

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Council

**Small Town and Rural Council Meeting | Virtual Only**

**Wednesday, April 23, 2025 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.**

Via [Zoom](#) | Meeting ID: **873 3538 6159** | Passcode: **595209** | Call-in: **888-788-0099**

## AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of March Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
  - a. [Yale Law Review](#)
  - b. STAR website updates
3. Council Position for Central WA Hybrid Hub Student Updates (Gov. Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)
4. Project Team Updates
  - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
  - b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
    - i. Sponsorships
  - c. Rural grant internships (Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Kevin Plachy)
    - i. Blog post
    - ii. Selection of recipients
  - d. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)
    - i. Date selection
5. Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)
6. FY26 Budget (Julianne Unite)
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: May 28, 2025
  - a. June and August Council Meeting schedule
10. Adjourn

## **CHARTER**

### **Small Town and Rural Council**

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**Adopted: April 17, 2021. Amended July 17, 2021; September 7, 2024.**

#### **Purpose**

As an advisory entity to the WSBA Board of Governors, the Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council is committed to strengthen and support the practice of law in the rural communities throughout Washington state. Members of the STAR Council will work to ensure that the practice of law in rural communities is present, growing, and thriving.

Practitioners in rural communities are few and far between. Additionally, many of these practitioners are nearing retirement without a clear plan of succession for their clients, leaving a void of access to legal representation and counsel. The STAR Council will guide policy & program development, serves as ambassadors between the WSBA and these communities, explore and advocate for creative and innovative solutions, and regularly assess the legal landscape in rural communities to determine if WSBA policy, advocacy and program development require further resource for sustainability and improvements.

The STAR Council aligns with the authorized activities outlined in General Rule 12. More specifically, GR 12.1 (a) articulates the Washington Supreme Court's regulatory objective to provide, in part, "meaningful access to justice. . ." while GR 12.1(d) strives for "affordable and accessible legal services." In addition, the STAR Council aligns with the authorized activities outlined in GR 12.2, in particular by providing "services to members and the public," and "fostering collegiality among its members and goodwill between the legal profession and the public."

Further, the STAR Council furthers the WSBA mission to serve the public and the members of the Bar by providing focused attention on the unique needs of residents and members in rural areas both by improving access to legal practitioners in rural communities and outreach and development of a pipeline of younger rural residents to pursue a legal career and serve their communities.

#### **Definition of "Rural"**

For the purpose of the STAR Council and reflective of Washington's unique geographic and sociogeographic landscape, the definition of "rural" is as follows:

Based on the definitions produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) and an overview of Washington county population, we focused on counties with populations of less than 50,000 and more than 2,500. These areas are considered 'urban nonmetro areas not part of larger labor markets' by ERS. As part of the working definition, and for ease, we have termed these counties as 'rural.' Based upon WA county population data, we've pursued a hypothesis that counties with 30,000 or more are rural, but likely adjacent to a labor market and perhaps have a varying set of circumstances that may differ from counties that are less than 30,000.

This definition will serve as the "per se" definition of rural. The STAR Council has the authority to change this definition based on specific programming objectives.

## Composition

The member appointment process will follow the process for WSBA Committees. Members of the STAR Council should have demonstrated experience and/or interest in a thriving legal practice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Council will consist of 13 members and are outlined as:

- Chair (voting member)
- 2 Current or Former WSBA Board of Governors Members (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Member At Large (voting member)
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities - see above for definition of "rural" (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Young Lawyer Member, as defined in WSBA Bylaws (voting member)
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting members, must be currently employed with a WA Law School which is not currently represented on the Committee.)
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) (voting member).

WSBA Staff Liaison: Member Services and Engagement Manager or staff member in the Advancement Department, non-voting.

Board of Governor Liaison: as assigned annually, non-voting.

## Terms

- Chair: two-year term
- Members: three-year term

## Initial Committee Terms

In FY21, the first appointments to the STAR Council were effectuated in a staggered rotation of STAR Council members. Therefore, the following terms were in place for the first appointment cycle only. All subsequent terms should adhere to the term limits stated above. STAR Council members serving an initial term less than three years, should be considered an incomplete term. Therefore, the member is eligible to serve two subsequent complete three-year terms per WSBA Bylaws.

