

# HOW DO I BECOME A LAWYER?

START

## California offers many pathways



### Law Schools

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!



I'M IN HIGH SCHOOL



#### Study

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



#### Explore

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



#### Plan

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



I'M IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE OR UNDERGRAD



#### Study

- ▶ 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!](#))



#### 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, 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](#)



I'M NOT IN SCHOOL, AND I DIDN'T GRADUATE FROM COLLEGE

In California, qualified applicants can take the bar exam without going to law school. Most law schools require a college degree, but some may only ask for equivalent course work, and some law schools focus on your legal interest and life experiences and not on your grades or LSAT scores.

**If being a lawyer is your dream, you can achieve it!**



Access the online version of this handout for more information and resources.



**YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.**

**BECOMING A LAWYER IS A POWERFUL WAY TO HAVE REAL IMPACT.**



The State Bar of California



The State Bar of California

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?**

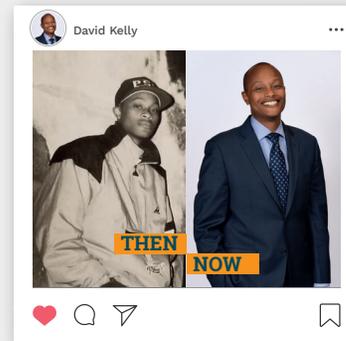
- ▶ Defend our rights to be treated fairly at work, to be free to assemble and protest peacefully, and against unlawful search and seizure
- ▶ Help people achieve U.S. citizenship
- ▶ Negotiate deals with musicians, actors, and athletes
- ▶ Protect our communities from pollution and keep them safe and 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.



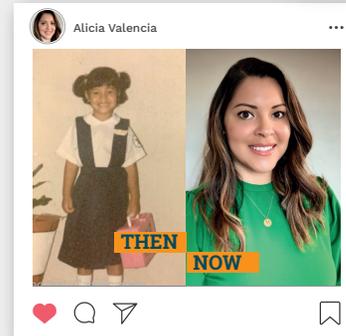
**David Kelly, Chief Business Officer  
Golden State Warriors**

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.



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

Raised in Salinas. Grew up loving to read and play sports. Attended Brown University and UC Berkeley School of Law. Worked at California Rural Legal Assistance Inc., leading its LGBTQ Program, a model for similar programs nationwide. Appointed by Governor Brown to the Fair Employment and Housing Council. Joined the Civil Rights Enforcement Section in the California Office of the Attorney General in Feb. 2019. Appointed as federal magistrate judge in Nov. 2022.



**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.



**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.