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2025 - 2026 Annual Report

The State Bar of Montana promotes the highest standards of professionalism and competence in the practice of law to foster an accessible, fair, and independent legal system and to preserve the rule of law.



2025-2026 Governance and Leadership

The State Bar of Montana is led by a 16-member elected Board of Trustees, augmented by four statewide officers. Trustees and officers are elected by their peers each June and are responsible for setting policy, providing strategic direction, and ensuring the State Bar's mission of serving both attorneys and the public is upheld. Leadership also includes the State Bar's committee chairs, whose guidance shapes work in critical areas like ethics, continuing legal education, access to justice, and more. Thirteen professional staff guide day-to-day operations.

Elected Officers*

President: **Aislinn W. Brown**, Helena
President-Elect: **Albert R. (Rich) Batterman**, Baker
Secretary-Treasurer: **Erica R. Grinde**, Missoula
Immediate Past President: **Antoinette M. Tease**, Billings
Chair of the Board: **Anna M. Kecskés**, Helena

Board of Trustees

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Ryan G. Hennen, Whitefish

Area B
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Delegates to the American Bar Association

Michael Klepperich,
ABA Delegate - Young Lawyer's Division

Matthew Thiel,
ABA Delegate - State of Montana

Tucker Gannett,
ABA Delegate - State Bar of Montana

**2026-2027 newly elected officers and trustees took office on September 16, 2026. For current officers, please refer to https://www.montanabar.org/About-Us/Elected-Bar-Leadership/*

Joint message from Aislinn W. Brown, *President, State Bar of Montana* and John Mudd, *Executive Director, State Bar of Montana.*



Aislinn W. Brown,
President, State Bar of Montana

John Mudd,
Executive Director,
State Bar of Montana



Celebrating Our Past, Strengthening Our Future

This year, as our nation commemorates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we are reminded that the rule of law has been central to the American experiment from its very beginning. Our state and federal constitutions, our courts, and the legal profession have helped preserve the liberties and institutions that have guided our nation for two-and-a-half centuries. Here in Montana, that same commitment continues through the work of attorneys who serve their clients and communities every day.

Since 1974, when the unified bar was established, the State Bar of Montana has been guided by two clear, enduring principles: to serve our members and to protect the public. That mission remains as vital today as it was more than 50 years ago. The State Bar is not simply an institution; it is the collective work of thousands of Montana attorneys who volunteer their time, expertise, and leadership to strengthen our profession and advance the administration of justice. Our committees, sections, pro bono programs, and public service initiatives exist because members continue to answer that call.

