WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING

2026 Professional License Review

PURSUANT TO RCW 18.410.020

Notaries Public
Cosmetology

Washington State Department of Licensing

Business and Professional Licensing Division | Operational Support Services

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2026 Professional License Review

Report purpose and background

Chapter 18.410 RCW requires the Department of Licensing (DOL) to review 10-percent of the agency's regulated professions each year and provide a report of its findings to the Legislature. The DOL review must include:

- The statutory authorization and purpose behind each professional license.
- The number of licenses issued, denied, revoked, or had penalties assessed.
- Details of each professional licensing board.
- How DOL regulates the profession compared to other states.
- The education and training required to obtain a professional license.

The report must also include a DOL recommendation on whether professional licenses should continue to be regulated in their current state or if they should be modified or discontinued.

Under RCW 43.24.086, the costs for professional and business licensing programs under the department are required to "be fully borne by the members of that profession, occupation, or business" and grants DOL the authority to set fees to this end. At the beginning of the biennium, DOL provides revenue and cost projections for the program in the coming biennium. Based on these projected costs, a certain amount is appropriated by the Legislature for program expenses.

Executive Summary

This report comprehensively reviews the professional licensure and regulation of notaries public and the cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, and manicuring professions. The report intends to inform the legislature of the regulatory challenges and opportunities within each profession and recommendations for modernizing professional practices.

Key findings

- **State-by-state regulation:** The regulation of each profession is predominately aligned across all 50 states. This regulatory continuity supports greater professional practice standards compliance within both the notary and cosmetology programs.
- **Licensee counts:** The five-year licensing count within the notary profession has declined slightly from its recent peak in 2022, while licenses under the cosmetology

program have marked a consistent steady increase over the five-year period reviewed.

- **Business costs:** Both programs have recorded rises in expenditures consistent with inflationary increases noted throughout Washington state government.

Recommendations

To strengthen public protection and enhance professional practice consistency, the department recommends the following actions:

- Modification of the notary public licensing program to include a licensing qualification for passing an examination or completing minimum training hours to ensure notaries are properly equipped to understand their scope of practice and protect the public, though additional partner engagement is needed to determine the least restrictive method to accomplish this.
- Modification of the cosmetology program to update identified sections within the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) to address new cosmetology services, resolve discrepancies and redundancies, and update terminology to reflect modern cosmetology practices and standards.

Conclusion

The state of Washington has maintained professional regulation of the notary public, cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, and manicuring professions consistent with the rest of the nation; however, there are opportunities to further protect the public and create clarity within each profession. Additions and modernizations to each profession's RCWs would aid further standardization to provide stable professional practice into the future.

Notaries Public

Background

Notaries public serve as official witnesses to individual signatures on important documents, administering oaths, certifying copies of documents, and officially confirming that a particular event happened or that a specific action was performed. The modern regulatory framework for notaries was established in 1985 when regulatory authority was moved to the Department of Licensing.

Statutory authority

Licensing and regulation for notaries public is authorized through the following laws and rules:

- Chapter 42.45 RCW – Revised uniform law on notarial acts
- Chapter 308-30 WAC – Notaries public

Board composition and oversight

The notaries public program does not have an associated board or commission.

Licensing information

To qualify to become a notary public a person must:

