



## 2024-2025 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.



# 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.

## Officers (2024–2025)

<div><div>PRESIDENT</div><div>Antoinette (Toni) Tease, Billings</div></div>	<div><div>PRESIDENT ELECT</div><div>Aislinn W. Brown, Helena</div></div>	<div><div>SECRETARY TREASURER</div><div>Erica R. Grinde, Missoula</div></div>
<div><div>IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT</div><div>J. Stuart Segrest, Helena</div></div>	<div><div>CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES</div><div>Albert R. “Rich” Batterman, Baker</div></div>	

## Board of Trustees (2024–2025)

<div><div>AREA A</div><div>Ryan G. Hennen, Whitefish</div></div>	<div><div>AREA B</div><div>Beth Hayes, Missoula Dana L. Hupp, Missoula Natasha P. Jones, Missoula</div></div>	<div><div>AREA C</div><div>Kaylan C. Minor, Dillon</div></div>	<div><div>AREA D</div><div>Anthony Gallagher, Great Falls Claire Lettow, Great Falls</div></div>
<div><div>AREA E</div><div>Albert R. “Rich” Batterman, Baker</div></div>	<div><div>AREA F</div><div>Craig D. Charlton, Helena Anna M. Kecskés, Helena Lindsey R. Simon, Helena</div></div>	<div><div>AREA G</div><div>Sherine D. Blackford, Bozeman Matthew A. Haus, Bozeman</div></div>	<div><div>AREA H</div><div>Shane P. Coleman, Billings Eli J. Patten, Billings Michelle Sullivan, Billings</div></div>

## Joint Message from Toni Tease, President, State Bar of Montana and John Mudd, Executive Director, State Bar of Montana.



**Toni Tease,**  
*President,  
State Bar of  
Montana*



**John Mudd,**  
*Executive Director,  
State Bar of  
Montana*

### Safeguarding the Judiciary, Preserving Justice, Serving Montanans

We live in interesting times. Across the nation, surveys point to declining public trust in institutions and leaders, including the judiciary and attorneys. In Montana, however, we stand on solid ground. Our courts remain strong, our Constitution resilient, and our growing legal community steadfast in its commitment to the mission entrusted to us more than 50 years ago.

Since 1974, when the unified bar was established, the State Bar of Montana has been guided by clear, values-based principles: to serve our members and to protect the public. That mission has never been more vital than it is today. The State Bar is not simply an institution; it is the collective work of thousands of Montana attorneys who dedicate their time, their skill, and their energy to advancing justice. Our committees, sections, and pro bono programs would not exist without the volunteers who believe deeply in this mission.

This past year, we have drawn strength from that tradition of service. Our members have advanced access to justice through pro bono efforts, rural outreach, and programs that bring legal resources to underserved communities. Throughout a busy legislative session, the State Bar provided balanced, thoughtful input on issues affecting both the profession and the public it serves, ensuring that our voice reflected not only the interests of attorneys but also the broader mission of improving the quality of legal services and the administration of justice in Montana. None of this would be possible without the attorneys who give freely of their time, energy, and expertise to ensure that the State Bar continues to advance its mission.

We are also proud to report that these efforts have been matched by continued growth and financial stability. Strong fiscal stewardship has allowed us to expand successful programs, support innovation, and remain well-positioned to serve both our members and the public for years to come.

Looking to the future, we have finalized a new strategic plan to guide our work through 2027. Grounded in and guided by our values, this strategic plan will refine our mission and purpose while striving to anticipate and meet gaps in access to justice. Just as importantly, it will aim to build a legal culture where all legal professionals thrive—work that is always in furtherance of our enduring mission to serve the public interest.

It has been a privilege to lead the State Bar of Montana this past year. Together, we have built on the progress of those who came before us, and together, we will continue to fulfill our mission to the attorneys of this state and the public that they serve.



2024/2025 By the Numbers

4,245  
active attorneys

3,263  
attorneys living and practicing in Montana

21  
practice-area sections serving diverse legal fields

14+  
committees advancing the work of the Bar and the profession

A New Vision for Justice: 2025–2027 Strategic Plan

The State Bar of Montana has unveiled its 2025–2027 Strategic Plan — a roadmap developed by its elected officers and trustees that sets new goals, a refreshed mission, and a vision for the future of justice in Montana.





**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.



**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.

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 (2023–2025)

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 **4,131 in 2023** to **4,245 in 2025**, showing steady upward momentum.



### MONTANA-BASED ATTORNEYS

The number of attorneys living and practicing in Montana grew from **3,193 in 2023** to **3,263 in 2025**.



