MINNESOTA BOARD OF LEGAL CERTIFICATION

ANNUAL REPORT



2024

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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.

2024 Board Members

- Chair: Kellie Reynolds, The American Registry of Radiologic Technologies
- Timothy Brausen, St. Louis Park
- Elizabeth Bryant, 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
- Randall Papke, Public Member, Clearwater
- Thomas Radio, Felhaber Larson Law Firm, Minneapolis
- Brandon M. Schwartz, Schwartz Law Firm, Oakdale
- Janet G. Stellpflug, Ropers Majeski PC, Minneapolis
- Jessica Thomas, Public Member, Minneapolis

MN Supreme Court Liaisons in 2024: Justice Gordon Moore (January through July) and Justice Theodora Gaïtas (August through December)
Executive Director for the Board: Emily Eschweiler

2024 Year in Review

In 2024, the Board of Legal Certification reviewed the annual reports submitted by the six 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.

The Board reviewed certification standard changes from two specialty fields. The MSBA submitted updates to the Real Property and Civil Trial standards, which were in line with the Board's rules.

Board committees reviewed the recertification applications and exams for the American Board of Certification's fields of Business Bankruptcy, Consumer Bankruptcy, and Creditor's Rights; the Minnesota State Bar Association's field of Civil Trial, and the National Board of Trial Advocacy's fields of Civil Trial and Criminal Trial.

In June 2024, the National Association of Counsel for Children notified the Board that they would not be seeking recertification and were voluntarily relinquishing their accreditation for Child Welfare Law in Minnesota. One Minnesota licensed attorney remains a specialist and the NACC has provided instructions on the language required to comply with Rule 7.2 of the Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct.

The Board continues to discuss ways to increase certification in Minnesota and what role the Board should play in the process.

Dated: March 18, 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 2024.

At the beginning of 2024, there were six agencies accredited in Minnesota to certify Minnesota lawyers as specialists. During 2024, the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) elected not to seek reaccreditation.

5

AMERICAN BOARD OF CERTIFICATION (ABC)

ABC certifies attorneys in the fields of Business Bankruptcy, Consumer Bankruptcy, and Creditors' Rights. As of December 31, 2024, 5 Minnesota lawyers were certified by ABC across these 3 fields.

7

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRIVACY PROFESSIONALS (IAPP)

IAPP certifies attorneys in the field of Privacy Law. As of December 31, 2024, 7 Minnesota lawyers were certified specialists in this field of law.

523

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 523 Minnesota lawyers were certified as specialists by the MSBA across these fields.

51

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, 2024, a total of 51 Minnesota lawyers were certified specialists across these 4 fields.

4

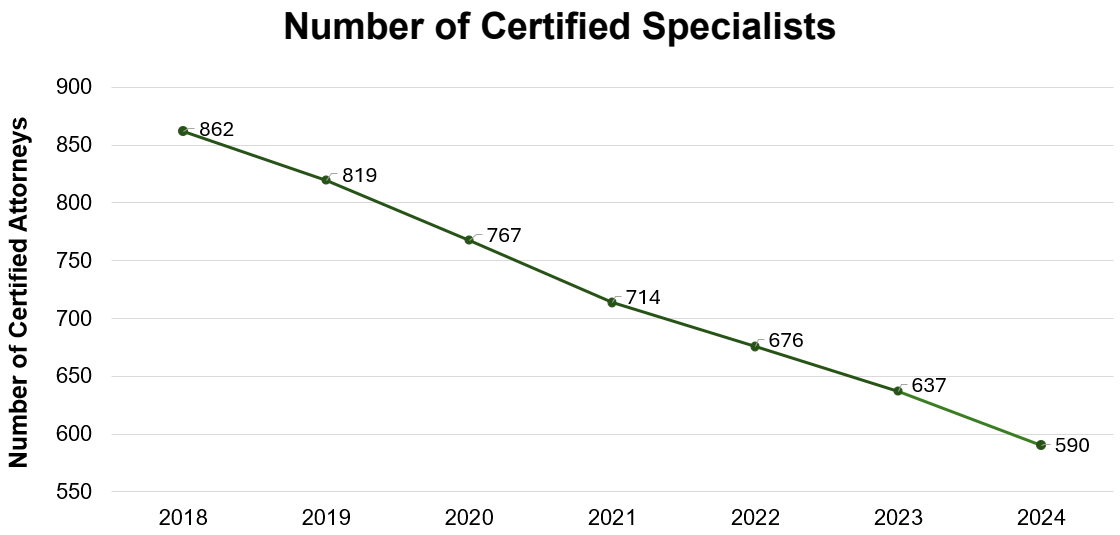
NATIONAL ELDER LAW FOUNDATION (NELF)

NELF certifies attorneys in the field of Elder Law. As of December 31, 2024, 4 Minnesota licensed lawyers were certified as elder law specialists.

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 862 in 2018 to 590 in 2024, a decrease of 31.5%



Agency/Specialty	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
ABC Consumer Bankruptcy	3	3	3	2	1	1	1
ABC Business Bankruptcy	5	3	3	5	5	3	3
ABC Creditors' Rights	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
MSBA Civil Trial Practice	253	239	211	189	177	167	143
MSBA Criminal Law	65	56	58	56	54	50	50
MSBA Labor & Employment Law	113	111	110	103	98	95	93
MSBA Real Property	317	306	287	272	261	247	237
NBTA Family Law Trial Advocacy	13	13	12	12	13	13	12
NBTA Civil Trial Practice	81	72	66	57	50	42	34
NBTA Criminal Law	8	8	8	7	7	6	4
NBTA Truck Accident Law	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
NELF Elder Law	3	3	3	3	3	4	4
IAPP Privacy Law	-	3	4	6	5	7	7
Total	**862**	**819**	**767**	**714**	**676**	**637**	**590**

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 6.7% from 2023 to 2024



With the FY24-25 budgets, the BLC overhead allocation for expenses was reduced from 3% to 2%. The 1% reduction was absorbed by the Board of Continuing Legal Education based on an analysis of the work performed in the office. The Board continues to look for ways to reduce expenditures in order to maintain a healthy cash balance.

Revenue Source	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Agency Application Fees	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Annual Agency Fees	$3,000	$3,500	$3,750	$3,500	$3,750
Annual Lawyer Fees	$32,265	$31,815	$9,795	$30,855	$28,845
New Lawyer Fees	$150	$1,300	$1,400	$800	$200
Total	**$35,415**	**$38,636**	**$14,945**	**$35,155**	**$32,795**