

California Bar Exam Fees to Increase in February



Law Graduates and Licensed Attorneys to Face Significant Fee Hikes

To address a looming budget shortfall, the State Bar of California has approved substantial fee increases for the California bar exam. Starting in February, law graduates and licensed attorneys will see significant hikes in their examination and moral character determination fees.

Law Graduates to Bear 26% Increase

Law graduates preparing to take the California bar exam will face a 26% increase in examination fees. The cost will jump from the current \$796 to a new price point of \$1,000. Law graduates will also witness a 32% increase in their moral character determination fee, which covers the review of an applicant's past conduct. This fee will rise from \$725 to \$960.

Licensed Attorneys Hit Hard

Attorneys already licensed in another jurisdiction who wish to take the California bar exam will bear an even heavier burden. Their examination fee will spike by a substantial 50%, soaring from \$1,197 to \$1,800. Furthermore, licensed attorneys' moral character determination fee will witness a staggering 54% increase, reaching \$850.

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Necessitated by Rising Costs

Leaders of the State Bar of California emphasize that these fee increases are indispensable to cope with the escalating expenses of attorney admissions. Notably, the organization has refrained from adjusting admission fees since 2016. Without these fee adjustments, the State Bar's admissions fund was projected to face a nearly \$8 million deficit in 2024, posing a significant financial challenge for the organization, which operates with an annual budget of almost \$270 million.

Mark Toney, a State Bar trustee, noted, "When you go year after year without adjusting fees, you're going to have to pay the piper."

Ongoing Fee Review and Adjustments

To maintain fiscal stability, the board of trustees has also greenlit a regular review of admissions fees every three years. Furthermore, they are considering the possibility of annual adjustments in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Law Schools' Concerns Heeded

While several fee increases were on the table, the board of trustees decided to delay implementing proposed fee hikes for California-accredited law schools. This decision came after these institutions expressed concerns about the potential financial strain. The State Bar had initially proposed raising the annual fee for these schools from \$2,170 to \$22,900, amounting to a staggering 955% increase.

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Exam Site Reduction to Save Costs

As part of their cost-saving efforts, the State Bar reduced the number of testing sites for the February 2024 bar exam. Locations in San Diego, Sacramento, and Oakland were eliminated, while areas in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Ontario were retained. This measure is anticipated to save approximately \$550,000.

Future Exam Plans and Remote Testing

Bar leaders are actively working on plans for the July 2024 bar exam, which may include further modifications to testing sites and the potential for conducting a portion of the exam remotely. These plans are expected to be finalized in January, offering insight into the State Bar's evolving approach to attorney admissions in California.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.

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