

NCBE Stands Firm on 2026 Launch of New National Bar Exam Despite Pushback



Amid growing calls for a delay, the **National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE)** is standing by its plan to debut the **NextGen bar exam** in **July 2026**, a significant overhaul intended to better assess practical legal skills.

The NextGen exam will replace the current **Uniform Bar Exam (UBE)**, used by over 40 jurisdictions, and introduces a restructured format that emphasizes real-world legal tasks over rote memorization. It has been under development for nearly four years and will include updated testing methods, such as integrated legal problem-solving, instead of standalone questions on topics like contracts and torts.

However, some legal educators and state bar officials are urging caution. Critics argue that the current rollout timeline is too aggressive, especially with several jurisdictions still finalizing implementation logistics. There are also concerns about whether law schools will have enough time to adjust their curricula to reflect the new test's competencies.

Despite these concerns, **Judith Gundersen**, president of the NCBE, defended the timeline, citing the extensive preparation that has already gone into the exam's development. "The profession has called for a more relevant, skills-based bar exam," Gundersen said. "We owe it to the next generation of lawyers to deliver on that promise."

Eight jurisdictions have already committed to adopting the NextGen exam in 2026, including **Oregon, Maryland, and Missouri**, with more expected to follow. Others, like **California**, have opted to take a wait-and-see approach, potentially delaying their adoption until they can further evaluate its impact.

Law students currently in their first year of study will likely be among the first to take the redesigned bar in 2026. The NCBE has provided resources and sample questions to help law schools begin adjusting coursework accordingly.

The transition comes amid broader debates about the role and fairness of bar exams in general. While some reform advocates have pushed for alternatives such as diploma privilege or supervised practice pathways, the NCBE maintains that a standardized, skills-based exam is critical to ensuring competency and public protection.

As the July 2026 deadline approaches, the NCBE continues to coordinate with jurisdictions, law schools, and stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition.

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