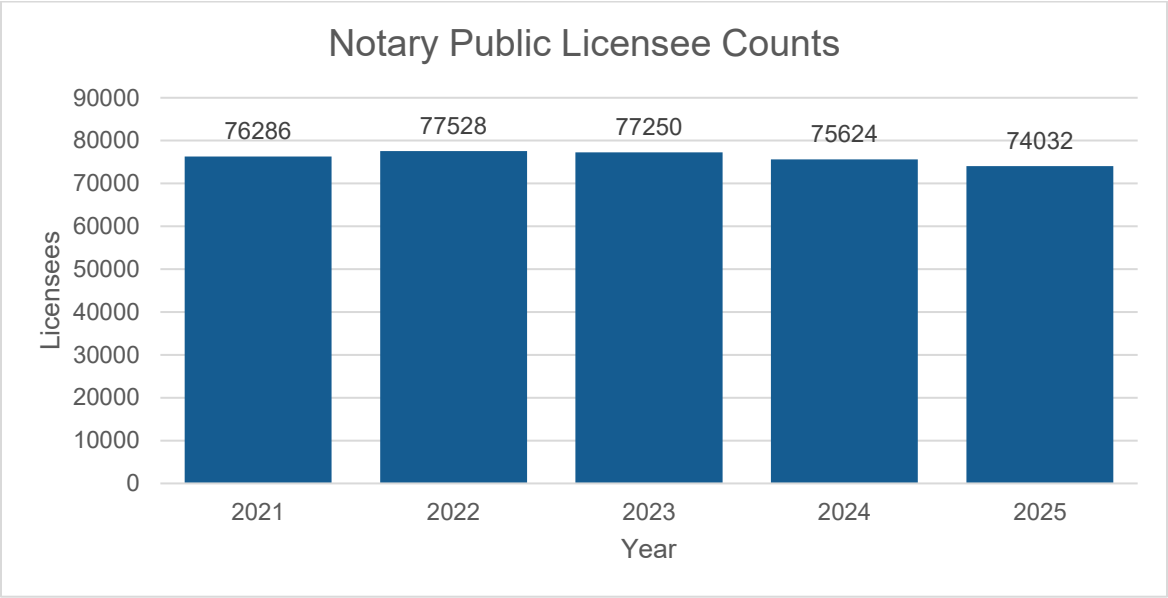
- Be at least 18 years old,
- Be a current resident or employee in the state of Washington,
- Be able to read and write English,
- Not have a felony conviction involving fraud or dishonesty, and
- Take an oath of office and procure a surety bond.

Electronic records notary endorsements can only be held by those who are also a commissioned notary. Electronic records notaries must notify the department of the tamper-evident technology provider they are enrolled to use before they perform any electronic notarial acts.

Notaries are required to maintain one journal at a time that documents all notarial acts they perform, including remote notarizations, and they must retain each journal for ten years past the last journal entry. Journals must still be secured and maintained by the

licensee, even after their license expires. Records notarized electronically can be maintained in an electronic journal along with the notary's physical journal. Electronic journals must be password protected and duplicated as backup.

Figure 1. Notary public licensing counts, 2021-2025



Licensing counts have stayed relatively stable over the last 5 years, with a slight decrease in the last 3 years. The current count of 74,032 is down from a peak of 77,528 in 2022, a decrease of 4.5 percent over 3 years. Of the 74,032 licensees, 10,249 hold electronic notary endorsements.

Table 1. Licenses issued, fined, revoked, and denied, 2021-2025

Year	Issued	Fined	Revoked	Denied
2025	74,032	7	10	0
2024	75,624	1	5	1
2023	77,250	0	3	0
2022	77,528	0	3	0
2021	76,286	0	0	1

From 2021 to 2025, 21 licenses were revoked, eight licenses were issued fines, and three applicants were denied on renewal. All 21 revocations were for unprofessional conduct. Seven fines were issued for unprofessional conduct, and one was for failing to cooperate with an investigation. Two of the denied renewals were for prior criminal convictions and one was for prior unprofessional conduct.

Budget information

Table 2. Notary public 5-year budget information

Fiscal Year	Expenditures	Revenue
FY 2025	$859,338	$873,390
FY 2024	$710,522	$755,135
FY 2023	$630,274	$805,630
FY 2022	$615,621	$718,120
FY 2021	$504,342	$782,201

Table 3. Notary public licensing fees

Description	Fee
Application for notary public commission	$40
Application for electronic records notary public endorsement	$15
Renewal of notary public commission (every 4 years)	$42
Renewal of electronic records notary public endorsement (every 4 years)	$15
License Print Fee	$5

Note, there is no cost for the remote notary endorsement.

State comparison

All 50 states have some form of licensure for notaries public and the regulation of notaries public was found to be relatively similar across states; however, there are some differences, especially regarding education and/or training requirements for licensure.

To become a licensed notary, 26 states require applicants to pass an exam, 20 require some form of training or education, and 13 require a background check with eight states requiring all three. Altogether, 32 states have at least one of these pre-licensing requirements.