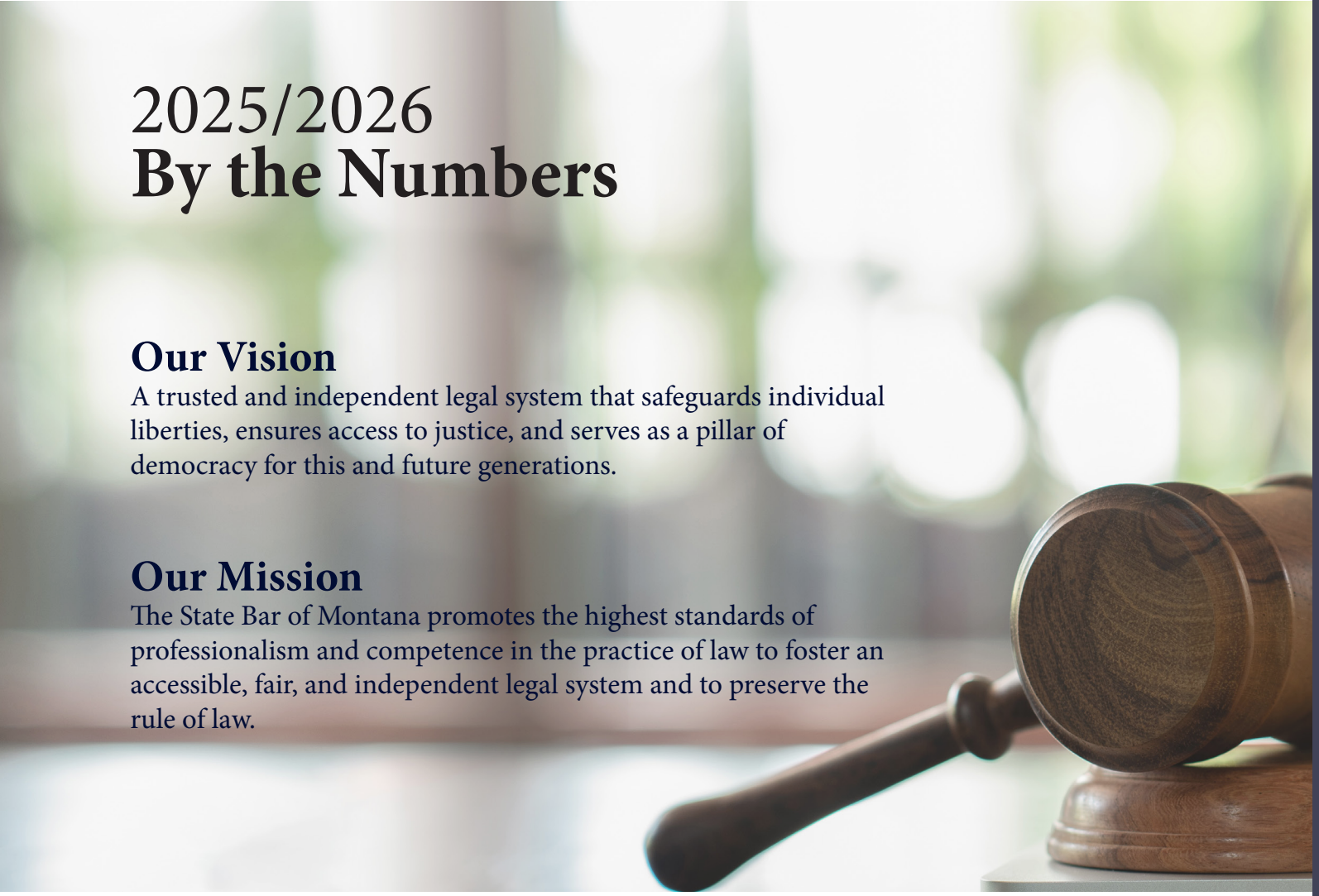
Throughout the past year, that spirit of service has been evident across our organization. Our members have expanded access to justice through pro bono representation, legal education, and outreach to underserved communities. Working alongside the Montana Legal Services Association, we successfully advocated for a new Community Justice Worker Program, which was adopted by the Montana Supreme Court. We also joined with the Montana Board of Bar Examiners to petition the Court to adopt the NextGen Uniform Bar Examination, ensuring that Montana continues to prepare the next generation of attorneys to meet the high standards expected of our profession. At the same time, the State Bar remained an active, thoughtful voice on issues affecting the legal profession and the justice system, always guided by our responsibility to serve both our members and the public.

We are equally proud of the organization's continued financial strength and sound stewardship. Careful management of our resources has allowed us to invest in member services, strengthen public outreach, embrace innovation, and position the State Bar for continued success in the years ahead.

As we look to the future, we remain guided by the priorities our board adopted in our 2025-2029 Strategic Plan: member education and engagement; operational continuity and enhancement; communication and outreach; and access to justice. Just as lawyers helped build the institutions that have sustained our democracy for 250 years, today's attorneys continue that tradition by upholding the rule of law, preserving public confidence in our courts, and serving communities across our state.

It has been a privilege to serve the State Bar of Montana this past year. Together, we honor the legacy of those who came before us while continuing the important work of ensuring that justice, professionalism, and public service remain at the heart of Montana's legal profession.

2025/2026
By the Numbers



Our Vision

A trusted and independent legal system that safeguards individual liberties, ensures access to justice, and serves as a pillar of democracy for this and future generations.

Our Mission

The State Bar of Montana promotes the highest standards of professionalism and competence in the practice of law to foster an accessible, fair, and independent legal system and to preserve the rule of law.

4,266
active attorneys

3,237
attornerys living and practicing in Montana

21
practice-area sections serving diverse legal fields

15
committees advancing the work of the Bar and the profession

A Vision for Justice: 2025–2029 Strategic Plan

The State Bar of Montana 2025–2029 Strategic Plan is a roadmap developed by its elected officers and trustees that set new goals, a refreshed mission, and a vision for the future of justice in Montana. The plan is anchored by six core values: professionalism, service, community, trust, advocacy, and innovation. Together, these values honor the profession's traditions while responding to the evolving needs of Montana's communities.

