

**Special Committee on Public Sector
and Public Interest Report to the Board of Governors
June 12, 2026**

In September 2025 the New Hampshire Bar Association (NHBA) convened a Special Committee on Public Sector and Public Interest Attorneys. The Committee was convened by the NHBA Immediate Past President Kate Mahan. Approximately one in six attorneys in New Hampshire practices in the public sector or public interest arena. Past President Mahan wanted to address the unique challenges faced by this significant segment of the bar to identify ways that the NHBA could support these attorneys while encouraging the next generation of attorneys to join their ranks.

The Committee included prosecutors, government attorneys at the state and local levels, public defenders, judicial branch employees, non profit attorneys, law school faculty, and individuals who served the traditionally under-represented members of our communities.

The Committee's charge highlighted that:

In recent years, the legal profession has faced numerous challenges, not only in adapting to an ever-evolving legal landscape but also in maintaining a balance between private sector opportunities and the critical work being done by public sector and public interest attorneys. These lawyers, who serve as the backbone of our justice system, often work in underfunded and high-pressure environments, yet their work touches the lives of countless individuals and communities, safeguarding rights, promoting fairness and ensuring justice is accessible to all.

In recognizing and strengthening the mutual role that public sector and public interest attorneys play in New Hampshire's legal landscape the Committee was tasked with exploring innovative solutions to support these dedicated professionals; addressing the unique challenges they face; and encouraging more attorneys to choose careers in these arenas.

Thus, the Committee was tasked, through survey, stakeholder meetings and other appropriate means to 1) identify statewide trends in public sector and public interest employment; 2) identify steps that can be taken to interest law students in pursuing these careers; 3) determine what resources the NHBA can provide to better support public sector and public interest attorneys; and 4) develop concrete steps to promote the representation of these attorneys in all aspects of bar activities and the profession.

The Committee began its work with members providing insights into the challenges for attorneys in their respective areas of public service, including what draws attorneys to the work as well as what causes them to leave. This discussion was insightful because the Committee learned that the financial challenges public sector attorneys encounter differs to some degree. For example, some offices pay for CLE's and bar dues while others do not. Some larger offices provide a substantial amount of inter-office training and mentoring while other offices, based on size and finances, are limited in their ability to do so. The Committee also analyzed whether financial issues raised as being "public sector" challenges were broader and similarly experienced by attorneys in solo/small firms or in more remote areas of the state.

The Committee quickly recognized that to be impactful it had to be strategic in identifying the key areas where true deliverables could be made within ten months. Providing Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs that were relevant and at low or no cost was the first deliverable identified.

The Committee sent a survey to all public sector and public interest attorneys asking what CLE topics would be of interest to them and what Bar Association support would be beneficial. The responses reflected that the CLE topics of greatest interest were Ethics and Developments in the Law. The preferred length of the CLEs was 1-2 hours. The most important Bar Association member service and support needed to meet the professional needs of the public sector and public interest identified in the survey were CLE programs.

Given the identified need for CLE programs, a subcommittee began its work to offer weekly lunch-time CLE programs at reduced cost. The work of the subcommittee remains ongoing with the anticipation that CLE programs will be offered within the next few months.

In addition, the Committee proposed a scholarship program to attend NHBA sponsored CLE programs. The scholarship program is not limited to public sector attorneys. The Board approved this proposal and in February 2026, the NHBA CLE department announced its Scholarship Program. This new offering provides tuition assistance to NHBA members who wish to participate in CLE programs but are experiencing financial hardships or other limiting circumstances. To apply for assistance all one needs to do is submit a brief application certifying need. To date, no request for tuition assistance has been denied.

As a second deliverable, the Committee determined it would be beneficial to spotlight the varied, fulfilling and exceptional work of the public sector and public interest lawyers. This spotlight was twofold - to herald the work of these attorneys and to attract other attorneys to these fields. The Bar News published an article on the formation of the Committee and in February 2026, published an article authored by Committee Member Sean Gill titled – Championing Public Sector and Nonprofit Attorneys.

As a regular feature, the Bar News has been profiling attorneys whose work involves the protection of vulnerable children, defending those charged with crimes and representing individuals in need of free civil legal representation. One attorney profiled expressed immense gratitude, not for the attention brought to their individual career, but to highlight the needs of their clients, including the need for more advocates and funding.

A topic that was ever-present for the Committee was NHBA annual bar dues. Although the Committee understood the financial strain of annual dues paid by individuals and not their employer, the Committee found no other state where there was a reduced fee for public interest and public sector attorneys. Two mandatory associations (California and Oregon) offer reduced dues based on income eligibility. The Hawaii Bar Association exempts public sector attorneys from its public protection fee.

While the Committee was able to make the above gains for public interest and public sector attorneys, more gains are certainly possible. These gains include: the need for mentorship programs with rewards for the mentors such as CLE credits and academic credit for the mentee; increased engagement with law students where they can understand the work of the public sector and public interest attorney and the rewards reaped for such work; and the pursuit of all available avenues to seek loan repayment assistance for public sector and public interest attorneys.

The Committee members recognize the incremental steps that they have advanced over the past ten months. It is their collective hope that the New Hampshire Bar, with the support of the New Hampshire Supreme Court, continues to make positive advancement for all those attorneys who dedicate their work to the public and the private interest clients and that its work will lead current and future attorneys to these critical fields.