



**Chastek Library**

**WASHINGTON STATE  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS**

Research Guide

**INTRODUCTION**

Washington Attorney General Opinions (AGOs) are official responses stating the position of Washington's chief legal officer on legal issues concerning the state or its sub-divisions. They are usually researched and written by Assistant Attorneys General working under the supervision of Senior Assistant Attorneys General.

Only certain individuals and governmental bodies can request Attorney General Opinions, such as the governor, state officers, the Washington State Legislature and its committees (see RCW 43.10.030(5) and (7)). Inquiries typically ask for an interpretation of a Washington statute, constitutional provision or other matter in which the state has an interest. Citizens and attorneys in private practice are not authorized to ask the Attorney General for an opinion.

**AUTHORITY**

Opinions of the Attorney General are persuasive authority and do not have precedential or binding effect; however, they are often cited and sometimes given great weight by the Washington State Court of Appeals and the Washington State Supreme Court.

It is important to distinguish between formal opinions (cited as AGOs) and Attorney General Letter Opinions (AGLOs). AGLOs are not officially approved by the Attorney General and have little, if any, authority. The Attorney General's Office ceased publishing AGLOs in 1983. Care should be taken to properly cite a formal opinion as an AGO and a letter opinion as an AGLO.

**LOCATING ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS IN THE LIBRARY**

Bound copies of the AGOs, from 1890 to 2006, are located at KFW440.5 - Kelley Reading Room. They are also available on microfiche, located in the Microform Collection on the Second Floor of the Chastek Library, along with AGOs from other states.

An AGO or AGLO on a specific topic or specific opinion can be identified by using a subject matter index at the end of each bound volume. AGOs are cited by year of publication and opinion number (*e.g.*, AGO 1984 No. 20). Bound volumes are divided into yearly quarters and the AGOs are indexed in chronological order. An annual subject index supplements the quarterly chronological index. A cumulative subject index is also available.

Summaries of Attorney General Opinions are published in the *Washington State Register*, as required by RCW 34.08.020. The summaries include the official cites and the names of the persons requesting the opinions. To find them, look in the Subject/Agency Index in the *Register* under "Attorney General's Office."

### **LOCATING ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS ONLINE**

A cite from the *Washington State Register* summary or a keyword search may be used to find opinions.

- Washington Attorney General Opinions from 1949 to present and Attorney General Letter Opinions from 1970 to 1982 are available online at:

<http://www.atg.wa.gov/AGOOpinions/default.aspx>

- Westlaw contains AGOs back to 1977 and can be accessed in the "WA-AG" database.
- LexisNexis has AGOs back to 1977 and can be accessed in the "WASH;WAAG" database.
- Loislaw has AGOs back to 1996.
- Casemaker has AGOs back to 1949.

### **REQUESTING ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINONS FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Copies of current opinions can be requested from the local Attorney General's Office in Spokane:

Office of the Attorney General  
W. 1116 Riverside  
Spokane, WA 99201-1194  
509-456-3123

There is no charge for this service. The request must include an AGO number or an RCW reference.

Requests for older copies of AGOs or other questions about the Attorney General's Office can be directed to the Attorney General's Main Office in Olympia:

Office of the Attorney General  
1125 Washington St. SE  
PO Box 40100  
Olympia, WA 98504-0100  
360-586-0752

### **SHEPARDIZING AND KEYCITING ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS**

Unfortunately, Washington AGOs cannot be Shepardized or KeyCited; however, LexisNexis and Westlaw may be used to locate authorities citing AGOs.