Montana's Legal Profession: Trends and Growth (2024 - 2026)

The State Bar of Montana, established by order of the Montana Supreme Court in 1974, is a unified bar. It is a private, attorney-funded organization, supported solely through attorney fee and program revenue. During the past three years, the number of active attorneys—both in-state and out-of-state—has steadily increased. This growth, combined with strong program participation and sound financial stewardship, reflects the continued strength of the State Bar and the value it provides to Montana's legal community and the public. The State Bar today serves a steadily growing and diversifying legal profession. The rise in attorneys practicing in Montana, along with notable gains in gender diversity, underscores the State Bar's resilience and its ongoing role in supporting access to justice and upholding the rule of law across the state.

Overall Growth

The total number of active attorneys has risen from **4,133** in 2024 to **4,266** in 2026, showing steady upward momentum.

Montana-Based Attorneys

The number of attorneys living and practicing in Montana grew from **3,179** in 2024 to **3,237** in 2026.

Out-of-State Attorneys

The number of attorneys maintaining licensure while living outside Montana also increased, from **954** in 2024 to **1,029** in 2026.

Demographic Trends

Female attorneys increased from **2,142** in 2024 to **2,277** in 2026.

District Growth (2024 - 2026)

Most districts show small, steady growth, with the largest increases in **District 4** (Missoula).

Practice and Sections

The State Bar of Montana has 21 active practice-area sections, each serving as a forum for education, networking, and professional development in specific areas of law. Section operations are funded by voluntary section dues, and each section has its own elected leadership. Section participation has remained strong during the past three years, with notable growth in several areas of practice:

Top Section Increases from 2025-2026:

Women's Law (+24)
Bankruptcy Law (+15)
Water Law (+15)
Family Law (+14)

All Sections:

1. Animal Law
2. Bankruptcy Law
3. BETTR Law
4. Construction Law
5. Criminal Law
6. Dispute Resolution
7. Family Law
8. Federal Practice
9. Health Care Law
10. Indian Law
11. Intellectual Property Law
12. Natural Resource, Energy & Environmental Law
13. New Lawyers
14. Nonprofit Law
15. Paralegal
16. Public Law
17. Public Utilities Law
18. School Law
19. Veterans Law
20. Water Law
21. Women's Law

Standing Committees

The State Bar of Montana has 15 standing committees, each playing a vital role in advancing the mission of the State Bar and supporting Montana's legal profession. Committees provide guidance on continuing legal education, ethics, professionalism, access to justice, and lawyer well-being. They oversee critical programs such as fee arbitration, Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection, and lawyer referral services.

Financial Overview

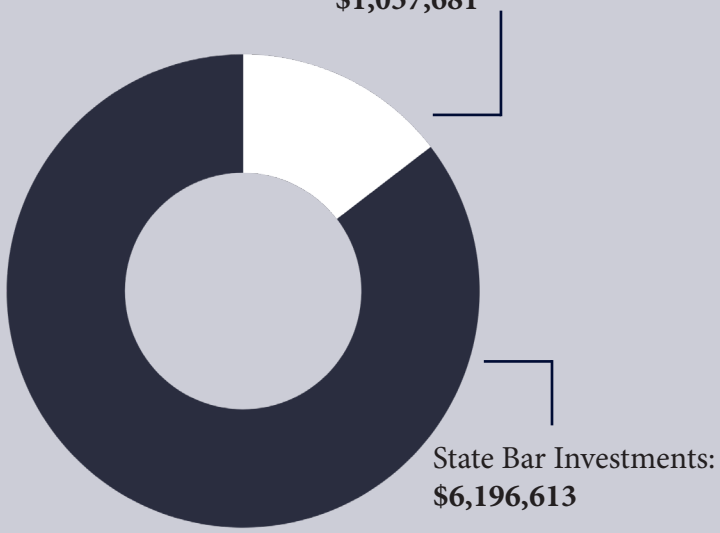
This section provides an overview of the State Bar's financial position for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026, including highlights of revenue, expenditures, assets, liabilities, and key trends affecting the organization's financial health. The State Bar of Montana continues to demonstrate strong fiscal stewardship. Prudent financial management has ensured a stable reserve to offset future operational expenses. The last dues increase occurred in 2018, and given the State Bar's current position, the need for another increase in the coming years remains minimal. Overall, the State Bar's operations remain fiscally solid, providing stability and flexibility to invest in programs and services that support both attorneys and the public.

