HOW DO I BECOME A LAWYER?

California offers many pathways

Unlike most other states with only a few law schools, California has over 50 law schools! They present a diverse array of opportunities at different cost points to receive a legal education. In addition to ABA-accredited law schools, we have California-accredited law schools and registered, unaccredited law schools. Some schools offer flexibility and opportunities for those who need it, including programs that are fully online, part-time or at night, with leeway to spread out your study over four or more years.

Law Office Study Program
California is one of only a few states where you can become a lawyer without going to law school, by studying under a judge or attorney. It’s four years of hard work or maybe more, but it could be the right path for you!

Law Schools

Stay in school
- Get good grades, and ask for help if needed

Law Office Study Program
- Some schools offer flexibility and opportunities for those who need it, including programs that are fully online, part-time or at night, with leeway to spread out your study over four or more years.

Study

I'M IN HIGH SCHOOL
- Stay in school
- Get good grades, and ask for help if needed

I'M IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE OR UNDERGRAD
- Take classes that require writing, logic, and critical thinking, such as communications, public speaking, and political science
- Get good grades, and ask for help if needed
- Study for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), and consider investing in prep courses if available (Check out our resource list for a free one!)

I'M NOT IN SCHOOL, AND I DIDN'T GRADUATE FROM COLLEGE
- If being a lawyer is your dream, you can achieve it!

Explore

Extracurricular activities:
- Does your high school have a Law Academy? Debate team?
- College fairs
- Community colleges

Explore

- Learn about the legal profession—visit law schools, intern at a law office or legal aid organization, attend court proceedings
- Join your school’s pre-law organization
- Ask a lawyer to take 15 minutes to chat with you about their career

Plan

Ask counselors about:
- Assistance programs
- Scholarships
- Grants for college

Plan

- Ask counselors about assistance programs, scholarships, and grants for law school
- Check law school websites for information about how to get ready, and any grants or scholarships they offer
- Look into your local bar association or affinity bar associations for grants or scholarships. You’ll find a list on our Resource Page

Access the online version of this handout for more information and resources.
As a lawyer, you can work for justice. You can create change and right the wrongs you see in your community. You can help people who need a passionate and effective advocate.

Truth is, lawyers can work in just about any field. You can have a career in politics, business, education, healthcare, environmental or criminal justice, sports, entertainment, or any combination.

In government, lawyers write laws as legislators or their staff, apply and enforce them in executive branch departments, and interpret them as judges. The possibilities are endless.

Think a law career is out of reach for you? IT IS NOT.

All sorts of people, from all walks of life, become lawyers. Undocumented immigrants. Rap musicians. Creative people. Passionate people. Lots of people just like you. Becoming a lawyer takes hard work and dedication, but it’s possible!

Worried about the cost? Don’t let that stop you.

Check around, there are lots of ways to become a lawyer, and many organizations offer financial support and resources to help students with the grit to study the law.

Okay, so what do lawyers actually do?

- Defend our rights to be treated fairly at work, to be free to assemble and protest peacefully, and against unlawful search and seizure
- Help people achieve U.S. citizenship
- Negotiate deals with musicians, actors, and athletes
- Protect our communities from pollution and keep them safe and strong
- Write or change the laws by running for office or working with an officeholder, or decide what the laws mean by becoming a judge or a research attorney
- Develop new businesses and create new opportunities for yourself and your community
- Help people stay in their homes and get public assistance when needed
- Fight to make sure everyone gets equal rights and the wages, benefits, and protections they deserve
- And more!

Meet some of California’s inspirational lawyers

Patricia Guerrero
Chief Justice of California
Born and raised in California’s Imperial Valley as the daughter of Mexican immigrants. Now the 1st Latina Chief Justice of California. Committed to promoting diversity and inclusivity in the judiciary, as well as technology that furthers access to justice for Californians. Passionate about civic education and increasing the provision of pro bono legal services to underserved communities.

Lisa J. Cisneros, Magistrate Judge
Northern District Federal Court San Francisco

Alicia Valencia, Esq., Senior Counsel
Employer Defense Group
Born in Central America (El Salvador). Raised in the Bay Area. Firsthand experience of the immigrant struggle inspired study of law. Attended UCSB as an undocumented student. Went on to USF law. Internship in immigration and judicial externship in domestic violence before graduating and has since amassed extensive experience in all aspects of Workers Compensation litigation.

David, Chief Business Officer
Golden State Warriors
Born in Chicago. Attended Morehouse College and the University of Illinois College of Law. Before settling into a law career, was a rap musician and founder of a record label and music producer, releasing eight albums and touring internationally. Established a successful practice in corporate and sports law before joining the Warriors in 2012.

Alexander Chan, Founding Director
Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic
Alex’s parents escaped political persecution in China. Their journey, as well as Alex’s own experience growing up in Southern California and Hong Kong as a transgender American, inspired him to fight for civil rights. He studied his way to Harvard, Columbia, and Oxford, clerked for judges in California, and now leads a clinic at Harvard protecting LGBTQ+ rights.

Want to learn more? Yes! Check out the path to becoming a lawyer on the back.