SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair
2025-2026 Regular Session

AB 2784 (Committee on Judiciary)
Version: June 11, 2026
Hearing Date: June 23, 2026
Fiscal: No
Urgency: No
AM

SUBJECT

State Bar of California

DIGEST

This bill requires the Board of Trustees (Board) of the California State Bar to fix the annual license fee for active licensees for 2027 in the same amount as 2026 and makes various other changes to the State Bar Act.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Bar of California (State Bar) is a public corporation and the largest state bar in the country. Attorneys who wish to practice law in California generally must be admitted and licensed by the State Bar. (Cal. Const., art. VI, § 9.) This bill is the annual State Bar licensing fee bill. This bill keeps the license fee static for 2027. The bill also makes various other changes to the State Bar Act, including removing authority for the State Bar to collect fees for the California Lawyers Association, reallocating money from certain affinity programs, making various enhancements to the discipline system, and authorizing the State Bar to meet in closed session to discuss sensitive and confidential matters.

The bill is author sponsored. No timely support was received by this Committee. One individual is in opposition.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

Existing law:

1) Requires all attorneys who practice law in California to be licensed by the State Bar and establishes the State Bar, within the judicial branch of state government, for the purpose of regulating the legal profession. (Cal. const., art. VI, § 9; Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 6000 et seq.)

   a) The Legislature sets the annual fees. (Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 6140, 6141.)
   b) The State Bar is governed by the Board of Trustees of the State Bar (Board). (Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 6010 et seq.; § 6016.)

2) Establishes that protection of the public, which includes support for greater access to, and inclusion in, the legal system, is the highest priority for the State Bar in exercising their licensing, regulatory, and disciplinary functions. Whenever the protection of the public is inconsistent with other interests sought to be promoted, the protection of the public is to be paramount. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6001.1.)

3) Authorizes the State Bar to collect $553 in fees from active licensees for the year 2024 as follows:
   a) $400 annual license fee. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.)
   b) $40 fee for the Client Security Fund. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.55.)
   c) $25 fee for the costs of the disciplinary system. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.6.)
   d) $10 fee for the attorney diversion and assistance program. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.9.)
   e) $15 fee for lease costs in the San Francisco location. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.10.)
   f) $52 fee for funding salaries and benefits of employees of the State Bar. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.11.)
   g) $5.50 for administering compliance reviews and audits of client trust accounts. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.13.)
   h) $5.50 fee for the disciplinary diversion program. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.14.)

4) Authorizes the State Bar to collect $161 in fees from inactive licensees for the year 2024 as follows:
   i) $100 annual license fee. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6141(a).)
   j) $10 fee for the Client Security Fund. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.55.)
   k) $25 fee for the costs of the disciplinary system. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.6.)
   l) $5 fee for the attorney diversion and assistance program. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.9.)
   m) $3.50 fee for lease costs in the San Francisco location. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.10.)
   n) $14 fee for funding salaries and benefits of employees of the State Bar. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.11.)
   o) $1.25 fee for administering compliance reviews and audits of client trust accounts. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.13.)
   p) $1.25 fee for the disciplinary diversion program. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.14.)
   q) An inactive licensee who is 70 years old or older is not required to pay an annual license fee. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6141(b).)

5) Authorizes the State Bar to provide the California Lawyers Association (CLA) with administrative and support services, including the collection of the CLA's membership dues in conjunction with the collection of the annual licensing fees. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6031.5.)

6) Specifies the manner in which funds for affinity programs are to be allocated to the CLA. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6141.3.)

7) Requires the State Bar to administer a Client Security Fund (CSF) to relieve or mitigate pecuniary losses caused by the dishonest conduct of licensees of the State Bar, foreign legal consultants registered with the State Bar, and attorneys registered with the State Bar under the Multijurisdictional Practice Program, arising from or connected with the practice of law. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.5.)

8) Requires the State Bar to transmit to the Legislature an annual report detailing the number of complaints regarding access issues related to the biannual state bar exam. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6060.10.)

This bill:

1) Makes various findings and declarations of the Legislature related to the State Bar being a state agency.

