

# Supporting the Legal Profession



## Student Debt

The cost of a law school education isn't what it used to be. [According to the non-profit Law School Transparency](#), the rising costs of a law degree have significantly outpaced inflation over the last three decades.

- In 1990, the average public law school tuition was \$3,236 for residents.
- In 2019, the average public law school tuition was \$28,186 for residents.
- When adjusted for inflation, public school was *four and a half times as expensive* in 2019 as it was in 1990.

The costs are even higher for non-resident public school students and private law schools.

### Growing tuition costs = increased debt loads

Today, the average debt for law school graduates who borrow for tuition is [around \\$118,000](#). The impact this level of debt has on the overall legal system and the public's access to justice is not well understood by the general public.

Loan repayment assistance programs (LRAP) and loan forgiveness programs provide one solution to the growing problem of law school tuition debts. LRAPs provide loan repayment or lower loan payment options to graduates entering specific types of employment, usually law-related public interest jobs, civil legal aid, or public defense. There are various types of LRAPs administered by law schools, state bar associations and foundations, and federal and state governments providing debt relief to some law graduates. As of 2022, the state of Wisconsin does not have a LRAP program available to attorneys, but other states do. The ABA provides a comprehensive list of [statewide LRAP programs on its website](#).

Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs, whether from the federal, state, or local governments or private sources, are a tool to support government and nonprofit service



providers who ensure the delivery of vital services to the public, especially in rural and/or underserved communities where legal resources are scarce. They also serve as a recruitment and retention tool that helps reduce student loan debt obligations for those that choose potentially less lucrative legal careers in public service.

The State Bar of Wisconsin recognizes the long-term financial constraint mortgage-sized tuition debt can impose. The median starting public interest attorney salary in civil legal aid is less than \$50,000, and averages less than \$60,000 for public defenders and prosecutors. Despite a deep commitment to ensure access to justice for all citizens, many attorneys find that the rising costs of legal education forces them to forego any form of public service or to practice in fields or settings that result in substantially lower loan repayment opportunities, leave for a higher earning wage out of state or in a large city, or take a second job.

**The State Bar of Wisconsin supports legislative efforts to reduce the overall cost of a legal education and to provide loan repayment assistance programs ("LRAPs") where appropriate.**

### Contact Info

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## Other Issues

The State Bar of Wisconsin is committed to the important role it plays in positively impacting the legislative process on issues of importance to the courts, the legal profession, and the public. It adopts policy positions that affect the regulation of the practice of law, delivery of legal services, administration of justice, funding of the justice system, criminal practice and procedure, and civil practice and procedure.

Among those topics, the following are issues that are priorities or issues that have recently been considered or taken up by the legislature:

### Broadband Access

**The State Bar supports efforts to expand broadband access, meeting the minimum criteria defined by the FCC\* to all parts of Wisconsin.** This helps ensure attorneys can conduct business statewide, and Wisconsin residents have access to online research, legal forms, and self-help programs.

**The State Bar supports state and federal funding and grants for broadband statewide to ensure more uniform coverage across Wisconsin.** This support extends to the expansion of broadband in any capital or infrastructure legislation.

*\*Current FCC standards are 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed, the minimum speeds necessary to stream video or conduct normal business activities.*

### Prosecutor Board

**The State Bar of Wisconsin supports the creation of an independent prosecutor board and creation of the State Prosecutors Office.** The independent board will serve to protect the interests and funding for elected District Attorneys and assistant district attorneys in Wisconsin.



### Ghostwriting

**The State Bar of Wisconsin supports policies which encourage or enhance the quality and availability of legal services to the public.** This includes the use of “ghostwriting” that provides for the vital participation of legal counsel, without disclosure of the attorney’s name or bar number, in assisting pro se individuals in preparing documents for use within the legal system. This limited legal assistance can benefit parties and the court by focusing the legal issues and more clearly stating the facts and therefore promoting the effective administration of justice. Lawyers, as an essential component of the state’s justice system, have a responsibility to work for an efficient and effective justice system.

### Tax on Legal Services

**The State Bar of Wisconsin opposes a professional tax on legal services.**

Access to legal services is essential to the operation of an ordered society, and a tax on legal services would further increase legal fees and decrease low-income and moderate-income individuals’ access to justice.

[For a complete, up-to-date list of all State Bar of Wisconsin policy positions, see the State Bar Policy Positions Handbook.](#)

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