GENERAL RULE 25
PRACTICE OF LAW BOARD

(a) Purpose. The purpose of this rule is to create a Practice of Law Board in order to promote expanded access to affordable and reliable legal and law-related services, expand public confidence in the administration of justice, make recommendations regarding the circumstances under which non-lawyers may be involved in the delivery of certain types of legal and law-related services, enforce rules prohibiting individuals and organizations from engaging in unauthorized legal and law-related services that pose a threat to the general public, and to ensure that those engaged in the delivery of legal services in the state of Washington have the requisite skills and competencies necessary to serve the public.

(b) Appointment. The Practice of Law Board shall consist of 13 members, at least four of whom shall be non-lawyers. The appointments shall be made by the Supreme Court after considering nominations from the Board of Governors of the Washington State Bar Association and other interested people and organizations. The members shall be appointed to staggered 3-year terms of 3 years and no member may serve more than 2 consecutive full 3-year terms. Any vacancy shall be filled for the unexpired term. The Supreme Court shall annually designate a chair and vice-chair, who shall be members of the Board.

(c) Powers of the Practice of Law Board.

(1) Advisory Opinions. On request of any person, or in connection with the consideration of any complaint or any investigation made on its own initiative, the Board may render advisory opinions relating to the authority of non-lawyers to perform legal and law-related services and arrange for their publication. No opinion shall be rendered if, to the Board's knowledge, the subject matter either involves or might affect a case or controversy pending in any court. An advisory opinion shall be issued by the Board in writing and shall be transmitted to the person making the inquiry. At the direction of the Board, an opinion may be published in the Washington State Bar News. Published opinions shall not, insofar as practicable, identify the party or parties making an inquiry, or the complainant or respondent.

(2) Complaints. The Board shall have jurisdiction over and shall inquire into and consider complaints alleging the unauthorized practice of law by any person or entity in accordance with the procedures outlined in this rule.

(3) Investigation. The Board may, on its own initiative, and without any complaint being made to it, investigate any condition or situation of which it becomes aware that may involve the unauthorized practice of law.

(4) Recommendations to the Supreme Court Regarding the Provision of Legal and Law-Related Services by Non-Lawyers. On request of the Supreme Court or any person or organization, or on its own initiative, the Board may recommend that non-lawyers be authorized to engage in certain defined activities that otherwise constitute the practice of law as defined in GR 24. In forwarding a recommendation that non-lawyers be authorized to engage in certain legal or law-related activities that constitute the practice of law as defined in GR 24, the Board shall determine whether regulation under authority of the Supreme Court (including the establishment of minimum and uniform standards of competency, conduct, and continuing education) is

necessary to protect the public interest. Any recommendation that non-lawyers be authorized to engage in the limited provision of legal or law-related services shall be accompanied by a determination:

(A) that access to affordable and reliable legal and law-related services consistent with protection of the public will be enhanced by permitting non-lawyers to engage in the defined activities set forth in the recommendation;

(B) that the defined activities outlined in the recommendation can be reasonably and competently provided by skilled and trained non-lawyers;

(C) if the public interest requires regulation under authority of the Supreme Court, such regulation is tailored to promote access to affordable legal and law-related services while ensuring that those whose important rights are at stake can reasonably rely on the quality, skill and ability of those non-lawyers who will provide such services;

(D) that, to the extent that the activities authorized will involve the handling of client trust funds, provision has been made to ensure that such funds are handled in a manner consistent with RPC 1.15A and APR 12.1, including the requirement that such funds be placed in interest bearing accounts, with interest paid to the Legal Foundation of Washington; and

(E) that the costs of regulation, if any, can be effectively underwritten within the context of the proposed regulatory regime. Recommendations to authorize non-lawyers to engage in the limited practice of law pursuant to this section shall be forwarded to the Washington State Board of Governors for consideration and comment before transmission to the Supreme Court. Upon approval of such recommendations by the Supreme Court pursuant to the procedures set out in GR 9, those who meet the requirements and comply with applicable regulatory and licensing provisions shall be deemed to be engaged in the authorized practice of law.

(d) Expenses of the Practice of Law Board. The Practice of Law Board shall be supported through annual commitments from the Washington State Bar Association and through a portion of other licensing fees established by the Supreme Court for non-lawyers authorized to engage in the regulated practice of law. The Board shall be administered and staffed by the Washington State Bar which shall pay all expenses reasonably and necessarily incurred by the Board, pursuant to a budget approved by the Board of Governors. Members of the Board shall not be compensated for their services, but shall be reimbursed for their necessary expenses incurred in connection with the Board in a manner consistent with the Association's reimbursement policies.

