law school
with more than
\$150,000 in debt
(GP is 14.9%).*



*Feel burned out from
their work regularly
or occasionally*

Next Steps for the Task Force

The Task Force is using these findings and the underlying survey responses to help guide its priorities. The work is part of the Task Force's overall research and analysis to formulate the best possible final recommendations for the WSBA Board of Governors. The Task Force has reviewed these results within its Working Groups and at the full Task Force level.

AI Disclosure: *Some material in this publication was generated using CoPilot and was reviewed for accuracy by the Survey Workgroup of the Member Well-Being Task Force.*

APPENDIX D

Suicide and Addiction Workgroup Supplemental Survey Results

Responses Overview

Active

Responses

195



Average Time

19:31



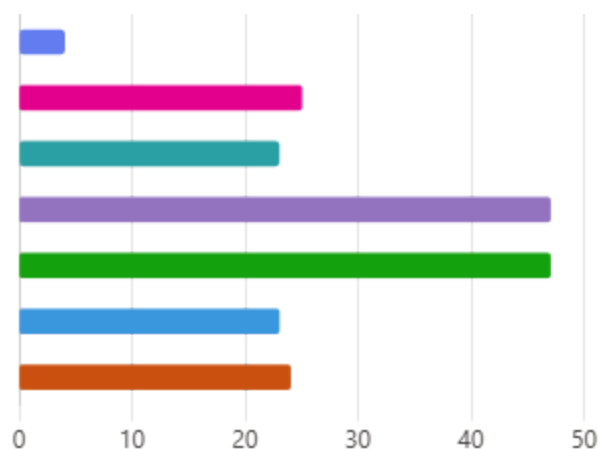
Duration

52 Days



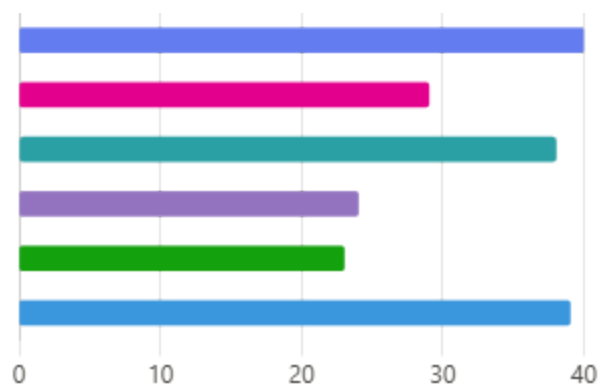
1. How long have you been in legal practice?

Less than 1 year	4
1 to 5 years	25
6-10 years	23
11-20 years	47
21-30 years	47
31-40 years	23
More than 40 years	24

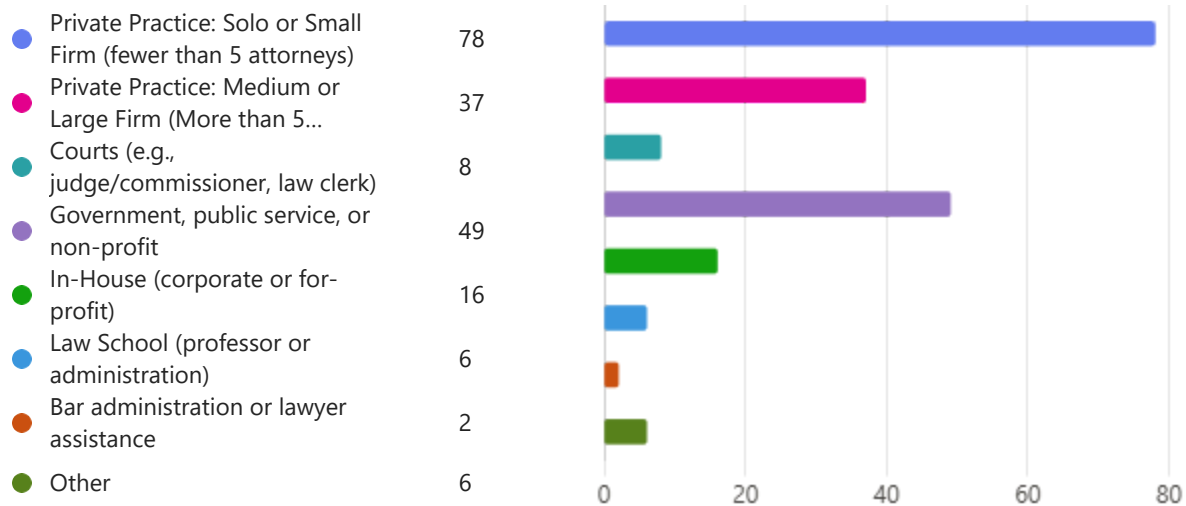


2. In general terms, please describe the type(s) of law your practice.

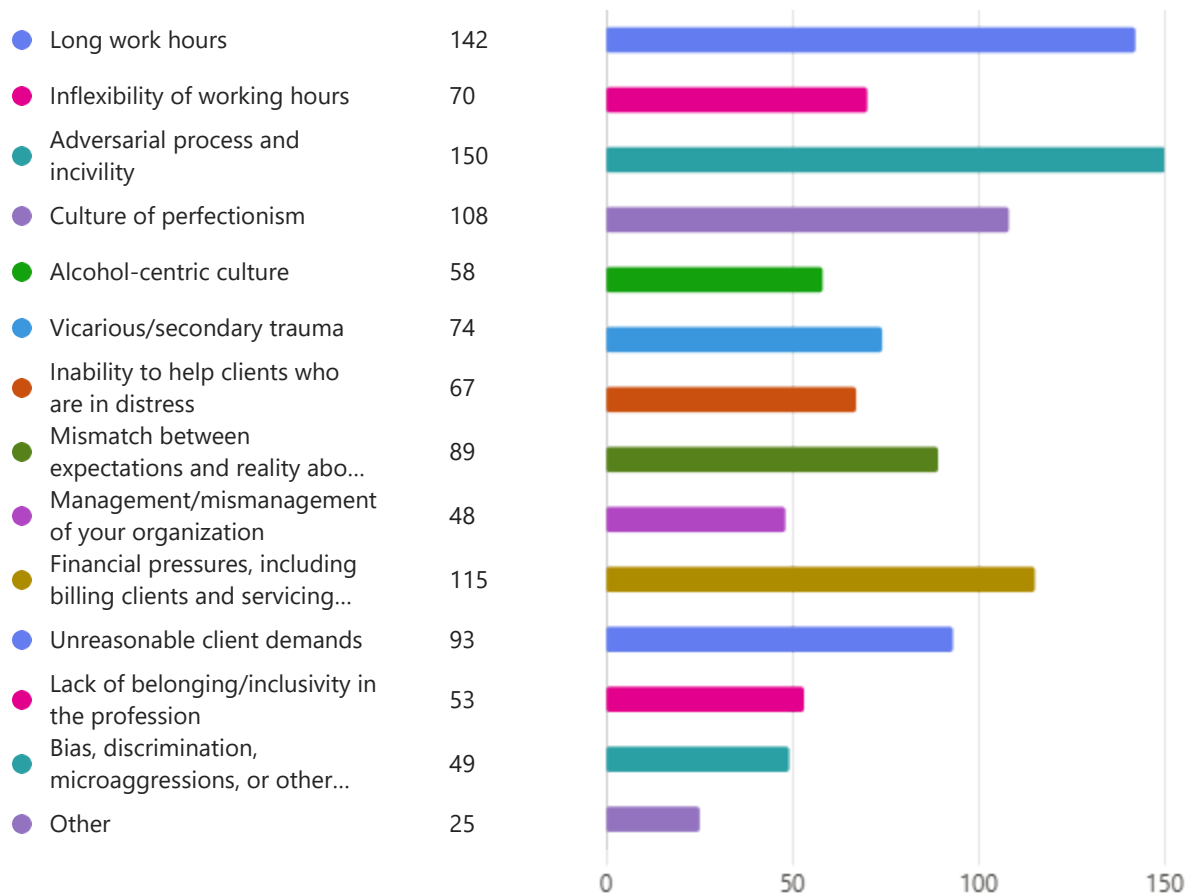
Litigation (civil)	40
Litigation (criminal)	29
Transactional (e.g., business, real property, contracts)	38
Family Law	24
Administrative, Government or Regulatory	23
Other	39



