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Subject: Sometimes a lawyer is overkill | The Seattle Times

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April 16, 2021

Dear Seattle City Council and Mayor Durkan et al:

I urge you folks in our government to do all that you can to protect and continue the LLLT program that is designed to provide the poor and minorities to access the legal system in the State of Washington.

It would be a travesty to let this program die and disenfranchise our poor and minority citizens justice in our state.

Thank you,

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Attachment from The Seattle Times:

<https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/editorials/sometimes-a-lawyer-is-overkill/>

Sometimes a lawyer is overkill

[The Seattle Times editorial board](#)

April 15, 2021 at 3:02 pm Updated April 15, 2021 at 3:02 pm

Washingtonians should hope they never need the services of a Limited Legal License Technician (LLLT), but if they do, they should hope one is available. Unless the state Supreme Court has a change of heart, LLLTs are an endangered species.

LLLTs are trained legal professionals, a step up from paralegals. They aren't full-blown lawyers with the same extensive education, but they have learned specialized areas of the law and been tested on that knowledge. Think of them as akin to nurse practitioners in medicine. You'd want a doctor for surgery and a lawyer for a court case, but for a lot of run-of-the-mill stuff, the nurse practitioner or LLLT is plenty, and much more affordable.

Washington state [pioneered LLLTs](#) when the Supreme Court authorized them in 2012. Other states have created or are considering their own versions.

Since inception, though, the Supreme Court has offered little support for the fledgling program. LLLTs may work only in family law, for example. They have proposed expanding into elder care, health law, landlord/tenant issues, immigration and other practice areas, but the Supreme Court repeatedly rebuffs them.

By keeping their practice area so narrow, the legal establishment prevents the program from flourishing. Just as not every lawyer wants to practice family law, so too with potential LLLTs.

The limited scope also denies low-income residents and communities of color an affordable option in legal matters that don't wind up in court and don't require an expensive attorney. It would be better, for example, if a family facing eviction from a low-cost apartment could get some professional help filing paperwork.

The Washington State Bar Association and the state Supreme Court haven't been fans of LLLTs for a while. The reason offered is the high cost of the program and limited participation. Perhaps more realistically it's because every person who goes to an LLLT is lost billable hours for a lawyer.

Last summer, the Supreme Court, without any public input, voted to

[sunset the LLLT program](#). Current LLLTs and those in the pipeline could continue, but there would be no new ones within a couple of years.

Now, that decision might not be final. The court has relented and at least is letting the public weigh in on the regulations that would enact the sunset. We encourage readers to do so. Tell justices that everyone should have access to affordable legal services. Tell them that in a lot of cases, a lawyer is overkill. Tell them to expand practice areas for LLLTs.

And tell them that, in [the words](#) of former Chief Justice Barbara Madsen, who was instrumental in creating the program, “The elimination of the LLLT license, which was created to address access to justice across income and race, is a step backward in this critical work. It is not the time for closing the doors to justice but, instead, for opening them wider.”

Contact the Supreme Court at supreme@courts.wa.gov, and keep your comments to no more than 1,500 words.

The Seattle Times editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Jennifer Hemmingsen, Mark Higgins, Derrick Nunnally and William K. Blethen (emeritus).