



## Northwest Justice Project

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César E. Torres  
Executive Director

April 30, 2021

The Honorable Steven Gonzalez  
Chief Justice, Washington State Supreme Court  
415 12th Ave SW - PO Box 40929  
Olympia, WA 98504-0929  
Via email: [supreme@courts.wa.gov](mailto:supreme@courts.wa.gov)

### Re: Comment in Support of Proposed Amendment to APR 11

Dear Chief Justice Gonzalez:

On behalf of the Northwest Justice Project (NJP), I write in support of the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Board's proposed amendment to Rule 11 of the Admission and Practice Rules (APR). Supporting a vision of Justice for all low-income people in Washington, NJP is the largest statewide non-profit legal aid provider. NJP employs more than 175 attorneys, with offices serving all 39 counties. Our organization was an early signatory to the commitments of the Race Equity and Justice Initiative ([REJI](#)). We are committed to being an anti-racist organization and believe in principles of equity and inclusion.

The amendment is very modest, requiring a single ethics credit in the topic of equity, inclusion, and mitigation of bias. Nevertheless, NJP supports this change because we believe the legal profession has an important role to play in addressing structural, race based inequities in society. Today, WSBA's proposal to require training in mitigation of bias is fundamental to its obligation to protect and serve the public and to regulate legal professionals. By adopting the amendment, the Court would empower the WSBA to further its objective to "promote diversity and equality in the courts and the legal profession." GR 12.2(a)(6). This is an important step towards combatting the systemic inequities in our society.

Just as important, WSBA's proposal furthers the understanding of the legal profession's historic role in propagating and maintain the vestiges of racism and Jim Crow laws in the judicial system, and begins the process of taking steps to address it. As stated by this Court: "The legal community must recognize that we all bear responsibility for this on-going injustice, and that we are capable of taking steps to address it, if only we have the courage and the will". Washington's Supreme Court [Letter to the Judiciary and Legal Community](#) June 4, 2020.



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Adopting the amendment is a necessary first step to help the legal profession begin to address these injustices, increase access to the justice system for more people, lead to more equitable and fairer results, and aligns with the leading trend among bar associations. Across the country, state bar associations are requiring similar equity and elimination of bias continuing legal education (CLE) for legal professionals. For example, the State Bar of California has long required at least one CLE to be in the “Recognition and Elimination of Bias in the Legal Profession and Society.” Similarly, the New York State Bar Association requires at least one CLE credit in Diversity, Inclusion and Elimination of Bias, as have Vermont, New Jersey, and Minnesota. Bar associations across the country are recognizing the importance of training and education on equity, inclusion, and the elimination of bias. It is time for Washington and the WSBA to join the movement and do its part to tackle systemic inequities.

When legal professionals are trained on these issues, they will be equipped with skills to be better advocates for their clients. Communication skills are enhanced when legal professionals have a better understanding of the issues faced by client communities impacted by the legacy of racism. Further, there are many opportunities for collaboration among legal professionals with differing perspectives, which helps enrich everyone’s experience and encourages innovation and growth.

Everyone in Washington will benefit from this requirement, and the costs for satisfying it would be minimal as there are already various accessible, and often free, trainings available. In fact, WSBA itself has committed to providing high quality, free, equity, inclusion, and mitigation of bias training.

While NJP is among many law firms across the state that already offer training on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, we nonetheless support mandating this training. Those who need it the most are much more likely to receive it if it is required; furthermore, infrastructure and high-quality training opportunities will likely increase if the training is mandatory.

While the amendment would require only one out of the six mandatory ethics credits to be centered in equity, inclusion, and elimination of bias, we agree that this a step in the right direction. Therefore, NJP wholeheartedly supports the suggested amendment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'César', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

César Torres  
Executive Director

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**Sent:** Friday, April 30, 2021 2:51 PM  
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Dear Chief Justice Steven Gonzalez & Associate Justices of the Court –

Attached please find Comments from the Northwest Justice Project in Support of Proposed Amendment to APR 11. Thank for your attention and consideration.

César E. Torres (he, him, el), Executive Director  
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Northwest Justice Project

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