- 2 Active WSBA Members  
*1 member with two-year term, 1 member with three-year term.*
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities (see above for definition)  
*1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two years term, 2 members with three-years term.*
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting, must be currently employed with a WA Law School)  
*1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two-years term, 1 member with three-years term.*

The following positions will begin as a standard term as set forth in this charter.

- Chair
- 1 Active WSBA Young Lawyer Member
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP).

### **Scope of Work**

The scope of the STAR Council's work will focus on what the WSBA is uniquely positioned to do in supporting a sustaining and thriving environment for the practice of law and increase access to justice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Council will work with all relevant and interested stakeholders to collaborate where needed. The provision of direct legal services and civil legal aid to the public is outside the scope of the STAR Council.

### **Measures of Success**

- Increased awareness of the issues and possible solutions to address any gap in practicing members in rural communities.
- A sustainable pipeline of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- Increased numbers of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- The establishment of funding for programs and initiatives for the practice of law in rural communities.

### **STAR Council Roles**

#### **1. Community Education and Outreach**

Coordinated efforts to educate members and potential members about the unique needs, opportunities and benefits of a rural practice. This can include, but should not be limited to, comprehensive information on WSBA's website, features in WSBA publications, presentations at high schools, law schools and community colleges. Meetings and events, such as a summit or symposium, to highlight the issue, convene interested stakeholders to share their concerns and strategize on possible solutions.

#### **2. Pipeline and Placement Program(s)**

Develop WSBA programming, or WSBA supported/partnered programming designed to build a pipeline of practitioners in rural areas as well as an incentive program to encourage members to explore a rural practice on a time-limited or multi-year timeframe. This role should explore a possible collaboration or strategic overlap with WSBA existing and future mentorship program(s). In particular, this role will require extensive strategic planning and identification of external stakeholder support and additional funding sources. Coordinate with law schools and other stakeholders regarding economic incentives to practice in rural areas.

#### **3. Job Opportunities and Clearinghouse**

Utilize existing and future WSBA resources to support and highlight job opportunities in rural communities. This role should include making it easier, and perhaps more cost-effective, to add job postings to WSBA's service. Develop a clearing house to assist retiring members with succession planning and the buying/selling of a practice.

### **Committee Evaluation**

The STAR Council should conduct an assessment within five years from the date of Board of Governors' initial approval of the STAR Committee by 1) conducting a survey of rural practitioners to provide stakeholder feedback regarding the impact of this Council to effectuate change in these areas, 2) assessing the scope of work to reflect impact and progress in this area and align with trends in the greater legal community, and 3) earnestly examining if the Council is necessary to continue the scope of work.

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Council

### Small Town and Rural Council Meeting Minutes Wednesday, March 26, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

**Council Members Present:** Governor Kari Petrasek, Merf Ehman, Rusty McGuire, Ashley Cummins, Philip Hunsucker, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Judge Kathryn Burke, Jesse Lamp, Governor Mary Rathbone

**Council Members Absent:** Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Past President Dan Clark, Allison Foreman

**WSBA Board of Governors Present:** Matthew Dresden, Emily Arneson

**WSBA Staff Present:** Julianne Unite, Vanessa Sweeney

**Public Attendees Present:** Jason Walker, Sophia Bird McSherry, Rachel Cortez, Mirisa Torres

## Introductions and Approval of February Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair, Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:11 p.m. On motion by Council Member Rusty McGuire, seconded by STAR Council Member Philip Hunsucker, the Council approved the February STAR Council Meeting minutes, with an amendment to indicate Jesse Lamp was present for February meeting.

## WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

Referencing the recent Board of Governors (BOG) meeting this past weekend March 21-22, Gov. Petrasek stated the BOG met with the Supreme Court, an annual occurrence, to update the bench on what the BOG is working on and answer questions. The BOG also discussed implementation challenges for standards of indigent defense. Challenges include requests for new funding for budget shortfall, OPD is uncertain on how much will be secured. There was a first reading for the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Councils' Equity and Justice plan, and a first reading and proposal on adding public member to the BOG. The majority of Saturday's agenda was spent discussing the FY26 budget, and changing bylaw allowances for members to request a hardship exemption for license fees.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite noted the WSBA recently rolled out an Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage policy (page 10 of the meeting materials) for external parties including vendors and volunteers. In short, the main points of the policy state that if AI is utilized in Bar meetings or materials, volunteers must inform the WSBA liaison ahead of time, people need to consent, and materials generated with AI tools must include an AI use disclosure. Council members should review the full policy in its entirety.

