

Illinois to Adopt NextGen Bar Exam in 2028



Major Milestone in Legal Licensing

Illinois has announced its decision to switch to the NextGen Bar Exam in 2028, becoming the largest jurisdiction so far to adopt this revised version of the national attorney licensing exam. This transition marks a significant milestone in the evolution of legal licensing in the United States.

Nationwide Shift Towards NextGen

With Illinois on board, the state becomes the 19th jurisdiction to commit to the NextGen bar exam. This exam represents the first major overhaul of the bar testing process in 25 years. The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) began developing the NextGen exam in 2021. Their goal was to create an exam that focuses more on assessing practical legal skills and less on the memorization of laws.

Want to know if you're earning what you deserve? Find out with LawCrossing's salary surveys.

Implementation Timeline Unclear

While Illinois has confirmed the transition to the NextGen exam, state officials have not yet decided whether the change will take place in February or July of 2028, according to an announcement by the Supreme Court of Illinois.

Key Changes in the NextGen Exam

The new NextGen exam will eliminate the three separate components currently used: the 200-question Multistate Bar Exam (MBE), the Multistate Essay Exam (MEE), and the Multistate Performance Test (MPT). Instead, the NextGen exam will be a single, cohesive test, which will be shorter—nine hours compared to the current twelve—and administered entirely on computers.

Slow Adoption by Larger States

Despite Illinois' commitment, larger bar exam states have been slow to adopt the NextGen exam. None of the five jurisdictions with the highest number of bar examinees—New York, California, Florida, Texas, and the District of Columbia—have announced plans to transition to the new test. Illinois, the sixth-largest jurisdiction, saw 1,998 candidates take its July bar exam this year.

Stay up-to-date without the overwhelming noise. Subscribe to JDJournal for a curated selection of the most relevant legal news.

California's Separate Path

The State Bar of California has considered developing its own bar exam, separate from the NCBE, as a cost-saving measure. This proposal, which could potentially save up to \$4 million annually, has been put on hold as of this month.

Early Adopters of NextGen

Six jurisdictions, including Maryland and Missouri, plan to adopt the NextGen exam at the earliest opportunity in July 2026. Another ten jurisdictions will follow in July 2027, while Colorado, Kansas, and Utah have scheduled their switch for July 2028.

Transition Period and Future Plans

The NCBE has announced that both the current bar exam and the NextGen test will be available from July 2026 until February 2028. After this transition period, only the NextGen exam will be administered.

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