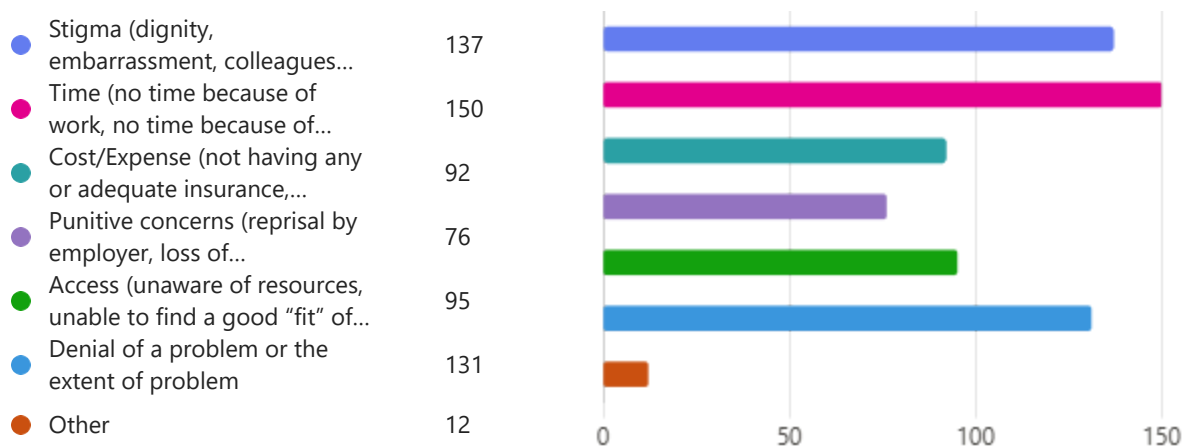
3. Which of the following best describes the organization where you work?



4. Thinking about yourself or other attorneys you know, what features of the legal profession do you believe contribute to mental health or substance use challenges? Select all that apply.

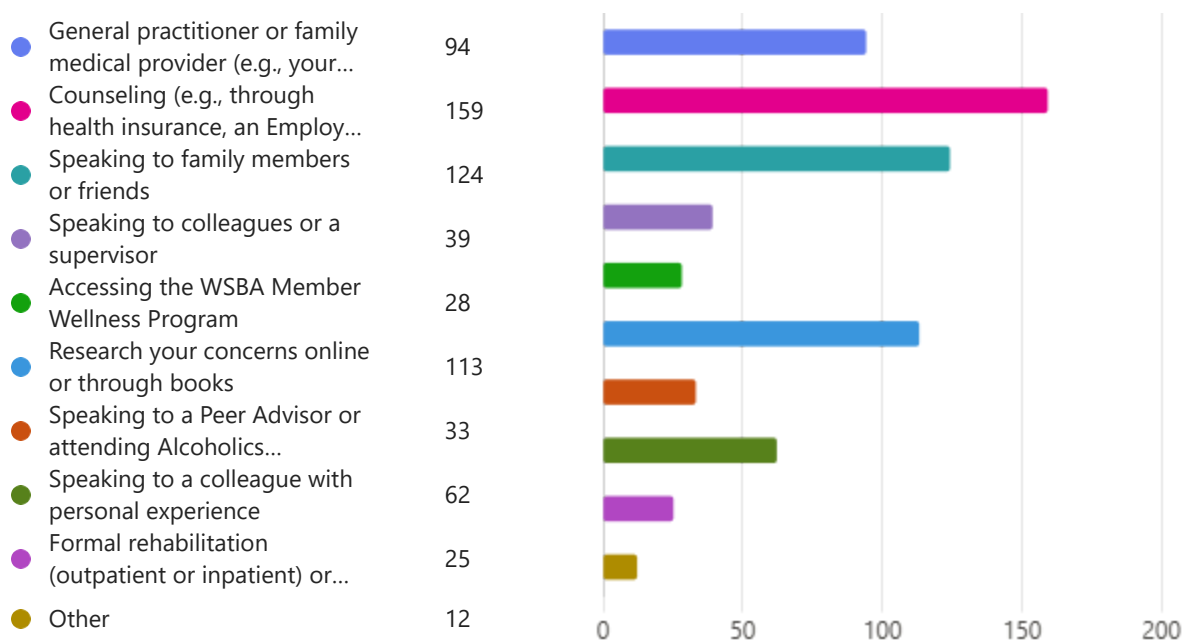


5. Thinking about yourself or other attorneys you know, which of the following may be reasons why an attorney may not seek care for mental health concerns or substance use? Select all that apply.

