Purpose and Our Program Goals

The Board of Legal Specialization was established to create a method by which qualified North Carolina lawyers might become certified as specialists in designated areas of the law. Our goals are to first, assist in the delivery of legal services to the public by identifying those lawyers who have demonstrated special knowledge, skill, and proficiency in a specific field. Second, the legal specialization program seeks to improve the competency of members of the Bar by establishing an additional incentive for lawyers to participate in continuing legal education and to meet other requirements of specialization.

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Message from the Executive Director

The North Carolina State Bar exists to protect the public. As part of carrying out that mission, the State Bar Council created the Plan of Legal Specialization in 1983 “to assist in the delivery of legal services to the public by identifying to the public those lawyers who have demonstrated special knowledge, skill, and proficiency in a specific field, so that the public can more closely match its needs with available services; and to improve the competency of the bar[.]” 27 N.C. Admin. Code 1D.1701. These are lofty ideals, but I am proud to say that these goals are sincerely pursued and emphatically achieved by everyone involved with the specialization program. Our specialty committees take great care in objectively reviewing the qualifications of applicants; our committee members pore over the specialty exams, analyzing every word in a question to ensure the question is fair and accurate; and our Board engages in spirited debate about topics ranging from streamlining the application process to the appropriate use of program funds to increase the visibility of the specialization program to both lawyers and the public. In a survey this past fall, recent applicants indicated that their top reasons for applying for certification as a North Carolina specialist were the enhanced professionalism that is attributed to certification and the personal challenge that accompanies certification. I could not agree more, and I am inspired that those joining our program are doing so to contribute to a greater sense of professionalism in the legal community while overcoming the impressive challenge of achieving certification. I feel strongly that our lawyers can be proud of their designations as board certified specialists because certification truly does mean something – it objectively reflects the substantial proficiency acquired and demonstrated by the lawyer, and it instills confidence in the profession by the public.

The individuals guiding this program and the members who have achieved the significant task of certification genuinely value and intently pursue the very purpose of the program: to protect the public by assisting in the delivery of legal services to the public and by improving the competency of the bar. The specialization program will continue to provide a great service to the people of North Carolina, and I look forward to our collective efforts in maintaining the heightened standards of practice for the benefit of the public.

Sincerely,

Brian Oten
Executive Director
Annual Program Statistics

North Carolina is one of only 19 states that certify lawyers as specialists.

Who are our specialists?

![Bar chart showing the number of NC specialists and active NC lawyers]

NC Specialists - 1,254
Active NC Lawyers - 28,302

How many in each specialty practice area?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Practice Area</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appellate</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankruptcy Law Business</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankruptcy Law Consumer</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Law Federal</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Law Juvenile Delinquency</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Law State</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder Law</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Planning and Probate</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Law</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Law</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and Information Security Law</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Property Law Commercial</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Property Law Residential</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security Disability Law</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trademark Law</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities Law</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers' Compensation Law</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where are they located throughout the state?

Practice Areas
The board certifies lawyers in 13 areas of law.
• Appellate Practice  • Bankruptcy Law  • Criminal Law (including juvenile delinquency)  • Elder Law
• Estate Planning and Probate Law  • Family Law  • Immigration Law  • Privacy and Information Security
• Real Property Law  • Social Security Disability Law  • Trademark Law  • Utilities Law
• Workers’ Compensation Law

History of the program

The History of the North Carolina Board of Legal Specialization

First Certifications Awarded in Bankruptcy, Estate Planning, and Real Property

• 1987

Board of Legal Specialization was Created by the North Carolina State Bar

• 1983

Family Law Added as a Specialty

• 1989

Immigration Law Added as a Specialty

• 1997

Social Security Disability Law Added as a Specialty

• 2006

Elder Law Added as a Specialty

• 2009

Juvenile Delinquency Added as a Specialty

• 2012

Utilities Law Added as a Specialty

• 2016

Privacy and Information Security Added as a Specialty

• 2018

Appellate Practice Added as a Specialty

• 2011

Trademark Law Added as a Specialty

• 2013

Board of Legal Specialization Celebrates 20 Years!