### OUT-OF-STATE ATTORNEYS

The number of attorneys maintaining licensure while living outside Montana also increased, from **938 in 2023** to **982 in 2025**.



### GENDER TRENDS

Female attorneys increased from **2,082 in 2023** to **2,215 in 2025**—a growth of more than **6%**, three times faster than the increase among male attorneys.



### DISTRICT GROWTH (2023–2025)

Most districts show small, steady growth, with the largest increases in District 18 [Bozeman].



## Practice Area 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:

1. BETTR Law [Business, Estates, Trusts, Tax & Real Property] (+30)
2. Public Utilities Law (+22)
3. Indian Law (+17)
4. Family Law (+12)

### 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 **14 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

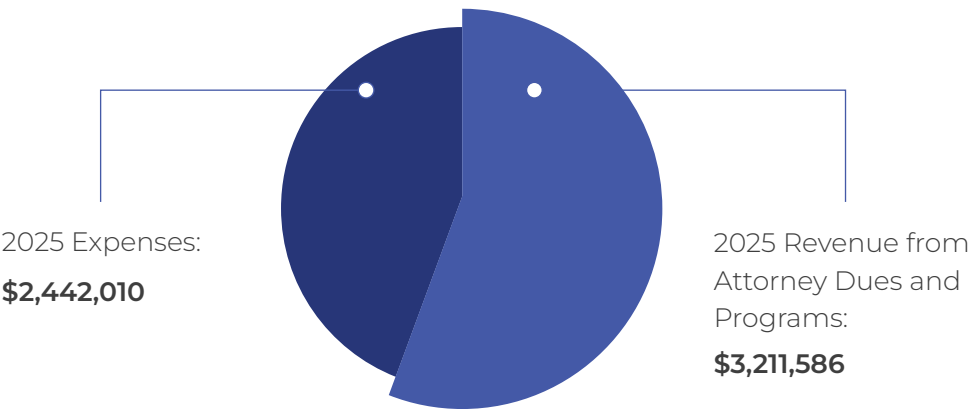
This section provides an overview of the State Bar's financial position for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, including highlights of revenue, expenditures, assets, liabilities, and key trends affecting the organization's financial health.

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.

