

# MINNESOTA BOARD OF LEGAL CERTIFICATION

## ANNUAL REPORT



**2025**

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# Background

**The Minnesota State Board of Legal Certification accredits agencies to certify lawyers in Minnesota as specialists. The certification process provides the public with assurances that those who have earned the right to call themselves specialists in certain fields of law have met the necessary prerequisites for certification.**

Agencies must complete a rigorous application process, which includes providing documentation verifying that the agency has complied with the Rules of the Minnesota State Board of Legal Certification. The Board reviews each agency's standards and materials at least once every three years. The Board also conducts a periodic review of the examinations used to certify specialists.

Certified lawyers must adhere to the agency's standards, which include, at a minimum, showing substantial involvement in their specific field of law, receiving peer recommendations, and completing a written examination.

## **2025 Board Members**

- Chair: Brandon M. Schwartz, Schwartz Law Firm, Oakdale
- Timothy Brausen, St. Louis Park
- Elizabeth Beach, Elizabeth Bryant Law Office, St. Louis Park
- Martin A. Costello, St. Paul
- Cynthia K. Daniels, Public Member, Lakeville
- Donald R. McNeil, Heley Duncan & Melander, PLLP
- Trice Okrzynski, Trice Wayne Okrzynski, Attorney At Law, Golden Valley
- Randall Papke, Public Member, Clearwater
- Thomas Radio, Felhaber Larson Law Firm, Minneapolis
- Suncica Sejdinovic, Winthrop & Weinstine, Minneapolis
- Janet G. Stellpflug, Ropers Majeski PC, Minneapolis
- Jessica Thomas, Public Member, Minneapolis

**MN Supreme Court Liaison:** Justice Theodora Gaïtas

**Executive Director for the Board:** Emily Eschweiler

# 2025 Year in Review

In 2025, the Board of Legal Certification reviewed the annual reports submitted by the five accredited agencies. The Board monitors the number of certified specialists in each field and asks agencies how they are marketing their specialties to increase attorney interest.

Board committees reviewed the recertification applications and exams for the National Board of Trial Advocacy's field of Criminal Law; the Minnesota State Bar Association's fields of Criminal Law, Labor and Employment, and Property Law; the National Elder Law Foundation's field of Elder Law; and the International Privacy Professional's field of Privacy Law.

The Board continues to discuss ways to increase certification in Minnesota and what role the Board should play in the process. In 2025, Board members attended CLE institutes to promote certification and wrote articles for legal publications.

Dated: April 2, 2025

/s/ Brandon Schwartz  
BRANDON M. SCHWARTZ  
CHAIR, BOARD OF LEGAL CERTIFICATION

/s/ Emily J. Eschweiler  
EMILY J. ESCHWEILER  
DIRECTOR, BOARD OF LEGAL CERTIFICATION

# Accredited Agencies

There were 5 agencies  
accredited at the end of  
2025

5

## AMERICAN BOARD OF CERTIFICATION (ABC)

ABC certifies attorneys in the fields of Business Bankruptcy, Consumer Bankruptcy, and Creditors' Rights. As of December 31, 2025, 5 Minnesota lawyers were certified by ABC across these 3 fields.

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9

## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRIVACY PROFESSIONALS (IAPP)

IAPP certifies attorneys in the field of Privacy Law. As of December 31, 2025, 9 Minnesota lawyers were certified specialists in this field of law.

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495

## MINNESOTA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION (MSBA)

The MSBA certifies attorneys in the fields of Civil Trial Practice, Criminal Law, Labor & Employment Law, and Real Property. As of December 31, 2024, a total of 495 Minnesota lawyers were certified as specialists by the MSBA across these fields.

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47

## NATIONAL BOARD OF TRIAL ADVOCACY (NBTA)

NBTA certifies attorneys in the fields of Civil Trial Practice, Criminal Law, Family Law, and Truck Accident Law. As of December 31, 2025, a total of 47 Minnesota lawyers were certified specialists across these 4 fields.

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## NATIONAL ELDER LAW FOUNDATION (NELF)

NELF certifies attorneys in the field of Elder Law. As of December 31, 2025, 4 Minnesota licensed lawyers were certified as elder law specialists.