## Council Position for Central WA Hybrid Hub Student Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Ashley Cummins)

Gov. Petrasek reported that she, STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins, and WSBA Advancement Director Kevin Plachy have been working on the position description (page 14 of meeting materials). Ashley noted the primary change made is specific to the Flex JD program at Seattle University. Since the hub program is new, the goal is to ensure students who are recruited for the position understand who the program is looking for. Additionally, the hybrid hub identified in the description is specifically for the Central Washington hub so there is no confusion with South Sound and Alaska hybrid hubs. Gov. Petrasek asked if there is feedback from the Council, and if not, the next step involves the description being sent to the Office of General Counsel (OGC) for approval and ensures it falls within GR12 before dissemination. If Council members have comments or suggestions, follow up with Gov. Petrasek. Gov. Petrasek asked Julianne whether the Council needs to vote, or if agreeing it looks good can suffice. Julianne explained that it's fine for now, and the Council will vote on the final version. There were no comments from Council members, and barring any changes, Julianne and Kevin will send to OGC for approval. The Council can then vote at the April meeting and begin student recruitment.

## Project Team Updates

### a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King shared there are a few remaining employers that have yet to confirm interviews. Initially there were 31 jobs posted, six did not receive applications, six jobs were withdrawn due to positions being filled separately or not ideal applicant pool. Currently, 19 jobs have received applications and have interviews arranged. There is a room reserved for Rusty for in-person interviews. There was a total of 77 applications in total and approximately 40-50 student registrations. In comparison, last year there were 20 employers, 24 open positions, and 33 applications received.

Rachel Cortez noted that many people at this point in the year have jobs secured. Rachel suggested considering holding virtual hiring event earlier than April, and it may be too late for law students. The February/March timeframe is the latest to consider holding hiring events. The Office of Public Defense (OPD) is targeting the fall/winter timeframe, and noted this is when larger corporations are holding hiring events. Gov. Petrasek suggested the Gonzaga virtual job fair could aim to hold the event in November. Sean raised a concern that February is prime On Campus Interview (OCI) season and students may be overwhelmed, and targeting a timeframe after midterms and before finals makes sense. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila mentioned the Northwest Public Service Career Fair in January has many participants. Ashley suggested a survey be sent to employers to gauge whether the fall timeframe is suitable.

### b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)

STAR Council Member Merf Ehman stated Chief Justice Stevens has agreed to be the keynote speaker for the STAR Summit and will likely kick off the Summit in the morning. Merf indicated the Council can weigh

in on what topics can be plenary sessions and what could be concurrent panels. Plenary topics and related speakers include: Rule of Law and what it means in rural communities with Judge Parnell indicating availability to speak on this; Justice Stevens, Ashley is following up; Judge Rodriguez True is available to potentially speak at lunch, Gov. Petrasek offered to reach out to Judge True; ethics in rural areas, Kevin will follow up with a professor at Gonzaga; Tribal and Indian Law, consideration to contact Bree Blackhorse or another tribal judge; AI and how it's playing out in rural areas; revisiting Legal Lunchbox series including past topics APR6 and immigration. Ashley identified the Legal Lunchbox topics as plenary and clarified that these sessions will cover different material than what was presented in the original Legal Lunchbox presentations. Additionally, there is a possibility to consider the American Bar Association, for covering the Rule of Law topic. Julianne noted a potential audio issue with the meeting space at Heritage University. The plan is to record all sessions, to allow people to view a session at a later time and sell on the CLE store. Depending on audio capabilities, there is a minimal chance the venue will need to change if audio requirements cannot be accommodated. Heritage University is to provide an update to Julianne by April 7<sup>th</sup>. Travis commented, an AI session can lend itself to a workshop as people can have an interactive discussion on current utilization of AI. Ashley agreed and mentioned a plan to reach out to people who can speak on AI. Ashley offered to circulate a list of all topics and ideas to the Council to generate feedback. The Council can continue the discussion and make decisions at the next Council meeting. Julianne mentioned to contact Julianne or Kevin if Council members would like to sponsor or knows of potential sponsors for the Summit.

c. Rural Grant Internships (Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Kevin Plachy)