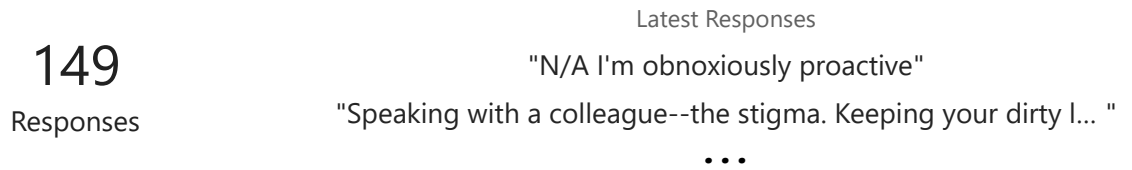


6. For the following questions, please imagine that you were facing a mental health or substance abuse issue yourself.

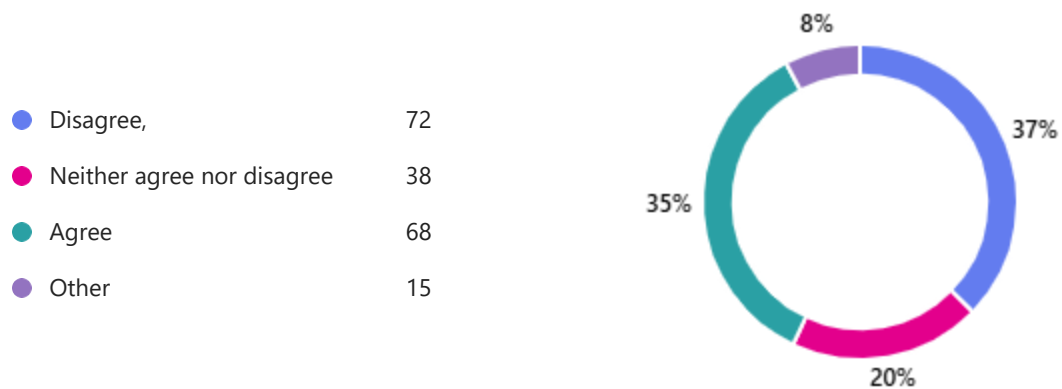
What resources do you believe you would realistically use to get help? Select all that apply.



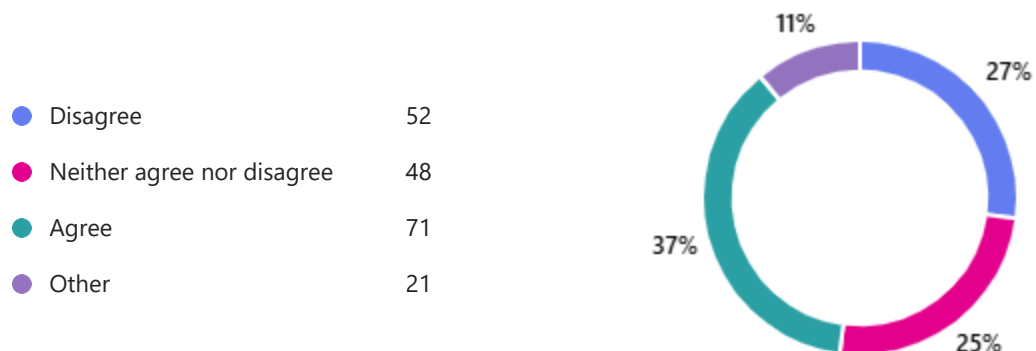
7. Looking at the resources in the previous question, which options do you believe you definitely would not feel comfortable using? Why not?



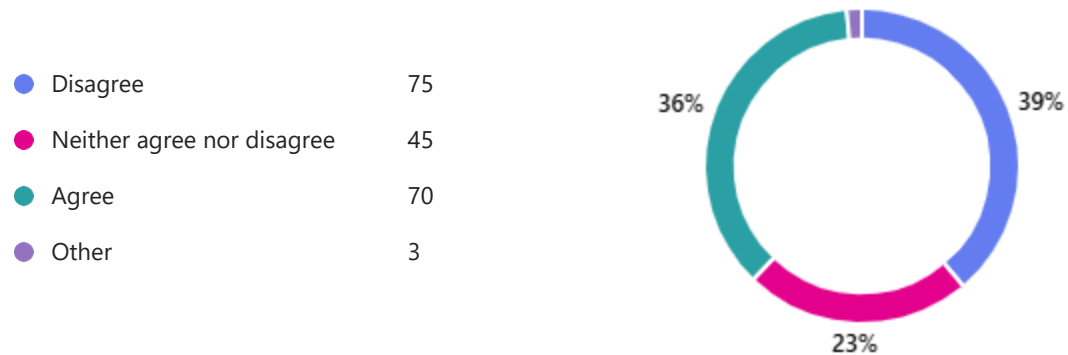
8. If I were experiencing a substance use or mental health issue, I would feel comfortable taking sick leave and/or a medical leave of absence from work.



9. At my current employer, I could take leave to address a substance use or mental health issue without suffering negative workplace consequences, such as exclusion from advancement opportunities, demotion or dismissal, or social exclusion.

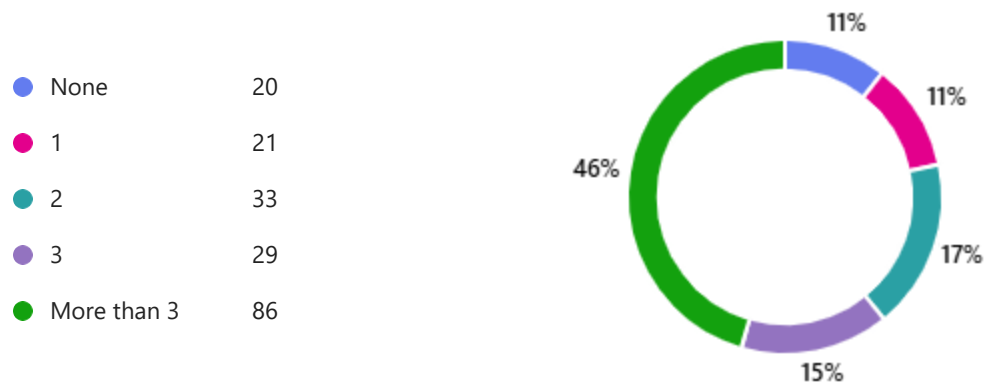


10. If I were experiencing a substance use or mental health issue, I would feel comfortable seeking peer support (either formally through a peer counseling program, or informally through colleagues).

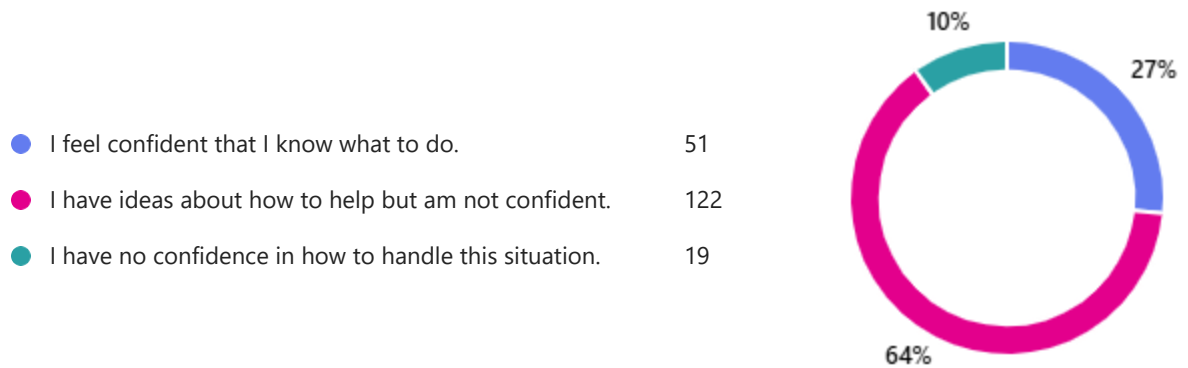


11. The following questions ask about self-harm and suicide.

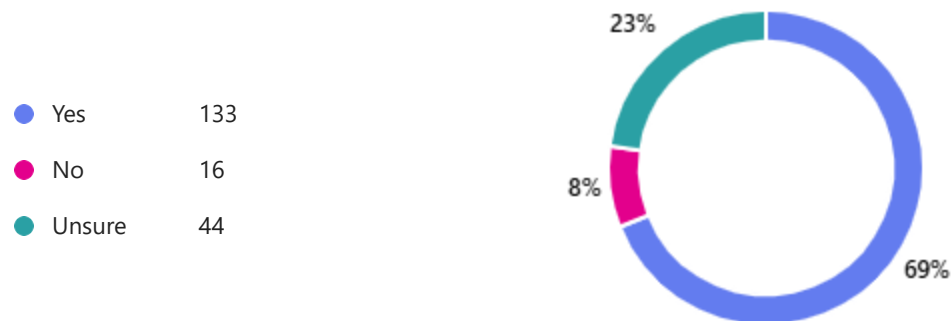
In the event that you had thoughts of self harm or suicide, are there people in your life who you trust and who you feel you could reach out to for support? If so, how many?



12. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am confident that I would know what to do to help someone who has told me they intend to or have made plans to kill themselves.



13. "Mental health first aid" is a term describing training and resources that teach you how to identify, understand, and respond to mental health challenges in other people. If a training on mental health first aid were made available, would you be interested in taking it?



14. Are there additional thoughts you would like to share about the culture of drinking; challenges finding help; or the struggles attorneys have with their mental health?

84
Responses

Latest Responses
"This shit's not for the weak."
...

APPENDIX E

Judiciary Workgroup Supplemental Survey Results

Responses Overview

Closed

Responses

156



Average Time

22:52



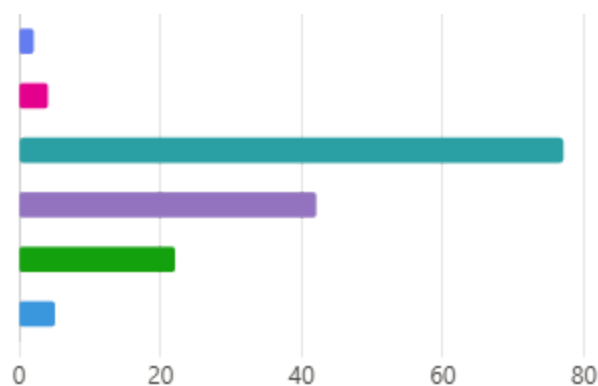
Duration

92 Days



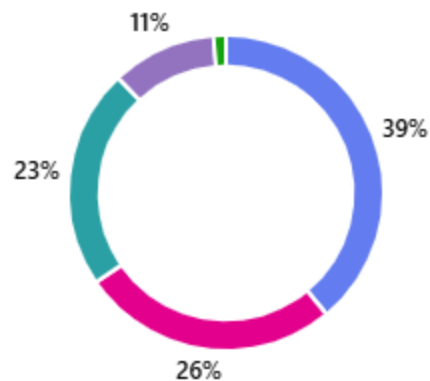
1. What court do you serve on? Check all that apply.

Supreme Court	2
Court of Appeals	4
Superior Court	77
District Court	42
Municipal Court	22
Tribal Court	5

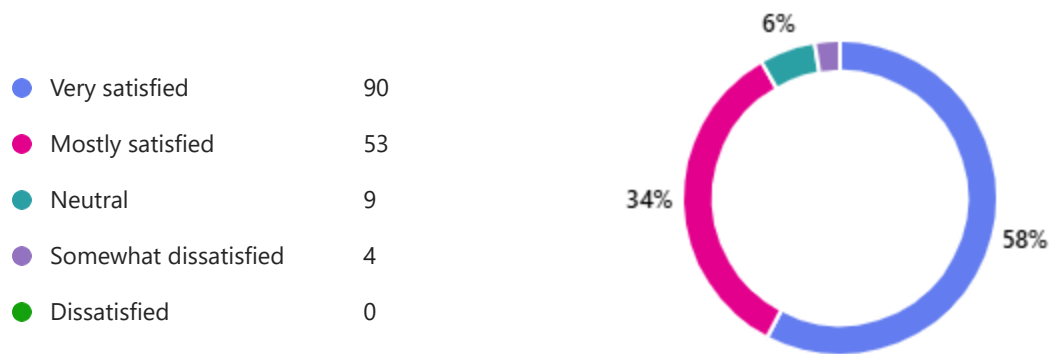


2. How long have you been on the bench? Check all that apply.

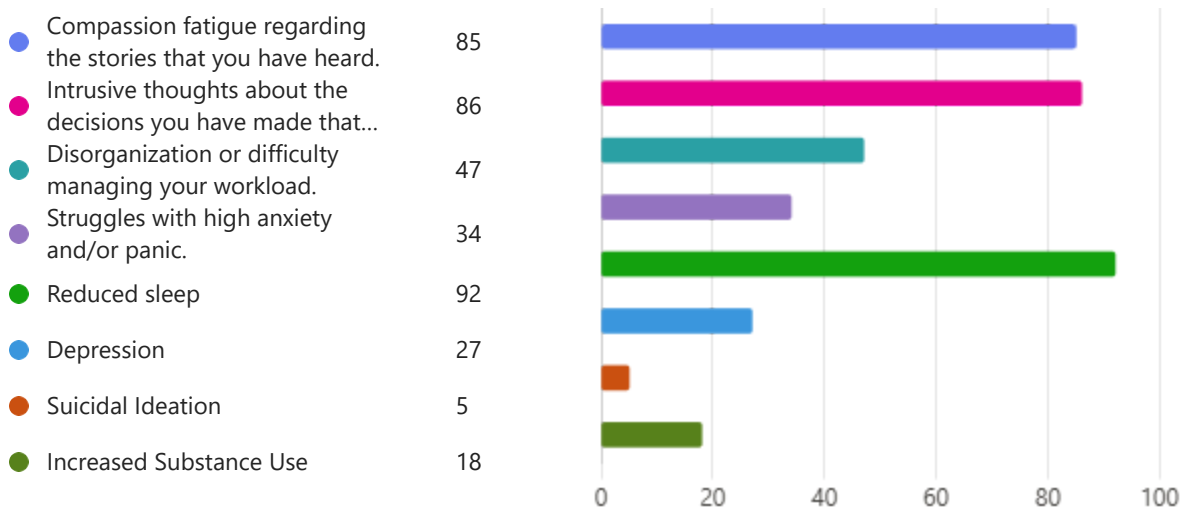
0-5 years	62
6-10 years	42
11-20 years	36
More than 20 years	17
Retired	2