Table 4. Number of states with different licensing requirements

Licensing requirement	Yes	No
Exam	26	24
Training	20	30
Background check	13	37
At least One	32	28

Washington does not require notary public applicants to complete any examination, training, or background check requirements while notaries in 32 other states must complete at least one of these pre-licensure requirements.

Additionally, most states have a notary fee cap between $5 and $15, including the state of Washington which caps the fee for notarial acts at $15 and electronic notarial acts at $25, though no state requires notaries to charge a fee.

Listening session feedback

The department held three listening sessions in early December 2025, to gather feedback from notaries public about the regulation of the license. The most frequent recommendation received was to implement a mandatory training requirement for notaries. Additionally, licensees noted the need for updates to the Notary Handbook and changes to the journal retention requirements for remote online notarizations.

Regulatory changes as result of review

The department is continuing to work with internal and external partners to explore opportunities to conduct rulemaking on several topics, including notary journal management and disposal. The department has also completed an internal review and is coordinating with the industry to make updates to the Notary Handbook.

Recommendations

Due to interests expressed by the industry to further emphasize public protection within the profession, the department recommends modification to the notary public licensing program to include a licensing qualification requirement for passing an examination, completing minimum training hours, and/or clearing a background check. Additional industry partner engagement is needed to determine the least restrictive method for ensuring commissioned notaries are equipped to properly understand their scope of practice while protecting the public. All of these recommended changes to the regulation would require changes in statute.

Cosmetology, Hair Design, Barbering, Esthetics, and Manicuring

Background

Individuals licensed to perform cosmetology, hair design, barber, manicurist, esthetician, and master esthetician services, as well as instructors in these subjects, perform varying hair, skin, and nail amenities for the public. The program licenses individuals and locations for salon/shops, mobile units, personal services, and schools. Licensure for the cosmetology profession was created in 1984 with personal services, mobile units, and salon/shop added in 1991 and the barbering, manicuring, and esthetics professional licenses being created in 2002. Master esthetics and hair design were added in 2013 and 2015, respectively.

The Legislature stated its intent for creating this program in RCW 18.16.010 as "...(recognizing) that the practices of cosmetology, hair design, barbering, manicuring, and esthetics involve the use of tools and chemicals which may be dangerous when mixed or applied improperly and therefore finds it necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, and welfare to regulate those practices in this state."

Statutory authority

Licensing and regulation for cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, and manicuring are authorized through the following laws and rules:

Chapter 18.16 RCW: Cosmetologists, Hair Designers, Barbers, Manicurists, and Estheticians

RCW 18.16.050: Advisory Board – Members – Compensation

Chapter 308-20 WAC: Cosmetology – Barber – Manicurist – Esthetician Rules

Board composition and oversight

The State Cosmetology, Hair Design, Barbering, Esthetics, and Manicuring Advisory Board is authorized by RCW 18.16.050. The Director of the Department of Licensing is responsible for appointing ten board members consisting of:

- A representative of a licensed private cosmetology school;
- A representative from an approved apprenticeship program conducted in an approved salon/shop;

- A representative of a public vocational technical school licensed under this chapter;
- A consumer who is unaffiliated with the cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, master esthetics, or manicuring industry; and
- Six members who are currently practicing licensees and have been engaged in the practice of manicuring, esthetics, master esthetics, barbering, hair design, or cosmetology for at least 3 years.

To be considered for board appointment, applicants must apply through the office of the Director of Licensing. The director's office then coordinates review and verification of the applicants' qualifications and interest with board staff before the director makes the appointments.

The board is required to meet 3 times a year. Over the past 5 years, the board has met a total of 16 times. Of the 16 meetings, 6 began without a quorum. Of those 6 meetings, 5 reached a quorum within 10 minutes of the meeting beginning. With 10 members on the board, it can be difficult to recruit and keep the board fully appointed to meet quorum in meetings.

Licensing Information

Individual licenses under this program include cosmetology, hair design, barber, manicurist, esthetician, and master esthetician. First time applicants must complete the application, pay a fee, complete all required training hours for the profession either in school or in an apprenticeship, and take and pass the state-approved practical and written exams. Individual licenses are renewed every 2 years, and the printed license must be displayed in direct view of their clients.