Julianne noted there has been one applicant to date. Referencing page 12 of the meeting materials, there is a copy of this month's *BarNews* article featuring an interview with last year's internship grant recipients. Ashley has been recruiting directly with students, and recently returned from a conference where she plugged this program and encouraged people to apply. Rachel asked when will applicants be notified of results, Julianne replied, applicants should be notified by April 25. Gov. Petrasek clarified applicants can be awarded the STAR grant even if receiving compensation/funding from organizations.

d. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)

Judge Kathryn Burke, Kevin, Julianne, Coco Holbrook, Assistant Managing Attorney, and Lola Velazquez with Northwest Justice Project (NJP) met, and it was decided there should be one clinic event this year with the focus on estate planning and wills. Coco and Lola suggested holding the clinic later in summer, noting a drawback that it's very hot and would need to ensure the clinic is held in an air-conditioned space. And, shifting from a walk-in clinic format to appointment-based to help with transportation. It was noted that NJP may use their funds to secure transportation. Julianne commented, in addition to transportation, the potential additional cost of an interpreter may be considered, although this could wipe out the funds. After meeting with Coco and Kevin, Julianne added it was determined the best weekday options to be Mondays or Friday, with the proposed dates of either September 8, 12, 15, or 19. A potential advantage to holding the clinic on a Friday is that it may attract more volunteers, along with an idea to sponsor a social event afterward to provide an opportunity for volunteers to connect and



socialize. Gov. Petrasek suggested sending a poll via email to all Council members and friends of STAR to help gauge who is available to volunteer. Julianne shared there is a concern to keep in mind with the threat of ICE raids, and ensuring safe spaces that are private and closed to the public.

### Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley provided an updated on the upcoming Legal Lunchbox, scheduled for April 29<sup>th</sup> which will include a panel discussion on APR6. Ashley and WSBA Education Programs Lead Rachel Matz have met to gather materials and finalize confirmed speakers.

### FY26 Budget (Julianne Unite)

Julianne shared an updated on the FY26 STAR Council budget. The first draft of the budget was due internally, and the FY25 budget was used as a placeholder to develop the FY26 budget. The FY26 budget includes a \$2000 increase in Outreach from \$65,000 to \$67,000 given the feedback about the Rural Day of Service. If there are additional expenses to consider for FY26, discussions should occur soon. Julianne encouraged the Council to think about it and reach out to Gov. Petrasek or Julianne with questions. Ashley asked if there was an increase for a stipend for summer internship grant recipients so they can attend the Summit. Julianne advised drafting a proposal for consideration.

### Access to Justice Contest Update (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley informed the Council that the Seattle University's Access to Justice Institute (ATJI) will be applying for the Justice Department's 2025 Access to Justice Prize. The ATJI is proposing a creation of the RISE (Rural Impact Service and Engagement) Fellowship. The idea is to address attorneys having a hard time finding interns over the summer as the isolation factor makes it unappealing and creating professional development for fellows while they're doing legal internships. The hope is to create a pipeline with opportunities for social events in an effort to make interns feel part of the community and encourages returning to rural areas.

### Announcements

None.

### Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

### Next Meeting: April 23, 2025

### Adjournment

Gov. Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

## STAR Council Seattle University HUB Program Liaison

### Position Description

The Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council (formerly STAR Committee until Sep. 2024) was established by the Board of Governors with approval of its charter in April 2021. The STAR Council is committed to strengthening and supporting the practice of law in the rural communities throughout Washington state. The STAR Council furthers the WSBA mission to serve the public and the members of the Bar by providing focused attention on the unique needs of residents and members in rural areas.

**Position overview:** The STAR Council guides policy and program development, serve as ambassadors between the WSBA and these communities, explore and advocate for creative and innovative solutions that further the goals of strengthening and supporting the practice of law in rural communities. The three main focus areas of the Council are:

1. Community Education and Outreach
2. Pipeline and Placement Program(s)
3. Job Opportunities and Clearinghouse

See the [Council Charter](#) for more information.

**Position expectations and time commitment:** Given that the STAR Council is focused on and will largely be composed of rural practitioners, attendance at meetings is primarily and predominantly virtual. It is anticipated that Council meetings will be monthly for one hour, with the initial meeting of the year being two hours for an onboarding orientation. The liaison would be expected to attend meetings regularly and share information and perspectives from the Central Washington Hybrid Hub program and deliver relevant information about the work of the STAR Council back to colleagues in the HUB program. The liaison is not a member of the STAR Council and does not have voting authority.