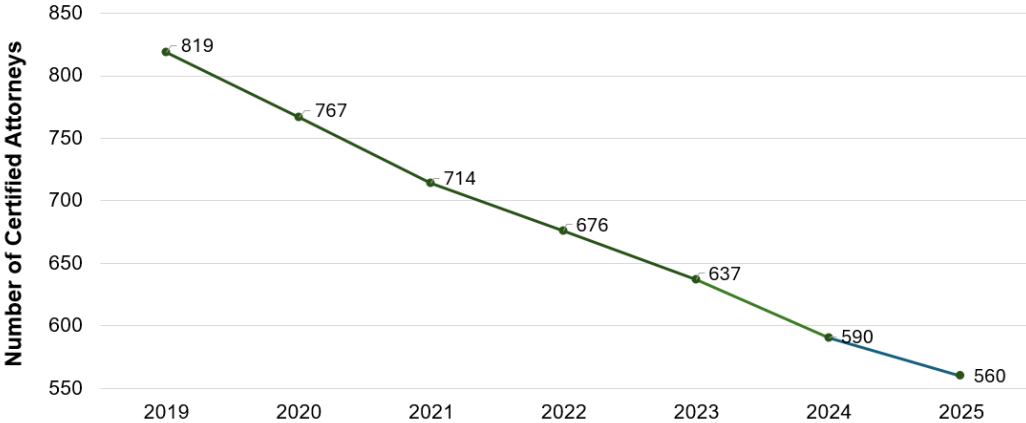
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# Certified Specialist Trends

## There continues to be a decrease in certified specialists

Certified lawyers are retiring faster than new lawyers become certified, and some lawyers indicate it is more difficult to meet certain requirements, such as a specified number of trials. As shown in the graph below, the number of certified specialists has decreased from 819 in 2019 to 560 in 2025, a decrease of 31.6%

**Number of Certified Specialists**



Agency/Specialty	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
ABC Consumer Bankruptcy	3	3	2	1	1	1	1
ABC Business Bankruptcy	3	3	5	5	3	3	3
ABC Creditors' Rights	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
MSBA Civil Trial Practice	239	211	189	177	167	143	132
MSBA Criminal Law	56	58	56	54	50	50	53
MSBA Labor & Employment Law	111	110	103	98	95	93	86
MSBA Real Property	306	287	272	261	247	237	224
NBTA Family Law Trial Advocacy	13	12	12	13	13	12	11
NBTA Civil Trial Practice	72	66	57	50	42	34	32
NBTA Criminal Law	8	8	7	7	6	4	3
NBTA Truck Accident Law	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
NELF Elder Law	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
IAPP Privacy Law	3	4	6	5	7	7	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>676</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>560</b>

# Funding

The Board is self-funded through certified lawyer and agency fees:

- Agency application fees: \$1,000
- Initial lawyer certification fee: \$100
- Agency annual fees: \$250 per specialty field
- Lawyer annual fee: \$45

The Board’s reserve balance is decreasing each year due to the decreasing number of certified specialists.

Revenue dropped by 4% from 2024 to 2025

With the FY26-27 budgets, the BLC allocation for payroll-related expenses was reduced following an analysis of the work performed by staff. The Board continues to look for ways to reduce expenditures in order to maintain a healthy cash balance.

Expenditures	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Salary	\$38,107	\$33,815	\$25,501	\$23,872	\$24,492
Rent	\$2,693	\$6,949	\$6,552	\$2,112	\$2,178
IT and Professional Services	\$2,296	\$2,053	\$2,785	\$1,691	\$2,159
Other	\$2,879	\$5,094	\$3,265	\$2,330	\$3,015
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$45,976</b>	<b>\$47,912</b>	<b>\$38,103</b>	<b>\$30,004</b>	<b>\$31,844</b>

Revenue Source	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Agency Application Fees	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Annual Agency Fees	\$3,500	\$3,750	\$3,500	\$3,750	\$3,250
Annual Lawyer Fees	\$31,815	\$9,795	\$30,855	\$28,845	\$26,640
New Lawyer Fees	\$1,300	\$1,400	\$800	\$200	\$1,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$38,636</b>	<b>\$14,945</b>	<b>\$35,155</b>	<b>\$32,795</b>	<b>\$31,490</b>