The Law Firm AI Safety Playbook

How to use AI confidently in your law firm without risking your bar license.

ABA Formal Opinion 512 doesn't ban AI in law firms. It bans careless use of AI. The difference is supervision, and that's something you already know how to do.

This playbook covers what the opinion actually requires, the five compliance rules every firm needs, and the mindset shift that makes AI feel no riskier than supervising a paralegal. Because it isn't.

COMPETENCE | CONFIDENTIALITY | SUPERVISION | ACCURACY

WHAT'S INSIDE

Five sections and a one-page quick reference, in the order you should work them. Tap any line to jump straight to it, and tap the footer on any page to come back here.

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The checklist on page 4 is clickable. Tick items off right in your PDF reader.

How to use this. Read it once end to end, then work through **the checklist on page 4** with your team. That single page is where compliance actually gets built.

The short version. Supervise AI the way you'd supervise a new associate, keep client details on an enterprise account, and make sure a licensed attorney reviews everything before it leaves the firm.

SECTION ONE

01 What ABA Opinion 512 Actually Says

The rule isn't "don't use AI." It's "don't use it carelessly."

Opinion 512 doesn't create new rules. It maps AI onto four obligations you already follow: competence, confidentiality, supervision, and accuracy.

#	OBLIGATION	WHAT IT MEANS FOR AI
1	**Competence**	You don't need to understand the code. You need to know what AI can and can't do, including its limits, tendencies, and risks in legal work.
2	**Confidentiality**	Only use secure enterprise accounts for client work. Free accounts can train on your inputs, and that's a confidentiality violation.
3	**Supervision**	Every AI output gets reviewed by a licensed professional before it leaves the firm. Treat it like work from a new associate.
4	**Accuracy**	AI gets you 80% of the way. The final 20% is verification, judgment, and sign-off, and that's your job. Always. No exceptions.

THE FEE RULES QUESTION

Opinion 512 also raises billing for AI-assisted work, and the rules vary by state.

Check your state's current guidance before you set how you bill for AI time.

THE OBJECTION IN YOUR HEAD, ANSWERED

WHAT YOU'RE TELLING YOURSELF

"What if using AI puts my bar license on the line?"

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

The lawyers who've faced discipline weren't punished for using AI. They were punished for failing to supervise it and for submitting incorrect work to courts.

The risk was never the tool. It was skipping the review.

SECTION TWO

02 Enterprise Account vs. Free Account

This is the single most important decision you'll make about AI in your firm.

Using a free AI account for client work is like emailing client files from a public Gmail account. It might feel the same on the surface, but the legal and ethical exposure is completely different.

FREE ACCOUNT	ENTERPRISE ACCOUNT
✕ Your prompts may be used to train the AI model	✓ Your data is never used to train the AI model
✕ No data confidentiality agreement	✓ A real confidentiality contract in place
✕ No enterprise security certifications	✓ SOC 2, HIPAA, and other certifications included
✕ No contractual recourse if data is exposed	✓ Contractual accountability if something goes wrong
✕ Risk of inadvertent disclosure, which is an ethics violation	✓ Meets your professional confidentiality obligations

THE RULE OF THUMB

Use your firm's enterprise account for anything involving client names, facts, or case details. General research and template drafting with no client information attached can use standard accounts.

ANY ACCOUNT	ENTERPRISE ONLY
Templates	**Client names**
General research	**Case facts**
Public information	**Confidential details**

When in doubt, default to enterprise.

SECTION THREE

03 The 5-Point AI Compliance Checklist

Implement all five and you'll be ahead of 95% of law firms.

These aren't aspirational best practices. They're the minimum standard for a compliant AI operation, and each one maps directly to the obligations in Opinion 512. Tick each box as your firm puts it in place.

DONE

01 Everyone uses the firm account. No exceptions. ☐

Every attorney, paralegal, and staff member uses the firm's enterprise AI account. No personal ChatGPT accounts. No free Claude accounts. One firm-wide account, documented in your policy and enforced from day one.

02 Know what goes in, and what doesn't. ☐

Templates, general research, and public information are safe with any account. Client names, case facts, and confidential details go into the enterprise account only, with your data agreement in place. Brief your whole team on this line before they touch any AI tool.