State Bar Financial Highlights

Revenue and Expenses for the year ending March 31, 2026



State Bar Assets



State Bar Liabilities: $1,775,953

Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection

Assets and Investments: **$1,748,900**

Education, Outreach, and Engagement

Pro Bono and Volunteer Contributions

The commitment of Montana's attorneys to serving their communities extends far beyond daily practice. Each year, lawyers across the state dedicate thousands of hours to pro bono work—providing critical legal services to individuals and families who otherwise could not afford them. These efforts strengthen access to justice, uphold the integrity of the legal profession, and reflect the State Bar's core mission of service to the public.

Rule 6.1 of the Montana Rules of Professional Conduct calls on every attorney to provide 50 hours of pro bono service annually, with the majority directed to serving Montanans of limited means. The Pro Bono Reporting process is managed by the State Bar of Montana with the assistance of the Montana Supreme Court Office of the Court Administrator.

In addition to pro bono service, countless attorneys volunteer their time on State Bar committees, sections, and educational programs, helping advance the profession and ensuring the State Bar remains strong, innovative, and responsive to the needs of Montanans.

The State Bar's 2025 Pro Bono Report to the Montana Supreme Court highlights the extraordinary ways Montana attorneys met that obligation.



2025 Pro Bono Highlights

1,166 attorneys licensed to practice law in Montana provided **74,536 hours** of pro bono and reduced fee service to Montanans of limited means, and organizations designed to assist people of limited means, valued at **almost $16.3 million**.

351 attorneys reporting Montana pro bono hours provided **24,306 hours** of pro bono service at a substantially reduced fee to people/families of limited means or organizations designed to assist people of limited means.

972 attorneys reporting Montana pro bono hours provided **49,718 hours** of pro bono services without expectation of fee for individuals/families of limited means or organizations designed to assist people of limited means.

In addition to reported pro bono hours, **602 attorneys** reported **14,202.75 hours** participating in volunteer activities to improve the law, legal system or legal profession. (These hours are not included in the report of total hours of service provided under Rule 6.1.)



Pro bono contributions were spread across a wide range of services, from direct representation of families and individuals in need, to support for charitable, religious, civic, and educational organizations. Together, these efforts reflect the profession's enduring commitment to ensuring equal access to justice for all Montanans.



Community Justice Worker Program

The State Bar has supported the Montana Supreme Court in its efforts to develop a carefully structured, court-supervised approach to expand access to legal services-especially for Montanans in rural and underserved areas. The program authorizes trained and certified Community Justice Workers to provide limited legal services in Montana's justice and city courts under defined rules. The program operates under the authority of the Montana Supreme Court and under the oversight of the State Bar of Montana through the Community Justice Worker Oversight Committee.

Montana lawyers have worked for years to close the justice gap, protect the public, and support solutions that are tested, limited in scope, and responsive to real needs in justice and municipal courts. This is part of the Bar's broader, ongoing commitment to strengthening access to justice statewide and ensuring our courts work for all Montanans.

Law Day 2026 Activities

Spring 2026 marked a renewed effort to support Law Day. Established in 1958 by President Eisenhower, Law Day has long been supported by bar organizations throughout the country. This year, we formed a new Law Day Committee, with participation that included representatives from Montana's judiciary, state and federal, and our tribal nations. Activities were organized throughout the state, and included our first online Law Day free CLE program, which had more than 500 attendees. This fall, the Law Day Committee developed programming for Constitution Day, and Freedom Week, established in 2025 by the Montana Legislature to educate Montana students about the founding of the United States.

High School Mock Trial Competition

The Montana High School Mock Trial program is an annual statewide competition that provides students with a hands-on opportunity to simulate real courtroom trials. Designed to deepen understanding of the legal system, the program builds critical thinking, public speaking, teamwork, and civic engagement skills among high school participants. The 2026 competition, held March 20-21, featured eleven teams representing five high schools from across the state. Each team was supported by a faculty advisor and, in many cases, an attorney coach. Helena High School earned the title of state champion and went on to represent Montana at the National High School Mock Trial Championship in Des Moines, Iowa, on May 7-9, 2026.