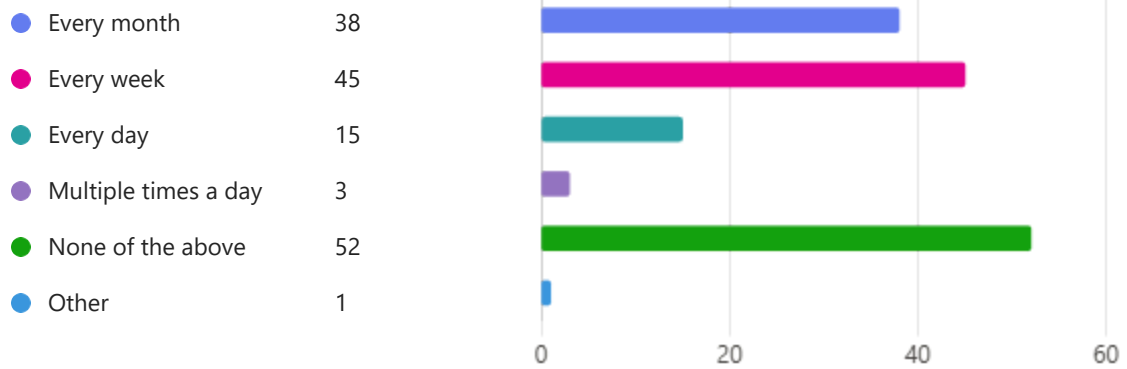
3. How satisfied do you feel about your career choice to become a judge?



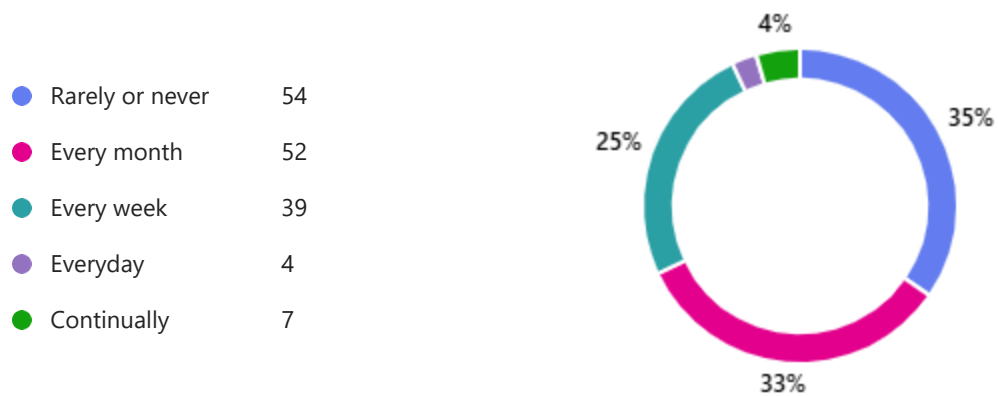
4. Which of the following challenges have you experienced as a result of your position on the bench? Check all that apply.



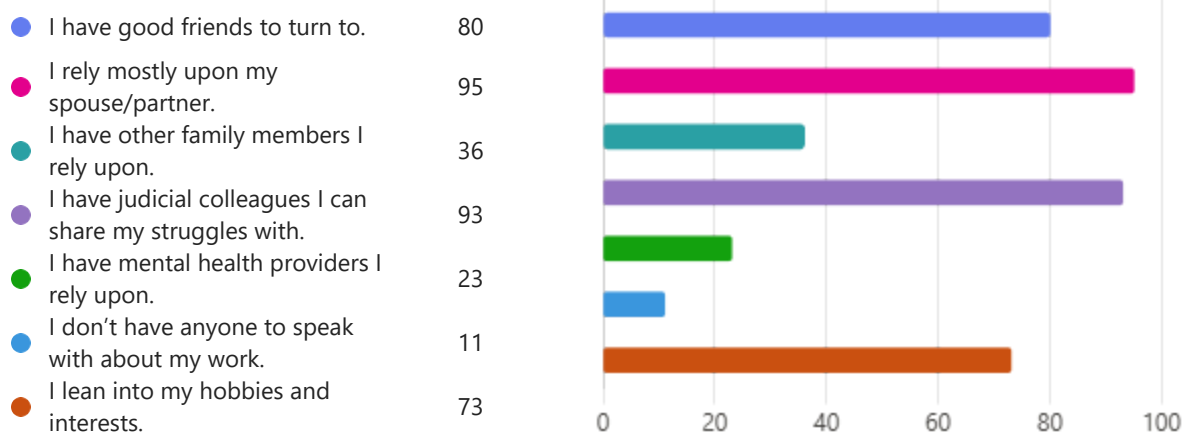
5. To what extent do challenges in concentration impact your work?



6. To what extent do you agonize over judicial decisions that you are going to make or have made.

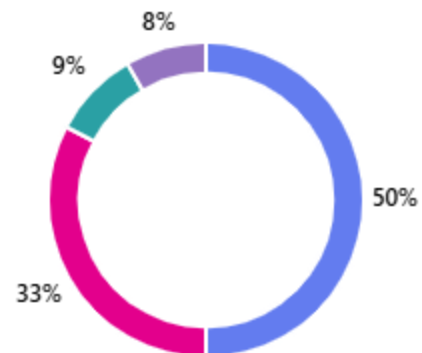


7. When overwhelmed by work do you have people to turn to in order to relieve this stress? Check all that apply:



8. I feel like I spend too much time trying to be what a judge is supposed to be rather than being myself.

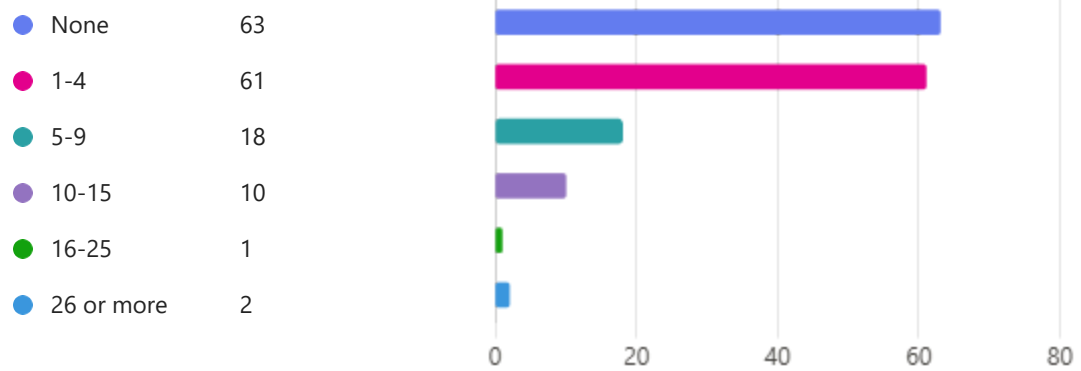
Not really true	78
A little true	51
Mostly true	14
Definitely true	13



