

State Bar of California Contemplates Reduction in Bar Exam Locations to Cut Costs



To alleviate budget constraints, the State Bar of California is considering a proposal to decrease the number of testing locations for its July bar exam. The plan, set to be voted on by state bar trustees, aims to trim the number of large testing sites from seven to four or five, potentially excluding locations in Sacramento and Santa Clara. However, officials are actively seeking a test site in San Diego.

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Concerns Raised by Legal Community

The proposed changes have sparked concerns among legal professionals, particularly in areas without nearby testing locations. The dean of the University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law, Michael Hunter Schwartz, expressed apprehension about the potential disadvantages for law examinees. McGeorge is the sole American Bar Association-accredited law school in Sacramento. Schwartz noted the potential favoring of wealthier bar takers who can afford local accommodations for better exam preparation.

Equity Concerns and Counterarguments

Schwartz questioned the alignment of the bar's commitment to equity with a plan that seemingly benefits those with financial means. However, a spokesperson for the state bar referenced an August memo acknowledging that the reduction in exam sites would shift some costs to examinees. The memo emphasized the necessity of these changes to address the "very real budget difficulties" faced by the State Bar of California.

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Financial Impact and Cost Savings

According to a memo reviewed by Reuters, the proposed reduction in testing sites is projected to cut \$354,141 from the total cost of administering the July bar, which amounts to \$4.5 million. The state bar has faced financial challenges recently, with a projected nearly \$8 million deficit in its admissions fund for 2024. To counteract this, the bar implemented admissions fee increases in September, expecting to generate an additional \$7.5 million annually.

Recent Fee Increases and Bar Exam Costs

Among the fee increases was a significant 26% rise in the cost of taking the bar exam, climbing from \$830 to \$1,003 for law graduates in February. With the nation's second-largest number of bar takers, surpassed only by New York, California witnessed nearly 8,000 individuals taking the July 2023 exam, while 4,125 participated in the most recent February test.

Previous Reductions and Proposed Exam Sites

The State Bar of California had previously reduced the number of bar exam locations for the upcoming February exam from five to three, excluding San Diego and Sacramento sites. The current plan, if approved, will feature large testing sites in Pasadena, Ontario, Anaheim in Southern California, and San Francisco in the northern region. Efforts are underway to secure a large site in San Diego, possibly at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista or a casino in Temecula.

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