Licensed Lawyer Program

The State Bar provides Licensed Lawyer, a free online referral service designed to connect Montanans with legal professionals across the state. The service allows the public to search for attorneys by location and practice area, making it easier to find qualified legal help. Participation is also free for Montana attorneys who wish to create a profile and highlight their services. This program expands on the State Bar's original Lawyer Referral Service, using modern technology to improve access to justice and strengthen the connection between attorneys and the communities they serve.

Citizens Law School (Free Online Program)

Launched in 2022 in response to lessons learned during the pandemic, the State Bar created an innovative, free online program to make information about our legal system more accessible to the public. Modeled on a program pioneered at the University of Montana's Alexander Blewett III School of Law, the initiative delivers a series of eight one-hour sessions covering topics ranging from family law to constitutional law. By leveraging online technology, the program reaches Montanans statewide, regardless of geography. It has been highlighted by the National Conference of Bar Presidents as a model of innovation in public legal education.

The 2026 curriculum included the series' first in-person event in Helena.

Support for Montana's Attorneys

Access to Justice Efforts

Montana attorneys continue to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring equal access to justice. Lawyers across the state pledge to provide 50+ hours of pro bono service annually, resulting in more than $16 million in donated legal services reported each year. The State Bar also supports access by leveraging relationships with key partners and programs, including:

- Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA): Funding the Montana Justice Foundation, a separate 501(c)(3) dedicated to advancing access to justice.
- Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA): An LSC-funded nonprofit providing essential legal services to low-income Montanans.

Continuing Legal Education (CLE)

The State Bar, through its CLE Institute, sections, and committees, delivers high-quality continuing legal education each year. In FY 2026, the Bar hosted an expansive program of seminars and conferences, serving nearly 1,000 attorneys statewide.

CLE Attendance (FY26):

- Annual Meeting CLE (multiple tracks): 273
- Bench/Bar CLE: 239
- Bucking Horse CLE: 79
- Ski & CLE: 187
- Real Estate CLE: 211
- St. Paddy's CLE: 287

The State Bar also hosted two free CLE programs, "On the road again: Professional Conduct in the Real World" organized and presented by the State Bar Professionalism Committee and "The Declaration of Independence at 250; How the Rule of Law has helped shape the American Dream" featuring: Hon. Brian Morris, Chief Judge, U.S. District Court for the District of Montana; Hon. Cory Swanson, Chief Justice, Montana Supreme Court; Aislinn W. Brown, President, State Bar of Montana.
Nearly 1,264 attorneys took advantage of the free CLE programming.

Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection (LFCP)

Created by the Montana Supreme Court in its order unifying the State Bar, the LFCP safeguards clients harmed by lawyer misconduct.
Report Period: January 2025 – January 2026

- Claims: 3 new claims filed; 1 partially approved, pending payment, 2 denied
- Payments: $0.00
- Reimbursements: Nearly $2,409.18 reimbursed to the Fund by one incarcerated attorney.

Payments from the fund are a matter of grace and require a determination that the lawyer engaged in dishonest conduct, as defined by the program rules.

Attorney Trust Account Oversight

The Montana Rules of Professional Conduct require that attorneys hold client funds separate from their own. The State Bar approves financial institutions authorized to hold client funds in trust. The Montana Supreme Court, through its Trust Account Overdraft Notification Rule requires that those institutions provide notice of any trust account overdraft to the Lawyers Fund for Client Protection.

Fee Arbitration Program

The State Bar also administers the Supreme Court– created Fee Arbitration Program to resolve attorney client fee disputes. The program requires participation from members of the bar and the public to serve on fee arbitration panels that issue enforceable decisions based on the fee reasonableness factors under Rule 1.5 of the Montana Rules of Professional Conduct.

Report Period: August 2025 – August 2026
Activity: 3 cases remain open from the previous year, 8 new cases opened, all filed by clients Status: 11 cases remain open. The total amount of fees in dispute is $137,044.82.

Additional arbitrators needed: Additional attorney and non-attorney volunteers arbitrators are being recruited to reduce case processing times. To learn more about this program, or to volunteer your time, please reach out to Regina Mercado at rmercado@montanabar.org.



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