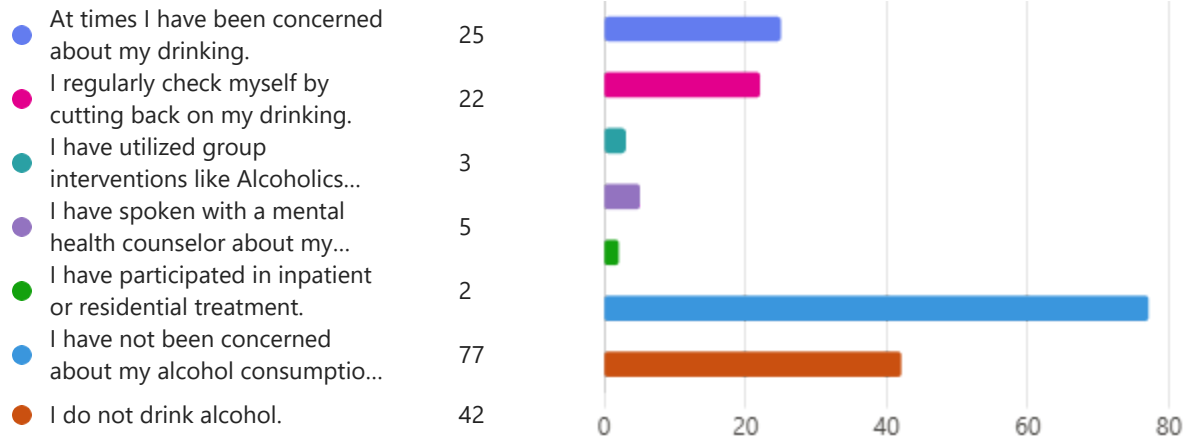
9. We are allowed to utilize sick leave for mental health reasons. Is this something you utilize?



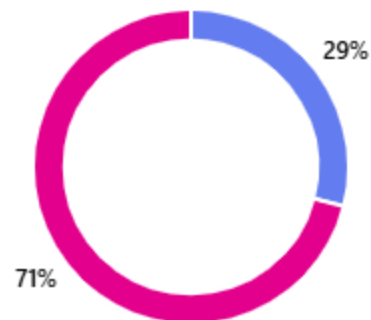
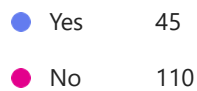
10. How many alcoholic beverages have you had in the last week?



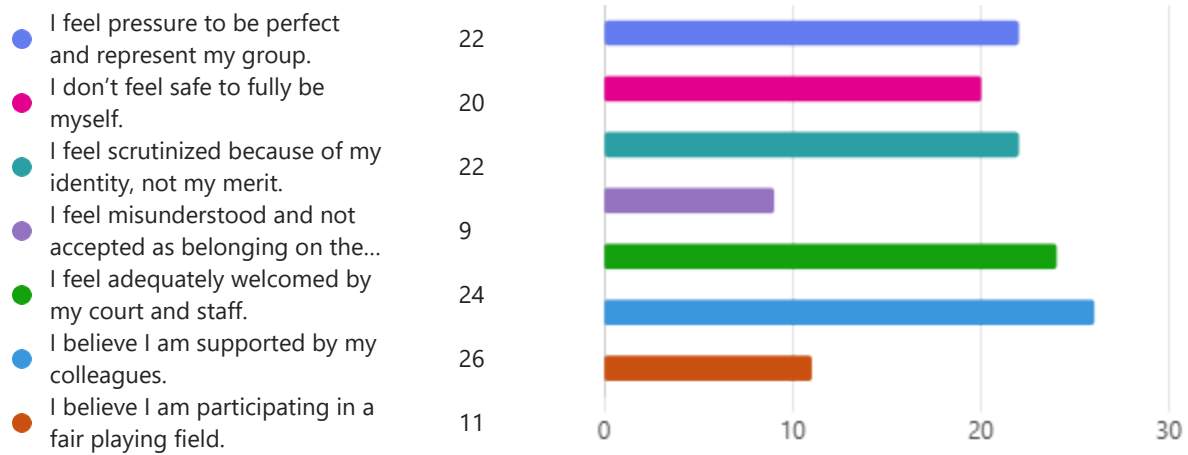
11. What perspectives or solutions have you turned to for addressing alcohol use (check all that apply)



12. Do you identify as a member of an under-represented, minority, or marginalized group?

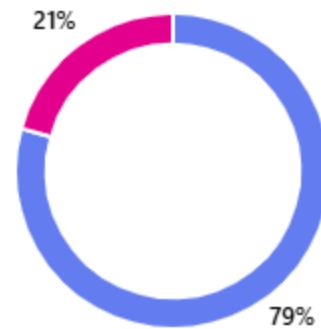


13. As a result do you experience any of the following, both positive and negative?



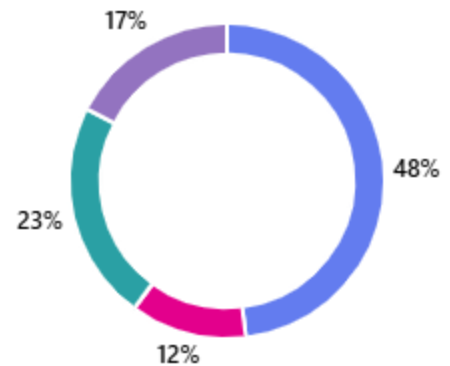
14. Do you handle after-hours search warrants?

Yes	123
No	32



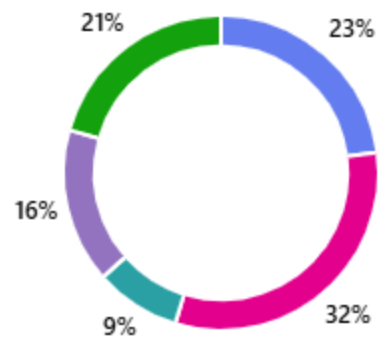
15. What impacts does after-hours search warrant work have upon your well-being? Check all that apply:

● A reduction in sleep quality.	113
● Second guessing decisions made after hours.	28
● A decrease in work performance the next day.	53
● Difficulty planning my personal life.	41