(e) Records. All records of the Board shall be filed and maintained at the principal office of the Association.

(f) Procedure.

(1) Committees. The Board may establish such committees as the membership may deem necessary and appropriate to the performance of its assigned tasks.

(2) Quorum. A majority of the Board shall constitute a quorum. The chairperson of the Board may appoint temporary members of the Board or a committee when a member is disqualified or unable to function on a specific matter for good cause.

(3) Action by Board. The full jurisdiction and authority of the

Board, as provided in this rule, may be exercised by a committee, except that (1) no advisory opinion may be given without the approval of a majority of the Board; (2) no determination of the unauthorized practice of law by a respondent and referral of a matter to a law enforcement or other agency may be made without the approval of a majority of the Board: and (3) the action of a committee on any matter shall be subject to review and the approval or disapproval of the Board.

(4) Formal Complaint Procedure.

(A) Preliminary Investigation. The investigation or review of a complaint shall be promptly instituted by the Board or by a member thereof designated by the chair of the Board. If a complaint has been filed, the investigating member shall interview the complainant and respondent and shall conduct such further investigation as is deemed appropriate.

(B) Report and Written Agreement. Upon the conclusion of an investigation of a complaint, a report shall be made to the Board. If, after consideration of the report, the Board concludes that there has been no unauthorized practice of law, the complaint shall be dismissed and the Board shall so notify the complainant and the respondent in writing and shall close the file in the matter. If the Board concludes that there has been unauthorized practice of law, the Board shall attempt to persuade the respondent to enter into a written agreement to refrain from such conduct in the future. The written agreement may include a stipulation to penalties in the event of continued violation.

(C) Pending Controversy. The Board may defer investigation if, to the Board's knowledge, the conduct complained of is the subject matter of or might affect a case or controversy pending in any court.

(D) Informal Disposition. The Board may attempt to arrive at an amicable disposition of any matter within its jurisdiction with the respondent. At any time during the pendency of a matter before it, the Board may conduct an informal conference with the respondent. At the Board's discretion, an electronic recording or written transcription of the proceeding may be made. A respondent subject to an informal conference may be represented by counsel. After a finding by the Board of the unauthorized practice of law, the Board shall endeavor to have the respondent enter into a written agreement to refrain in the future from such conduct. If the respondent declines to enter into a written agreement pursuant to this rule, the Board shall refer the matter to an appropriate law enforcement or other agency in accordance with this rule.

(g) Petitions for Review.

(1) Notice. Within 20 days after an opinion is published, or within 30 days after any final action of the Board other than the publication of any opinion, any aggrieved member of the bar, bar association, person or entity may seek review thereof by serving on the Board a notice of petition for review by the Supreme Court and by filing the original notice with the Clerk of the Supreme Court. The notice shall set forth the petitioner's name and address and, if represented, the name and address of counsel. The notice shall designate the action of the Board sought to be reviewed and shall concisely state the manner in which the petitioner is aggrieved.

(2) Procedure. Petitions for review to the Supreme Court shall comply with the Rules for Appellate Procedure.

(3) Final Determination. The final determination of a petition for review may be either by written opinion or by order of the Supreme

Court and shall state whether the opinion or the action of the Board is affirmed, reversed or modified or shall provide for such other final disposition as is appropriate.

(h) Referral to Enforcement Agency.

(1) Referral. When the Board concludes from its preliminary investigation, or from the failure of an informal conference as provided in these rules, that an amicable disposition of any matter within its jurisdiction cannot be effected with the respondent, it shall, based upon the nature of the complaint, the relief sought, and the facts as then known, refer the matter to the law enforcement or other agency the Board determines is best suited to conduct an investigation and any prosecution of such matter.

(2) Contents of File. Upon making a determination that an amicable disposition of a matter cannot be effected, and that the matter should be referred to a particular law enforcement or other agency, the Board shall send such agency the original complaint, response, evidence or other proof, investigative report and, if an informal conference has been conducted, a transcript of such proceedings. The Board shall retain copies of all such documents for its file.

(3) Notice to Complainant. Upon referring a matter to a law enforcement or other agency, the Board shall notify the complainant of such action in writing.

(i) Immunity from Suit.

(1) The members and staff of the Board shall be absolutely immune from suit, whether legal or equitable in nature, for any conduct in the performance of their official duties.

(2) Persons who bring allegations concerning any individual or entity to the Board shall be immune from suit, whether legal or equitable in nature, for all communications to the Board or to its staff.

(j) Regulations. The Board may adopt regulations pertinent to these powers subject to the approval of the Supreme Court.

[Adopted effective September 1, 2001; September 1, 2006.]