

Paralegal Certification Program Expands Access to Justice

Wisconsin lawyers can help themselves, their practices, and the public by encouraging paralegals to become certified.

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

In an era when legal matters have become increasingly complex, paralegals have evolved to become indispensable in supporting attorneys and enhancing access to justice. The State Bar of Wisconsin's Paralegal Certification Program is a beacon for those aspiring to excel in this crucial profession.

The Paralegal Certification Program is a comprehensive initiative designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel as paralegals. Over 300 paralegals currently participate. The program covers a range of legal topics, procedural knowledge, and ethical considerations, ensuring that certified paralegals are well prepared to assist attorneys. This voluntary certification demonstrates a paralegal's dedication to professional development and excellence. Certified paralegals must meet the program's education and experience requirements, and they attend educational sessions to polish their skills and ensure they're up to date on changes and trends.

Being a certified paralegal signifies a commitment to excellence and professionalism. Certification enhances an individual's credibility within the legal community and is a testament to proficiency in legal procedures, research, and ethical standards. The program provides paralegals with information about

changing laws, regulatory requirements, and exploration of ethics issues and thereby also benefits attorneys who value having the most current information within their firms.

Large parts of Wisconsin face significant challenges related to the shortage of legal representation. Certified paralegals play a crucial role in bridging this gap by providing essential support to attorneys. They handle routine legal tasks, conduct legal research, and prepare documentation, enabling attorneys to focus on more complex legal matters and on strategic aspects of cases, such as legal analysis, negotiation, and courtroom representation. This collaborative approach helps optimize legal resources, ensuring that even regions with shortages benefit from competent legal assistance, and can make legal services more affordable and efficient.

The Paralegal Certification Program is designed to ensure that certified professionals stay current with the rapidly evolving legal landscape. Through continuing education requirements and ongoing professional development opportunities, paralegals are equipped with the latest legal knowledge and changes in regulations. This commitment to staying up to date ensures that certified paralegals remain valuable assets in the legal profession.

The certification program fosters increased competencies among paralegal professionals by emphasizing not only legal knowledge but also ethical standards and effective communication skills. This multifaceted approach ensures that certified paralegals are well-rounded professionals capable of handling diverse challenges in the legal field.

As Wisconsin's legal community addresses access to justice and legal services in underserved areas, certified paralegals can help bridge the gap. **WL**



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