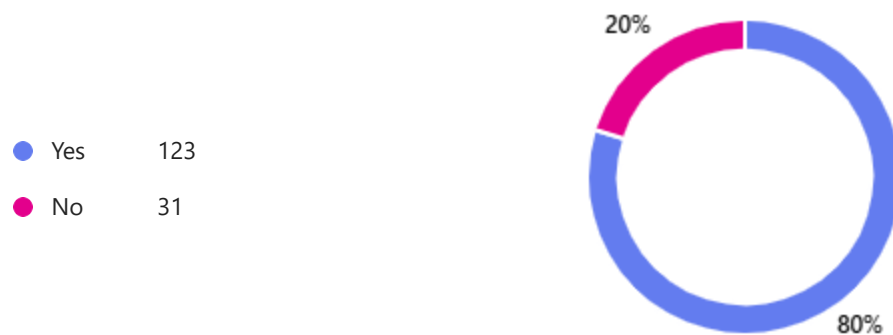


16. Have you ever felt discouraged that you do not serve on a higher court? Check all that apply.

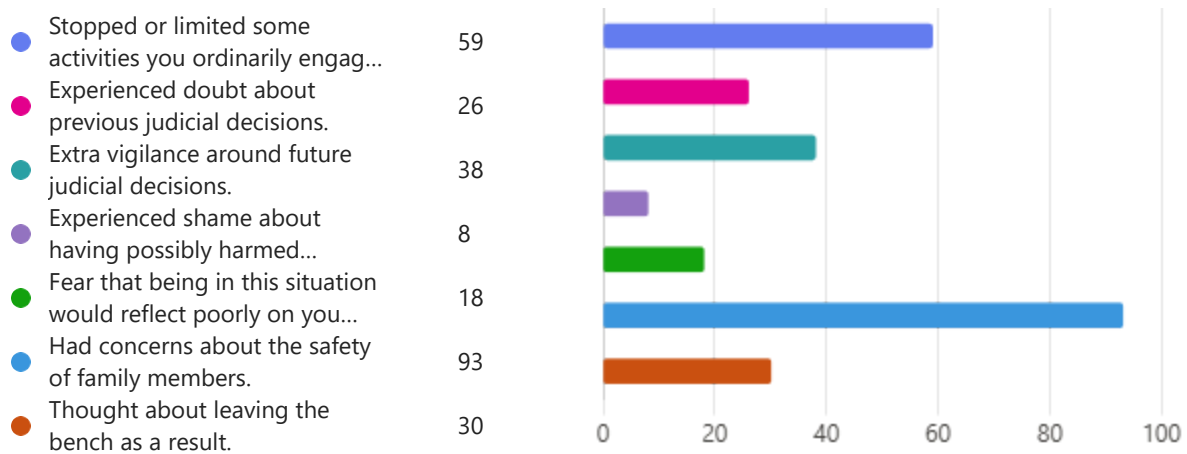
● I feel agency to move within or upwards within the profession.	39
● I find the evaluation and promotion cycle draining.	54
● I worry about my performance as it relates to my ratings.	15
● I am disappointed by a lack of opportunity for promotion within the judiciary.	27
● I think the system works fine and deserving people get appointed.	35



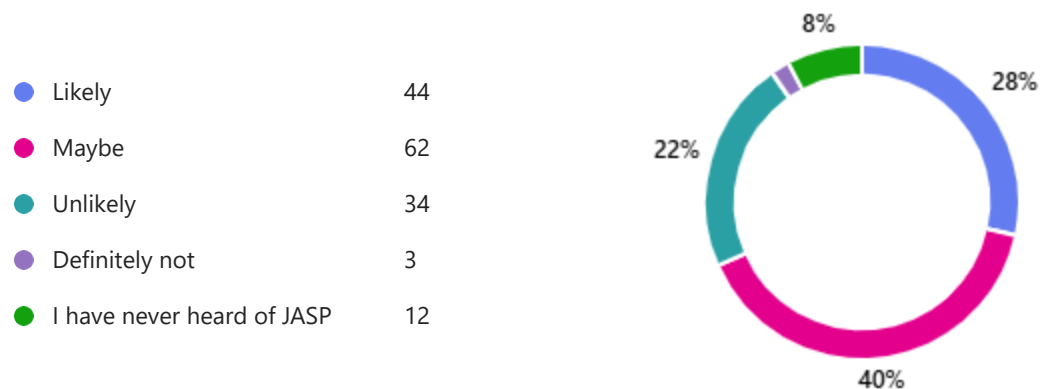
17. Have you had disturbing communications from either current or past litigants or a member of the public at large?



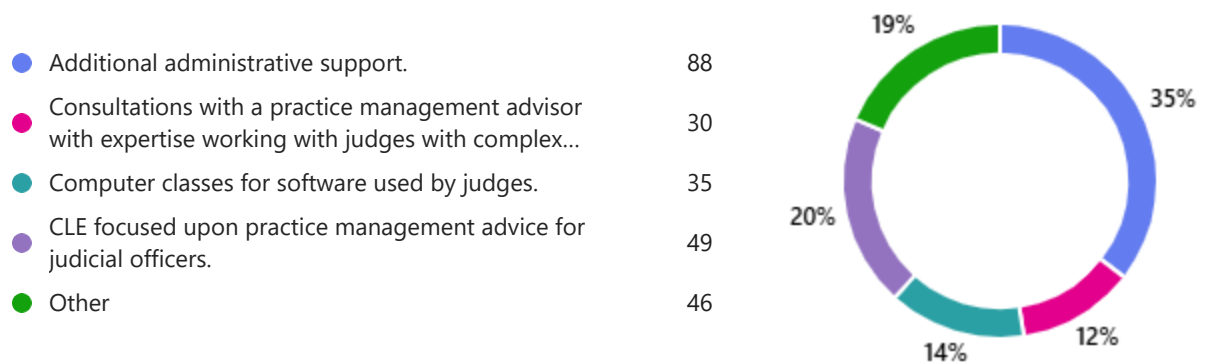
18. Which of the following did you experience as a result? Check all that apply.



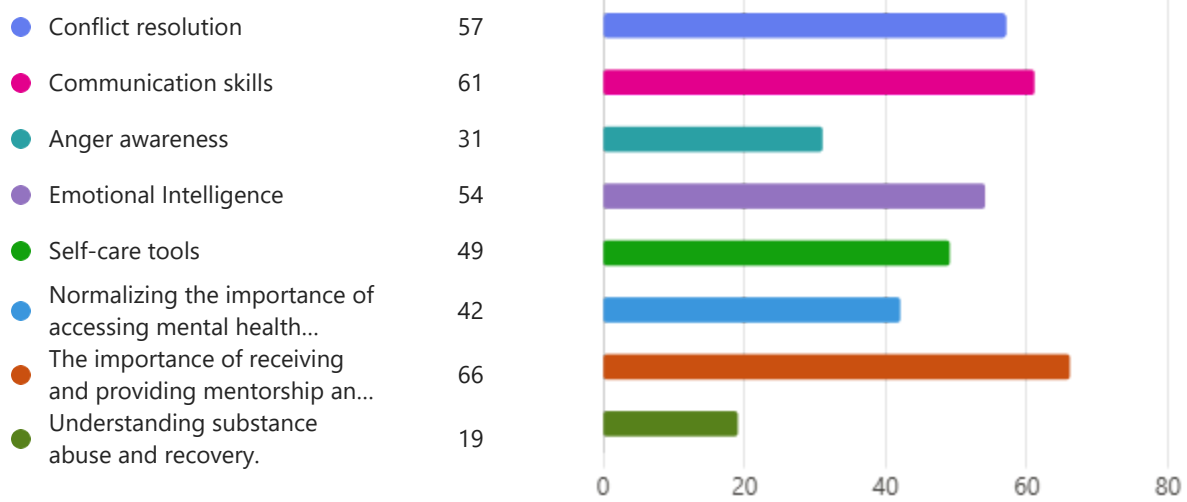
19. If you were concerned about another judge or yourself, would you be likely to contact the Judicial Assistance Services Program (JASP)?