**Requirements:** Must be a student enrolled in the Flex JD program at Seattle University School of Law, connected to Seattle University School of Law's Central Washington Hybrid Hub and / or HUB partner Heritage University, and have an interest in rural legal practice.

**Preferred qualifications and skills:** Interest in practicing law in Washington's rural communities.

#### Benefits:

- Develop and contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique needs, opportunities, and benefits of a rural practice
- Opportunity to explore creative solutions.
- Create connections, build relationships, and network with practitioners in Washington's rural communities as well as law students and members of the public.

**Reimbursement policy:** This is an unpaid volunteer position. Reasonable travel and other expenses will be reimbursed per the WSBA Expense Reimbursement Policy.

**Selection and appointment process:** Please submit a statement of interest to STAR Council Chair Kari Petrasek at [barleaders@wsba.org](mailto:barleaders@wsba.org).



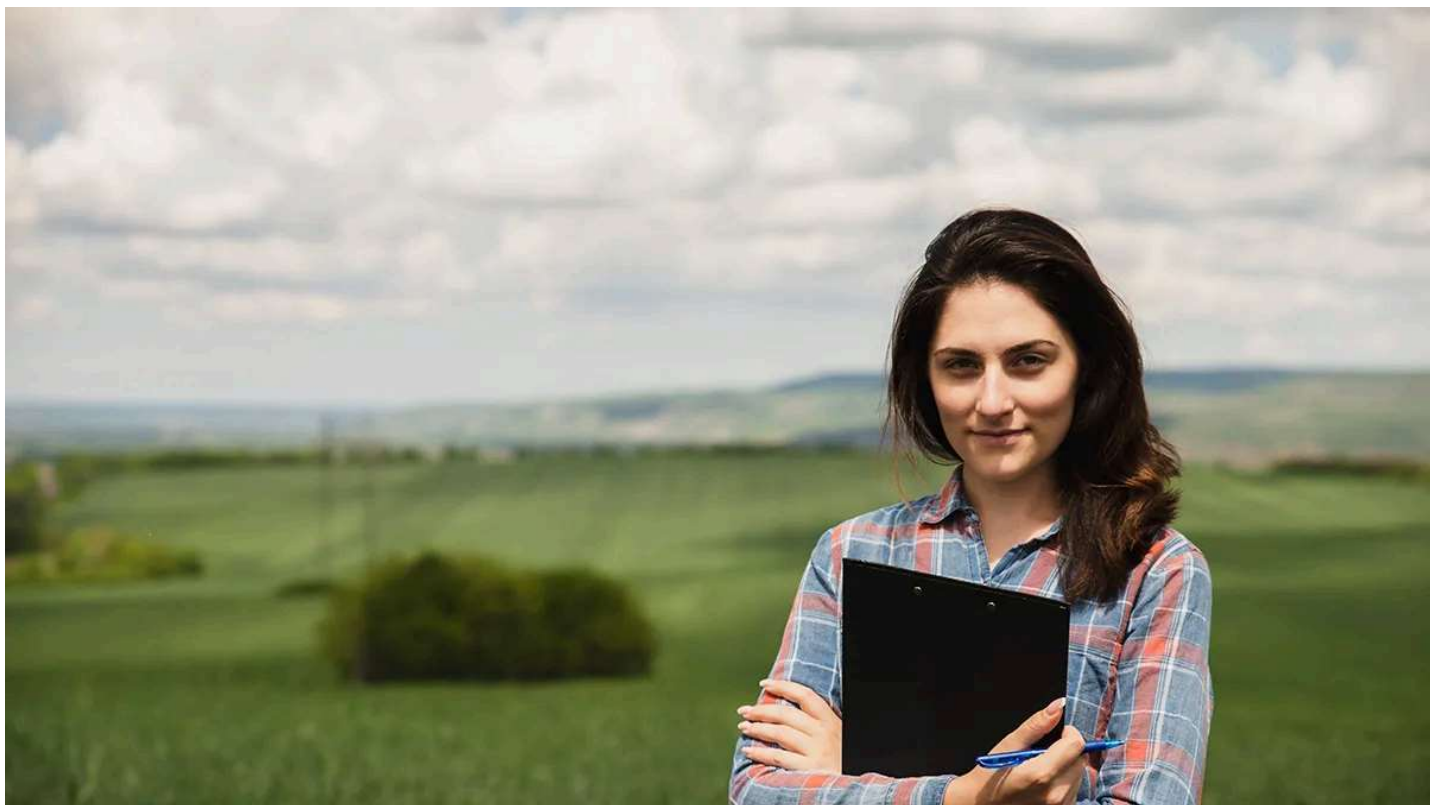
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*The Voices of Washington's Legal Community*



