

New York's "Clock Should Stop Act" Aims to Safeguard Bar Exam Takers



New York, August 2025 — In response to a medical emergency during the July New York State bar exam, state lawmakers have introduced the **"Clock Should Stop Act,"** seeking to institutionalize emergency protocols for test-takers. The proposed legislation—**Bill A08984**—would require the State Board of Law Examiners to halt exam timing and offer accommodations when emergencies arise.

Why the "Clock Should Stop Act" Matters

- **Legislative background:** Introduced on August 13, 2025, by Assembly Member Bichotte Hermelyn, Bill A08984 would add Section 460-a to the Judiciary Law. It sets forth procedures for emergencies occurring before or during the bar exam, including during scheduled breaks. Schools and officials must define emergencies to include medical crises, criminal events, and natural or man-made disasters.
- **Key provisions:** The bill mandates immediate steps such as summoning medical help, allowing proctors to use cell phones, pausing the exam clock, and ensuring the safety of all present. It also details accommodations like extra time, credit for completed sections, or a free retake within six months. The Board must produce an annual report on accommodations made.

The Hofstra Incident That Sparked Reform

On July 30, 2025, at Hofstra University, a bar exam candidate collapsed—reportedly from a heart attack—shortly before lunch. Despite the urgency, proctors did not pause the exam, forcing others in the room to continue. The incident raised significant concerns about safety and fairness.

Students recounted that calls for help were met with admonitions to remain silent and continue testing, even as the woman deteriorated. One noted that it took "three minutes in" for any response—deeming the handling both dismissive and inadequate. Meanwhile, the Board maintained that staff acted promptly once notified, calling security immediately.

Legislative Response and Wider Debate

The public outcry following the incident forced a reckoning over current protocols—or lack thereof—at critical exams. Lawmakers, advocates, and law students pushed for standardized emergency procedures and humane flexibility.

The National Conference of Bar Examiners affirmed that emergency handling policies are jurisdiction-specific, though the proposed legislation reflects growing pressure for jurisdiction-wide clarity and safety.

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