Figure 2. Cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, and manicuring licensing counts, 2021-2025

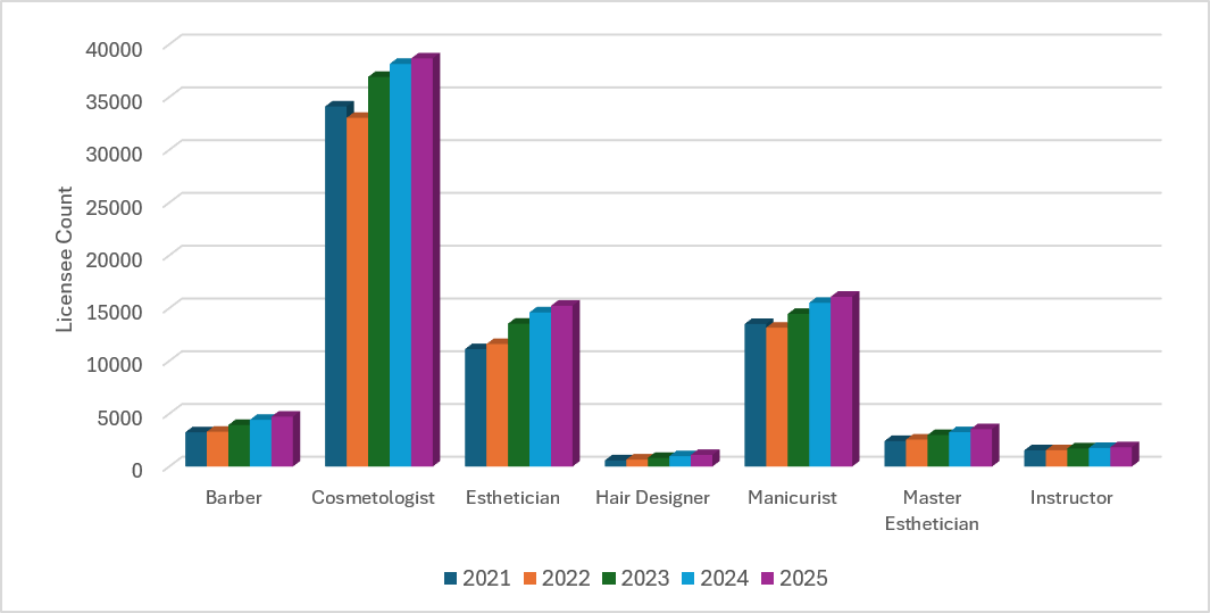


Figure 3. Salon shop business licensing counts, 2021-2025

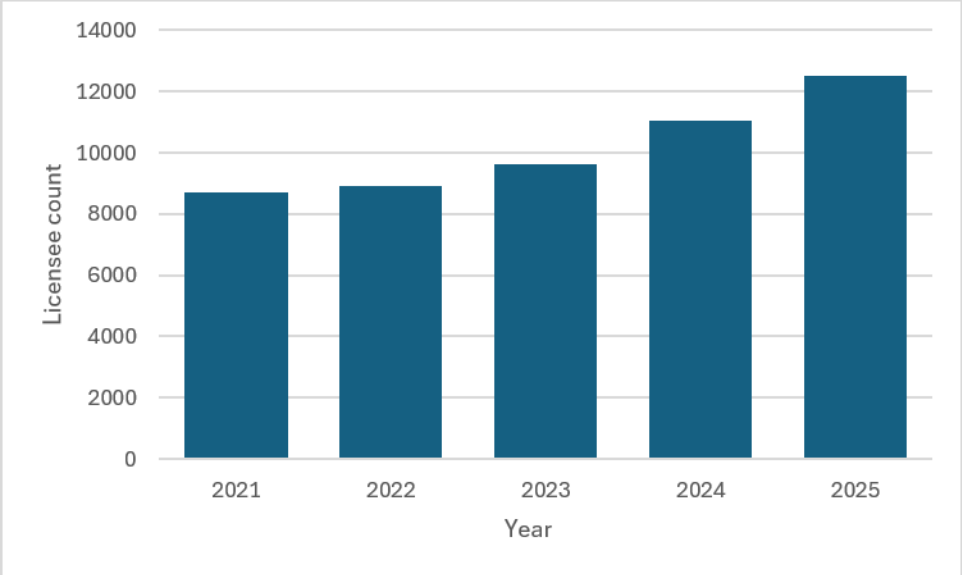


Figure 4. Other business and school licensing counts, 2021-2025

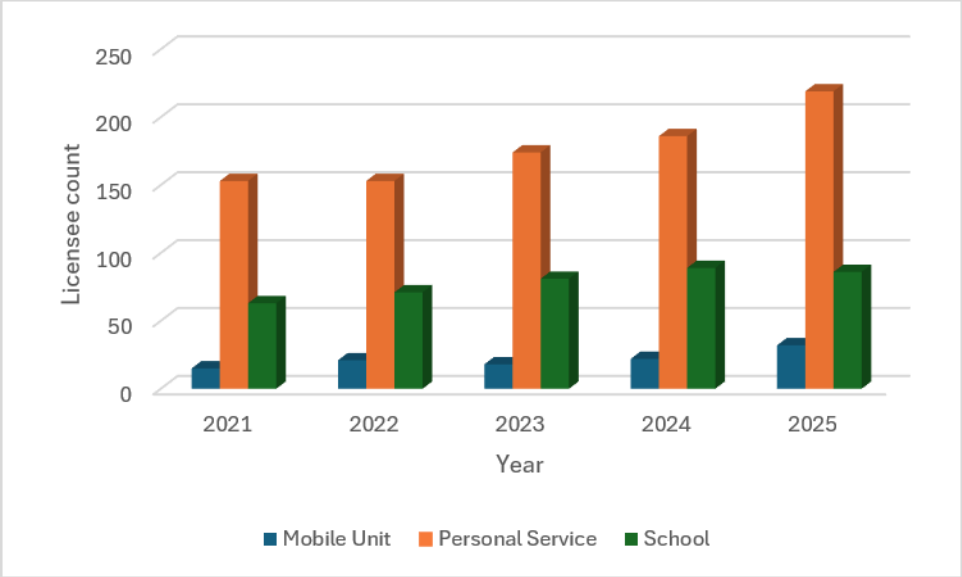


Table 5. Minimum curriculum training hours

Type	Training hours in school	Training hours in apprenticeship program
Cosmetologist	1,600	3,000
Barber	1,000	2,000
Manicurist	600	2,000
Esthetician	750	2,000
Master Esthetician	450	2,000
Combined Master Esthetician	1,200	2,000
Hair Designer	1,400	2,000

Reciprocity is offered to out-of-state applicants who provide proof that they are currently licensed in good standing in a jurisdiction with equivalent licensure requirements and show that they have passed an approved examination.

Industry instructors must also be individually licensed. To become an instructor, applicants must be licensed in the profession they are wanting to teach. There are 3 ways to become licensed:

1. Provide at least 500 hours of instruction as an “instructor-trainee” in a school or approved apprentice location and pass the approved licensing examination.
2. Hold an instructional credential from an accredited community or technical college and pass the approved licensing examination.
3. Hold a degree in education from an accredited postsecondary institution.

To be approved as an "instructor" in an approved apprenticeship program, the instructor must be a competent instructor as defined in Chapter 49.04 RCW.

Location licenses for cosmetology industry-related businesses include salon/shops, mobile units, personal services, and schools. These are distinguished by the location where services are offered and are renewed annually. School or post-secondary school licenses are locations which offer cosmetology, barbering, esthetics, manicuring, hair design, master esthetics, or instructor-trainee instruction to students. In addition to requirements for each type of professional business license, which includes passing an inspection at least once every 2 years for salon shops and an audit and inspection annually for schools, each must also maintain a business license with the Washington Department of Revenue.

All location licenses must be displayed in their reception areas and salon shops must also post notices to customers of participation in the apprenticeship program. Apprentices must wear identification visible to the public that states they are participants in the apprenticeship program. Apprentice training salons must be approved by both the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) and DOL.

