

2026 Revisions to Standards for CWLS Certification Summary of Notable Changes by Section

*Applicable to the general Standards, the CA-Specific Standards, and the SC-Specific Standards.
These revisions to the IN-Specific Standards are still pending approval.*

Section 1: Definitions

- This is a new section. Provides clarity, particularly an updated definition of the specialty field.

Section 2: General Principles

- Adds the sequence of events (initial application phase, committee approval, exam phase) and the number of exam attempts allowed.

Section 3: Initial Certification Requirements

- **Substantial Involvement:** Aligns the “substantial involvement” definition with the ABA requirement of at least 25% of a full-time job as opposed to NACC’s previous 30%.
- **Substantial Involvement Waiver:** More clearly defines the allowable alternative capacities of involvement in the child welfare field for people applying or recertifying under the substantial involvement waiver. Aligns the list with what we typically see and have historically accepted in practice. Adding an item about intersecting fields here provides clarity for applicants. [SI Waiver not applicable in Indiana]
- **Peer Review:** As recommended by the Equity Audit, eliminates the requirement for a review from a judge and instead specifies that the 5 reviews can be from attorneys and/or judges. Specifies that peer reviewers cannot be in private, for-profit legal practice with the applicant.
- **Disclosure of Conduct:** Aligns the language more closely with how this is asked on the actual applications and annual reports, and specifies when documentation is required (all instances where the result is anything other than dismissal).
- **Writing Sample:** Explicitly enumerates the minimum requirements that NACC looks for in reviewing a writing sample submission.
- **Examination:** Specifies process including retake policy and that an applicant becomes a CWLS upon notification of exam passage. Eliminates the option for an applicant who failed the exam and forfeited future retakes to review the questions, the correct answers, or their performance on each question. [For exam integrity and security purposes]

Section 4: Annual and Ongoing Requirements

- Adds a clause about ongoing duty to disclose conduct. Adds a clause about CWLS compliance with a state’s rules of professional conduct and ABA requirements regarding advertising the specialty. Adds a clause about continually upholding the qualities of a CWLS identified in the General Principles section. Adds a clause about consequences of noncompliance.

Section 5: 5-Year Recertification Requirements

- No significant changes. Just simplifies language and aligns requirements with those for initial certification.

Section 6: CWLS Certification Committee Review

- Adds a section to describe Committee votes and what certain decisions mean. Adds that the Committee is given discretion to make these decisions and that only the Committee has this authority (see Section 8).

Section 7: Denial, Revocation, Sanction, or Lapse

- Clarifies difference between denial, revocation, sanction, and lapse. Clarifies the options available to the Committee and when a Committee decision may be appealed.

Section 8: Appeals

- Removes the NACC Board of Directors from the appeals process (board is not anonymous and includes non-attorneys). Simplifies the process by eliminating the petition for reconsideration - if an adverse decision is made, the remedy is appeal. Identifies the alternate Committee panel as the appellate body.