20. What resources would be useful in helping you stay on top of your workload? Check all that apply.

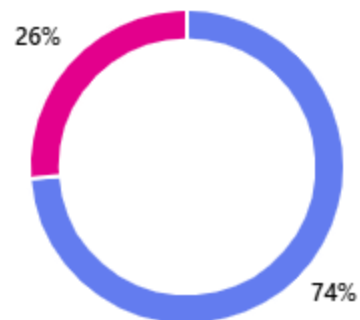


21. If you have attended or taught at judicial college, what skills do you wish had been taught that would have helped as a judge. Check all that apply:

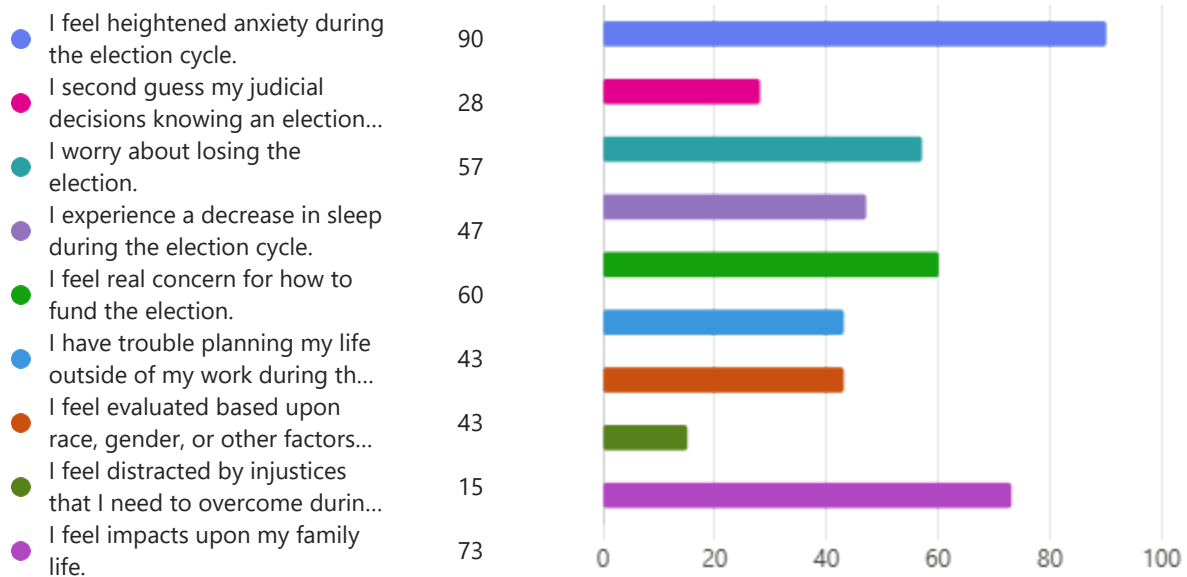


22. Are you an....

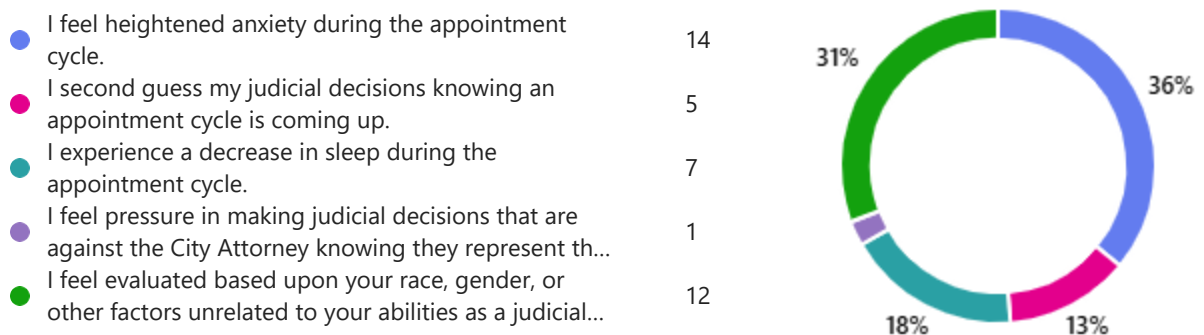
Elected judge	113
Appointed judge	40



23. For elected judges check all that apply:



24. For appointed judges check all that apply:



25. What challenges with your mental well-being have you experienced in your time on the bench?

132
Responses

Latest Responses

"Working with other judges is not always easy"

"Alcoholism"

"Most of my challenges have arisen when I have felt isolated... "

...

26. To what extent do you have the collegial support you need? What ideas would help make a difference to increase belonging?

124
Responses

Latest Responses

"As in all workplaces, some colleagues are supportive and ea..."

"Unsure"

"Prior to my first day, I expected the rest of the bench to rec..."

...

27. What recommendations do you have for the judiciary that would improve the mental health of the institution at large?

114
Responses

Latest Responses

"Promoting getting away from the Courthouse when you are..."

"Remove isolation, more emphasis on substance abuse."

"We need to intentionally engage in team building to decrease..."

...

28. Please share any other information you would like to share.

51
Responses

Latest Responses

"I think I have said enough!"

...

APPENDIX F

Workgroup Literature Reviews and Key Sources

Appendix F: Workgroup Literature Reviews and Key Sources

Law Student and New Member Workgroup

The workgroup reviewed national and institutional studies including:

- [Suffering in Silence: The Survey of Law Student Well-Being and the Reluctance of Law Students to Seek Help for Substance Use and Mental Health Concerns](#) : Insights on mental health challenges like stress, substance abuse, and burnout among law students.
- [Wellness & Wellbeing Initiative \(University of Minnesota Law School\)](#): A student-led program promoting wellness through mentorship, events, and feedback.
- [It Is Okay to Not Be Okay: The 2021 Survey of Law Student Well-Being: Highlights of mental health struggles faced by law students.](#)
- [The Phantom Menace to Professional Identity Formation and Law School Success: Imposter Syndrome](#): A study on imposter syndrome's effect on law students' development.
- [A Brighter Future for Law Student Well-Being?](#) Trends and initiatives for enhancing well-being in legal education.
- Additional insights and reporting from Gonzaga University, Seattle University, and the University of Washington.

KEY THEMES INCLUDED:

- High stress and burnout
- Imposter syndrome
- Substance use and limited mental health access
- Institutional barriers to wellness
- Promising peer-led and institutional programs.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workgroup

The workgroup reviewed national and institutional studies including:

- **2024 WSBA Membership Demographic Study:** Provided foundational data for equity planning.
- **WSBA Leadership Conversations:** Insights from Chief Equity & Justice Officer and Equity & Justice Lead on implementing the Equity and Justice Plan.
- **Council on Public Defense Race and Equity Subcommittee Report:** Addressed recruitment and retention gaps for BIPOC professionals.
- **Lawyers' Toolkit for Diversity & Inclusion (DC Bar):** Best practices for sustainable DEI change.
- **Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Affinity Bar Town Hall Report:** Identified barriers to retention and advancement for historically excluded groups.
- **WSBA Board of Governors Equity Plan:** Framework for equitable decision-making and accountability.
- **WSBA Member Well-Being Survey:** Highlighted disparities in stress, burnout, and resource utilization among minority legal professionals.