• 2007

Board of Legal Specialization Celebrates 30 Years!

• 2016

Board of Legal Specialization Celebrates 40 Years!
About Our Team

Staff
Brian Oten  
Executive Director  
boten@ncbar.gov

Denise Mullen  
Assistant Director  
dmullen@ncbar.gov

Lanice Heidbrink  
Administrative Support to Specialization Program  
lheidbrink@ncbar.gov

Board Members
• Robert (Bob) Mason, Chair, Asheboro  
• Larry H. Rocamora, Vice Chair, Durham  
• Kimberly R. Coward, Cashiers  
• Patricia Head, Raleigh  
• Laura V. Hudson, Raleigh  
• Everett (Vic) Knight, Raleigh  
• Robert A. Ponton, Raleigh  
• Jan E. Pritchett, Greensboro  
• Nancy S. Ray, Greenville

Specialty Committees
Appellate Practice  
John J. Korzen, Chair  
Kernersville

Bankruptcy Law  
A. Cotten Wright, Chair  
Charlotte

Criminal Law  
Robert C. Kemp, Chair  
Greenville

Elder Law  
Letha S. McDowell, Chair  
Kitty Hawk

Estate Planning and Probate Law  
Jennifer L. J. Koenig, Chair  
Greensboro

Family Law  
Eugene M. Carr, III, Co-Chair  
Hendersonville  
G. Elizabeth Hodges, Co-Chair  
Charlotte

Immigration Law  
Thomas E. Fulghum, Chair  
Durham

Juvenile Delinquency  
Mary D. Stansell, Chair  
Raleigh

Privacy & Information Security Law  
Matthew A. Cordell, Chair  
Greensboro

Real Property Law Specialty Committee  
Frank W. Erwin, Chair  
Jacksonville

Social Security Disability Law  
Andrea G. Farmer, Chair  
Rutherfordton

Trademark Law  
David W. Sar, Chair  
Greensboro

Utilities Law  
Henry C. Campen Jr., Chair  
Raleigh

Workers’ Compensation  
Michael W. Bertics, Chair  
Raleigh
Service Awards

Each year we are proud to present the specialization awards based on nominations that we receive from board-certified specialists. We bestow the awards during an annual luncheon each spring.

The Sara H. Davis Excellence Award

The award is presented to a certified specialist who exemplifies excellence in his/her daily work as an attorney and serves as a model for other lawyers. Special consideration is given for a long and consistent record of handling challenging matters successfully, for sharing knowledge and experience with other lawyers, for earning the respect and admiration of all others with whom the lawyer comes into contact in his/her daily work, and for high ethical standards.

2018 Winner: Rose Stout, Raleigh, Family Law

The James E. Cross Jr. Leadership Award

Nominations for this award are accepted from members of the North Carolina State Bar who have worked closely with the nominee. The award is presented to a certified specialist who has taken an active leadership role in his/her practice area through presentations at CLE seminars, scholarly writings, participation in groundbreaking cases, or service to an established professional organization.

2018 Winner: Leonard “Lennie” Jernigan, Raleigh, Workers’ Compensation

The Howard L. Gum Service Award

This award is given to a specialty committee member who consistently excels in completing committee tasks. The recipient is highly dedicated to legal specialization, donates his/her time to committee responsibilities, and responds to the needs of the staff and the board, in exemplary fashion. Nominations can only be accepted from committee members.

2018 Winner: Robert “Bert” Kemp, Greenville, Criminal Law

Directory of Specialists

All specialists are listed in the specialization directory, which is printed and mailed to libraries and clerks of court and posted on the website.

You can find the full directory at this URL nclawspecialists.gov/for-the-public/find-a-board-certified-specialist

You can request a printed copy by writing to: Denise Mullen dmullen@ncbar.gov