## Student Law Interns Go Country

*April 9,  
2025*



**I**n 2024, the WSBA's Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council launched a pilot program to provide grants to law students participating in summer internships in rural parts of Washington. The purpose of these grants is to assist in building a pipeline of rural attorneys who will help narrow the legal services gap in rural communities throughout the state. What follows are interviews with two of the 2024 grant recipients, Olivia Perez, a third-year law student at Gonzaga University School of Law who interned at the Franklin County Office of

Public Defense; and Shaw Lowry, also a third-year law student at Gonzaga University School of Law who interned at the Skagit County Public Defender's Office.

*Note: You can read the full version of this article in the March 2025 issue of Washington State Bar News.*

## **Olivia Perez**

### **Q. You were awarded a rural practice summer internship grant in 2024. What kind of work did you do during your summer internship?**

The Rural Practice Summer Internship Grant allowed me to serve as a Rule 9 intern at the Franklin County Office of Public Defense. During this internship, I had the opportunity to assist attorneys with legal motions and research. I also engaged directly with clients, discussing their cases and offering support. One of the most rewarding aspects of the experience was making court appearances.



### **Q. How did your internship help you grow as a law student and future legal practitioner?**

This internship deepened my commitment to public defense and played a significant role in my growth as both a law student and an aspiring legal practitioner. Although I've always known that public defense was the right path for me, this experience made me realize how much my skills are needed in rural communities, particularly where there is a shortage of Spanish-speaking attorneys. It also gave me a clear sense of direction for my future and confirmed where I want to start my legal career after law school.

### **Q. Did the experience make you more or less likely to practice in a rural community after graduation?**

My internship increased my desire to practice in a rural community after graduation. Through my time in Franklin County, I saw firsthand the pressing need for Spanish-speaking public defenders in the Tri-Cities. I am now even more determined to return to the Tri-Cities and continue providing support to all those in need.

**Q. What are some of the challenges you foresee of practicing law in a rural community?**

One of the challenges I anticipate when practicing law in a rural community is assisting clients who miss court appearances due to a lack of access to transportation. Many clients live miles away from the courthouse, and the absence of reliable public transportation in rural areas can make it difficult for them to attend appointments or court hearings. Additionally, securing diversion treatment for clients is challenging, as treatment centers in Washington are limited and often located far from rural areas.

***Internship Applications Open***

The WSBA is still accepting applications for 2025 summer internship grants, but the deadline is approaching. Visit the [Small Town and Rural Council](#) page to learn more about the application requirements and **apply before the April 13 deadline.**

**Shaw Lowry****Q. How did your internship help you grow as a law student and future legal practitioner?**

As many legal professionals know, hands-on experience can be tricky to come by while in law school. Hands-on experience was plentiful throughout last summer. My internship provided me the opportunity to meet with my clients, to understand the legal issues they were facing, and to speak at length with colleagues for advice and mentorship. In many situations, these opportunities helped me place my clients in a better position. It was incredibly rewarding to help individuals with real life situations after being in a classroom for the last couple years.

**Q. Did the experience make you more or less likely to practice in a rural community after graduation?**

Decidedly more likely. I've been fortunate enough to gain career experience in large cities and small counties across Washington, but I can't be too far from outdoor activity. Last summer was a nice reminder of this fact. During my weekends, I spent time floating out on



the Snake River. I was reminded that as much as I love a day in the city, the ability to drive 20 minutes to a hike, river, or lake is something I can't forego.

**Q. What are some of the challenges you foresee of practicing law in a rural community?**

I suppose the flip side of the coin is also social. Reputation is everything in any legal or legal-adjacent work. Where there are fewer individuals working in a specific field, it is entirely possible that I will need to put in the extra legwork to stop bridges from being burned based on personality differences or disagreements.

**Q. What would you say to other law school students or graduates who are on the fence about moving to and working in a rural part of Washington?**

It goes without saying, but don't knock it till you try it. There will of course be different positives and drawbacks for everyone, but rural Washington has so much to offer anyone who wants to discover it. Especially if you're the outdoorsy type, in which case the decision will eventually make itself, in my opinion.

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