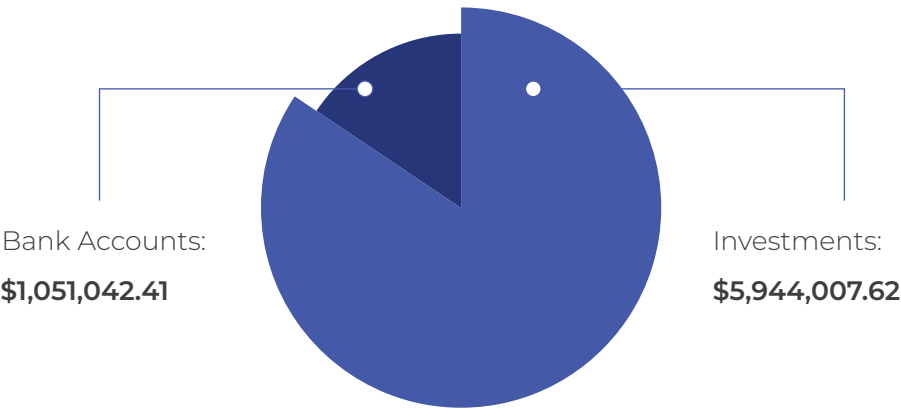
## State Bar Financial Highlights

### Revenue and Expenses for the year ending March 31, 2025



## Assets and Liabilities

### State Bar Assets



### State Bar Liabilities

\$1,894,540

## Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection

### Assets and Investments

\$1,457,427.60



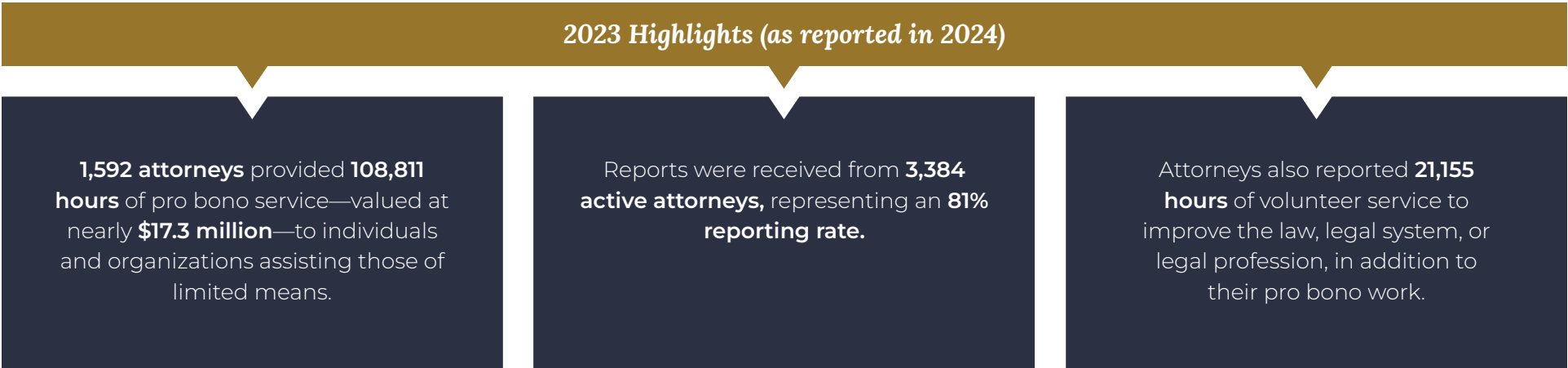
# Education, Outreach, and Engagement

## 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 State Bar’s **2024 Pro Bono Report to the Montana Supreme Court** highlights the extraordinary ways Montana attorneys met that obligation in 2023.

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.



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.

## Law School for Legislators

This biennial program equips Montana legislators with a foundational understanding of the judicial system, legal procedures, and constitutional principles. Designed to foster more informed policymaking, it also strengthens the working relationship between the legislative and judicial branches.

The most recent session was held on January 3, 2025, bringing together legislators from both chambers and political parties. Through presentations, case studies, and interactive discussions, participants gained valuable insights into the legal framework that underpins state governance.

Distinguished speakers included **Chief Justice Cory Swanson**, **Associate Justice Beth Baker**, **Lt. Governor Kristen Juras**, **Attorney General Austin Knudsen**, and **Elaine Gagliardi**, Dean of the University of Montana Alexander Blewett III School of Law. Their perspectives provided legislators with a deeper appreciation of the rule of law and the importance of maintaining an independent judiciary.





## 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 2025 competition, held March 21–22, featured six teams representing four 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 Phoenix, Arizona, on May 8–9.

## Citizens Law School (Free Online Program)

Launched in 2022 in response to lessons learned during the pandemic, the State Bar of Montana 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 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.

## Licensed Lawyer Program

The State Bar of Montana 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.





# Support for Montana's Attorneys

## Task Force on the Future of the Legal Profession

Launched in 2024, the Task Force on the Future of the Legal Profession was charged with assessing the challenges and opportunities facing Montana's legal system. Its final report is expected in 2025. Early survey results show that **72% of respondents view access to justice as "critical and urgent."** Key needs identified include expanding reduced-fee legal services, increasing rural legal help, and recruiting more pro bono lawyers.

## 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 **\$17 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 2025, the Bar hosted an expansive program of seminars and conferences, serving **nearly 1,000 attorneys statewide**.

## CLE Attendance (FY25):

- Annual Meeting CLE [multiple tracks]: 309
- Bench/Bar CLE: 260
- Bucking Horse CLE: 78
- Ski & CLE: 197
- Real Estate CLE: 181
- St. Paddy's CLE: 283

The State Bar also hosted **lawyer well-being programming**, reaching nearly **550 attorneys**. Notably, the "**Lawyer Like an Athlete**" program drew **549 attendees** on March 21, 2025 and continued strong into FY26, with **272 participants** on April 7, 2025.

## 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 2023 – January 2025

- Claims: 17 new claims filed; 15 approved and paid, 2 remain under review
- Payments: \$131,463.57 paid to clients
- Reimbursements: Nearly \$130,000 reimbursed to the Fund by three attorneys

## Attorney Trust Account Oversight

Through LFCP, the State Bar provides oversight of lawyer trust accounts, monitoring overdraft notifications from banks to ensure compliance with Montana's Rules of Professional Conduct.

## Fee Arbitration Program

The State Bar also administers the Supreme Court-created Fee Arbitration Program to resolve attorney-client fee disputes.

- **Report Period:** January 2023 – January 2025
- **Activity:** 7 new cases opened, all filed by clients
- **Status:** 5 cases remain open [2 in the 11th Judicial District, 1 in the 4th Judicial District, 2 in other districts]
- **Need:** Additional attorney and non-attorney arbitrators are being recruited to reduce case processing times.









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