

THE FLORIDA BAR BOARD CERTIFICATION – WHAT IT'S ABOUT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 8, 2016

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Tallahassee, January 8 – Board certification is a voluntary program for lawyers. Approved by The Florida Supreme Court and established in 1982 board certification is administered by The Florida Bar to help the public choose a lawyer. Certification is the highest level of evaluation by The Florida Bar of the competency and experience of attorneys in the areas of law approved for certification. The Florida Bar evaluates all certified lawyers for experience and expertise in a particular area of law as well as for professionalism and peer acknowledgement. After successfully undergoing the certification process and becoming board certified, a board certified lawyer may say that they have been *“Evaluated for Professionalism and Tested for Expertise.”*

The first certifications available were in civil trial and tax law. Board certification has now grown to include over 4500 lawyers in 26 areas of law including: admiralty and maritime law; adoption law; antitrust and trade regulation law; appellate practice; aviation law; business litigation; city, county and local government law; civil trial; Condominium and Planned Development; construction law; criminal appellate; criminal trial; education law; elder law; health law; immigration and nationality; intellectual property law; international law; juvenile law; labor and employment law; marital and family law; real estate; state and federal government and administrative practice; tax law; wills, trusts and estates; and workers' compensation.

The Board of Legal Specialization and Education (BLSE) of The Florida Bar governs the rules and policies for each of the certification areas and oversees the committees that implement each area's standards. A lawyer must be a member in good standing of the Florida Bar and meet the area's prescribed standards to become board certified. Standards for each area vary but each area maintains common minimum standards including:

- A minimum of five years in law practice.
- Substantial involvement in the field of law for which certification is sought.
- A passing grade on the examination required of all applicants.
- Satisfactory peer review assessment of competence in the specialty field as well as character, ethics and professionalism in the practice of law.
- Satisfaction of the certification area's continuing legal education requirements.

Board certification is valid for five years, during which time the attorney must continue to practice law and attend Florida Bar approved continuing education courses. To be recertified lawyers must meet requirements similar to those for initial certification.

“Lawyers strive for excellence in every endeavor,” said BLSE Chair Cynthia Johnson-Stacks. “Board certification is the natural progression of this innate desire. This highest of achievements not only benefits the individual lawyer, but by encouraging lawyers to hone their skills and practice with professionalism, the certification program is a great service to The Florida Bar and the public.”

Board certification establishes an independent measure of competence, professionalism and peer acknowledgement which helps clients and fellow lawyers set expectations for professional abilities. This level of verifiable expertise can help both prospective clients and counsel seeking to refer legal matters and can help lawyers grow their practice with matters in which they can best utilize their expertise. Board certified lawyers are offered lower malpractice insurance rates. Certification serves as an impetus toward investing energy and thought necessary for future growth and professional contribution. Because

continued certification requires satisfaction of specific standards and peer affirmation, others can be assured that the certified lawyer remains committed to excellence.

"Members of the public may feel confident that when they speak with a board certified lawyer, they are speaking with an expert in the field," said Jack Pelzer, 2013-2015 BLSE Chair. "Board certification not only recognizes past accomplishments and expertise, but provides opportunities for further growth in an area of specialization through interaction with other dedicated and exceptional lawyers."

For more information, please visit The Florida Bar Web site at Floridabar.org/certification or contact The Florida Bar's Legal Specialization & Education Department at 850/561-5842.

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EDITORS: Please note *The Florida Bar* is not an association and "Association" is not part of our name. Proper reference is "The Florida Bar." Local bar organizations are properly termed "associations."