03 A real person reviews everything, every time. ☐

AI isn't a final reviewer. Every document, email, letter, or work product created with AI's help gets reviewed by a licensed professional before it goes anywhere. Treat it exactly like work from a new employee. Check it, correct it, and only put your name on it when it's right.

04 Create a written AI policy and have everyone sign it. ☐

Spell out which tools are approved, what information can go into each, how AI-generated work gets reviewed before it's used, and what happens if someone breaks the policy. A signed policy sets a clear standard and protects you if something goes wrong.

05 Keep records: security docs, training logs, review examples. ☐

Document everything. Save your vendor's security certifications. Track who was trained on your policy and when. Keep examples of how you reviewed AI output. If a bar complaint comes up, your paper trail shows you took compliance seriously from the start.

SECTION FOUR

04 What to Tell Your Clients

Transparency builds trust, and it protects you.

Most clients have already heard about AI. How you talk about it matters more than whether you use it, so be proactive and be clear. Put AI language in your engagement letter and lead with the benefit.

> **SAMPLE ENGAGEMENT LETTER LANGUAGE**
>
> Our firm uses AI-assisted tools to help us serve you more efficiently and accurately. These tools are used on a secure, enterprise platform with strict confidentiality protections. All AI-generated work is reviewed and approved by a licensed attorney before use. AI assistance may allow us to handle certain tasks more quickly, which we pass on to you in the form of competitive fees. We remain fully responsible for all work product.

How to talk about AI with clients

- **Lead with the benefit.** AI lets you do faster, more thorough work at competitive rates.
- **Emphasize the review.** A licensed attorney reviews everything before it goes out, because AI doesn't replace your judgment.
- **Mention your security.** Most clients appreciate that you take confidentiality seriously.
- **Check your state's billing rules.** Research your state bar's rules on billing for AI-assisted work before you finalize your fee structure.

05 SECTION FIVE The 80/20 Mindset

AI is a very fast paralegal. You already supervise staff. This is just way faster.

The right question isn't "Is AI safe?" It's "Am I supervising it the way I supervise any staff member?" You already hold associates and paralegals accountable for their work. AI is the same relationship. It just works much faster and handles more volume.

80/20 THE SPLIT ON EVERY AI TASK

AI DRAFTS · 80% | YOU · 20%

AI gets you **80%** of the way there. The last **20%** is verification, judgment, and sign-off, and that part is always yours.

AI DOES 80%	YOU DO 20%
Drafts documents, briefs, and letters	**Review and verify all output**
Researches case law and statutes	**Apply legal judgment to findings**
Creates templates and intake forms	**Catch any errors or hallucinations**
Handles scheduling and follow-up emails	**Sign off on all final work product**
Summarizes long documents instantly	**Take full responsibility for what goes out**

THE MINDSET SHIFT THAT MAKES THIS SIMPLE

No attorney thinks twice about handing a research memo to a paralegal and reviewing it before filing. AI is that paralegal. It just works 10x faster and sometimes needs more careful proofreading.

The supervision obligation is identical. The upside is enormous.

AI Safety at a Glance

THE 5-POINT CHECKLIST

01 **Everyone uses the firm's enterprise account.**
No personal accounts, no free accounts, no exceptions.

02 **Know what goes in.**
Client info goes into enterprise only. General research can go into any account.

03 **A licensed professional reviews every AI output.**
Before it leaves the firm, every single time.

04 **Written AI policy, signed by everyone on the team.**
Approved tools, what goes in, how review works, and what happens if it's broken.

05 **Keep records.**
Security certs, training logs, and examples of how you reviewed AI output.

THE 4 OBLIGATIONS FROM OPINION 512

COMPETENCE	CONFIDENTIALITY	SUPERVISION	ACCURACY
Understand what AI can and can't do.	Enterprise accounts only for client matters.	Review AI like a new associate's work.	AI gets you 80%. You do the final 20%.

SMBTeam

Scale your law firm across leads, intake, operations, and finance.

The systems, the coaching, and the community to put AI to work in your firm the right way.

Learn More