Table 6. Licenses issued, fined, revoked, and denied, 2021-2025

Year	Issued	Fined	Revoked	Denied
2025	94,073	250	0	0
2024	90,076	54	0	1
2023	84,319	17	0	0
2022	75,043	17	0	0
2021	75,491	7	1	0

Of the 345 fines from 2021 to 2025, 319 were for unlicensed activity, including 276 specifically for unlicensed salon shops. The remaining 26 fines were for safety and sanitation violations, such as violations of WAC 308-20-110. The 2025 increase in fines issued is due to salon shop inspections beginning again following a pause during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Budget information

Table 7. Cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, and manicuring 5-year budget information

Fiscal Year	Expenditures	Revenue
FY 2025	$7,179,045	$5,377,436
FY 2024	$5,935,817	$5,065,155
FY 2023	$5,265,411	$3,910,530
FY 2022	$5,142,996	$3,929,201
FY 2021	$4,213,356	$3,323,715

Table 8. Cosmetology, hair design, barbering, esthetics, and manicuring licensing fees

Type of license	License Fee	Reciprocity Fee	Renewal Fee	Late Renewal
Cosmetologist, barber, manicurist, hair design, esthetician, master esthetician, and instructor	$35	$60	$66	$131
Salon/Shop, mobile unit, personal services	$121 *Reduced license application (permanent cosmetics): $15	N/A	$121 *Reduced license application (permanent cosmetics): $15	$181
School and post-secondary school	$330	N/A	$330	$523

Note: This table contains license, reciprocity, renewal, and late renewal fees for cosmetology licenses.

State comparison

All 50 states have some form of licensure for cosmetology, barbers, esthetics, manicurists, and salons/shops. The regulation of this industry was found to be relatively similar across states, though there is variation in the categories of licenses offered, what services each license can perform, the types of educational programs recognized, and the number of initial and continuing education hours required for licensure.

Table 9. Required curriculum hours across all 50 states

	Cosmetologist	Barber	Esthetician	Manicurist
Washington	1600	1000	750	600
High	1800	1800	1200	750
Low	1000	300	300	100
Average	1453	1274	633	391

Listening session feedback

The department held three listening sessions in early December 2025, to gather feedback from cosmetologists, hair designers, barbers, estheticians, master estheticians, and manicurists about the regulation of their licenses. The most frequent comments related to concerns regarding the testing vendor, updates and clarifications needed in the governing statutes and agency rules, differences between student instruction and industry practices, and sentiments that the student training hour requirements for these professions may be too high.

Regulatory changes as result of review

The department is continuing to work with internal and external partners to explore opportunities to undertake rulemaking on several topics, including updating terminologies, extending the expiration dates for training hours, and removing social security number collection requirements. The department also began a contract with a new testing vendor in May 2026.

Recommendations

The department recommends modification of the cosmetology program to update identified sections within state law to address new cosmetology services and technologies, resolve discrepancies and redundances, and update terminology to reflect modern cosmetology practices and standards. For example, during implementation of HB 1874 from the 2025 legislative session, DOL staff received public feedback that they would like more guidelines regarding the requirements for cosmetology licensees in the care and treatment of textured hair.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the board and commissions, businesses, licensees and interest groups who collaborated with us throughout the development of this report. We appreciate the feedback and support you provided us.

Definitions

BPD: The Washington State Department of Licensing Business and Professional Licensing Division

DOL: The Washington State Department of Licensing

Reciprocity: A reciprocal agreement between the department of licensing acting on behalf of the state of Washington and another state. The primary purpose of this agreement is to mutually recognize the education and/or experience that a licensee has obtained through another state to accept licensure.

Sources

- Chapter 18.16 RCW. Cosmetologists, Hair Designers, Barbers, Manicurists, and Estheticians. https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=18.16.
- Chapter 18.410 RCW. Professional License Review Act. https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=18.410.
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- RCW 18.16.010. Intent. https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=18.16.010.
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- RCW 43.24.086. Fee policy for professions, occupations, and businesses—Determination by rule. https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.24.086.
- Chapter 49.04 RCW. Apprenticeship. https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=49.04.
- WAC 308-20-110. Minimum safety and sanitation standards for schools, cosmetologists, hair designers, manicurists, estheticians, master estheticians, barbers, instructors, salons/shops, mobile units and personal services. https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=308-20-110.
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