

News release

Market research reveals that North American law firms expect to lose 58% of their legal secretaries by 2025



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New research conducted by BigHand and the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) uncovers high retirement and attrition rates among legal support staff. These trends will fuel the need for law firms to act quickly to organize their legal support services in order to continue offering optimal support to attorneys and clients.

BigHand, a legal software company focused on back-office operational and financial excellence, partnered with ALA to conduct a survey of senior HR and support services professionals, which gathered 120 responses from firms across North America. The survey reveals:

- U.S. firms are facing an attrition time bomb within legal support services: participants reported that they expect to lose 40% of their legal secretaries in the next three years, and over half (58%) by 2025.
- Backfilling these generalist secretarial roles is considered a "key challenge" as traditional skillsets are no longer available in the market.
- Attorneys' support needs are evolving: nearly three quarters of participants rate the challenge of satisfying the different levels of support for multiple generations of attorneys at a 7 or more out of 10.
- As a result, over two thirds confirm that their support services are changing, with firms exploring specialized groups, outsourcing and centralization in low cost locations.

April L. Campbell, JD, Interim Executive Director of the ALA comments, "Today's candidates are not looking for the same work as before and it's becoming increasingly difficult for firms to replace legal secretaries who possess several decades' of experience, with new-to-the-industry applicants because of mismatched skillsets and knowledge gaps. Compounded with evolving market pressures on cost and client service, and the varying support needs of lawyers, it's clear that firms must reorganize their support services accordingly."

Eric Wangler, President of BigHand North America comments, "For years, we've been hearing from law firms how they are facing an attrition and retirement time bomb among their support staff. We wanted to validate and quantify what we were hearing, which led to the survey."

"In response to these challenges, the majority of firms have started to move towards centralized and specialized legal support services that are better able to support their multigenerational lawyers. However, any kind of reorganization can only be successful with a quantitative view into the back-office and how support work is moving through the firm. Only with access to accurate data can firms make informed business decisions to effectively recruit, train and staff their back-office to support the evolving needs of their lawyers and clients."

With this research, BigHand and ALA offer a comprehensive view of the challenges and trends for the future of legal support service delivery. To access all research results and find out more about BigHand Now, please visit bighand.com/en-us/legal-retirement-and-staffing-survey

About the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA)

ALA is the premier professional association connecting over 8,500 leaders and managers within the legal industry. ALA provides extensive professional development, collaborative peer communities, strategic operational solutions, and business partner connections empowering its members to lead the business of law. For more information on ALA, visit alanet.org.

About BigHand

Through technology, insight and experience, BigHand delivers success for the future by helping its clients achieve professional productivity and operational excellence. With a range of solutions from task delegation, document creation, matter pricing, digital dictation workflow, intuitive reporting and analytics, BigHand helps busy people achieve more in less time and organizations become more efficient and effective. For more information, please visit bighand.com or contact Laura Foster, Senior Marketing Manager at laura.foster@bighand.com.