

Revolutionizing Legal Education: Online Law School Aims to Qualify for Indiana Bar Exam



Concord Law School at Purdue University Global has applied for a rule change from the Indiana Supreme Court allowing its graduates to sit for the state's bar exam. If approved, Indiana would become the second state to allow graduates from online law schools to take the bar exam, following California, which currently allows it. In Indiana and other states, law students must first graduate from a law school accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA), which requires brick-and-mortar campuses. However, online legal education has gained popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a dozen ABA-accredited law schools now offer primarily online Juris Doctor (JD) programs in addition to traditional in-person programs. In 2021, St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio became the first ABA-accredited law school to be approved to offer a fully online JD degree, allowing its graduates to take the bar in any state.

Purdue law dean Martin Pritikin has stated that allowing its law graduates to take the bar in Indiana will improve access to justice in the state by making legal education more accessible to individuals living in rural and underserved areas. He said that "for people who live in the farther corners of the state, they don't have to move or commute to the law school. They can stay where they are and serve their communities."

In 2022, the Indiana Supreme Court established a working group to review Purdue's proposed rule change but needed help to reach a consensus. In a February report, the working group stated that the online law school's relative affordability and diverse student population were factors weighing in favor of the rule change. However, the group also noted that the online law school is not as selective as the state's three ABA-accredited law schools and that its graduates might drive down the state's bar pass rate. The proposed rule change would cover only schools based in Indiana or part of an Indiana university, and Purdue is the only online law school to meet that criteria. Purdue acquired Concord Law School in 2017.

If the rule change is approved, it will help individuals living in rural areas or unable to attend traditional brick-and-mortar law schools due to work or family obligations. It could also benefit the legal industry, which currently faces a shortage of attorneys in rural areas. However, opponents of the change argue that online law schools lack the necessary resources to provide a comprehensive legal education and that graduates may not be adequately prepared to practice law.

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While the debate over whether online law schools should be accredited by the ABA and allowed to take the bar exam continues, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend toward online legal education. It remains to be seen whether other states will follow California and Indiana's lead in allowing graduates from online law schools to sit for the bar exam.