2) Keeps license fees the same for 2027 as they were for 2026.
    a) Authorizes attorneys to file for inactive status through December 31 of the calendar year prior to becoming inactive.

3) Clarifies that a felony conviction, whether or not it involves moral turpitude, and a misdemeanor conviction involving moral turpitude constitutes cause for disbarment or suspension.

4) Provides that once a conviction is final, postconviction proceedings do not change the effect of the conviction for discipline purposes under the State Bar Act unless they result in a finding that the conviction is void for lack of subject matter jurisdiction or that the attorney convicted is factually innocent, in which case the court shall treat the conviction as if it did not occur.

5) Provides that when the State Bar requests records, communications, and documents as part of a disciplinary investigation they must be provided to the State Bar notwithstanding attorney-client privilege or the Attorney Work Product doctrine.
    a) Any information provided will not violate, waive, or extinguish the duty to maintain a client's confidence, attorney-client privilege, or the Attorney Work Product doctrine.

b) All documents provided are to remain confidential unless disclosure is needed to fulfill the State Bar's duties under existing law, and these records are not public records under the California Public Records Act.

6) Authorizes the chief trial counsel or their designee to compel, by subpoena, the attorney who is the subject of an investigation.

7) Updates the notice transmitted to attorneys facing discipline to make clear that the failure to respond to the State Bar will result in a default judgment and loss of the right to practice law in California.

8) Provides that failure to reimburse the CSF as part of a license fee is a basis for suspension and repayment is a required condition to transfer the licensee's status from a suspension.

9) Specifies what information a financial institution is to provide the State Bar annually for Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA).

10) Repeals the requirement of the State Bar to collect fees on behalf of CLA as of January 1, 2030, and makes conforming changes.
    a) Removes the requirement that the State Bar assist CLA in receiving recognition from the American Bar Association, as provided.

11) Clarifies that a voluntary association of attorneys may generate low-cost continuing legal education materials, subject to State Bar approval.

12) Authorizes the State Bar to meet in closed session for specified matters.

13) Revises the allocation of moneys from affinity programs, as provided.

14) Prohibits a person or entity from holding themselves out as a law school unless they are accredited by the American Bar Association or the State Bar and award a juris doctorate degree.

COMMENTS

1. Author statement

The author writes:

> AB 2784 is the annual vehicle to set the licensing fees for attorneys and make policy changes to the State Bar. This year's measure critically holds the licensing fee flat and does not raise fees on attorneys. The bill also formally ends the somewhat awkward legal relationship between the State Bar and the California Lawyers Association

where the State Bar was collecting the membership dues of a trade group consisting of the State Bar's regulated community. Recognizing that no other legal trade organization is recognized in statute, the bill removes statutory references to the California Lawyers Association.

Finally, as is typical in the annual bar fee bill, the bill proposes several technical changes to the State Bar Act at the request of the agency to streamline State Bar governance and improve oversight of the legal industry.

2. <u>State Bar of California functions as the administrative arm of the Supreme Court for the purpose of assisting in attorney admissions and discipline</u>

As a constitutional matter, the judicial power of California is vested in the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, and superior courts. (Cal. Const., art. VI, Sec. 1.) (*In re Attorney Discipline System* (1998) 19 Cal.4th 582, 592; *Obrien v. Jones* (2000) 23 Cal.4th 40, 48.) In addressing this inherent authority to regulate the practice of law, the Supreme Court has explained: "'The important difference between regulation of the legal profession and regulation of other professions is this: Admission to the bar is a *judicial function,* and members of the bar are *officers of the court,* subject to discipline by the court. Hence, under the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers, the court has inherent and *primary regulatory power.*'" (*In re Attorney Discipline System, supra,* 19 Cal.4th at 593.) The State Bar functions as the administrative arm of the Supreme Court for the purpose of assisting in attorney admissions and discipline, with the court retaining its inherent judicial authority to disbar or suspend attorneys. (*In re Attorney Discipline System*, *supra*, 19 Cal.4th at 599-600; *see Keller v. State Bar of California* (1990) 496 U.S. 1, 11.)

Attorneys who wish to practice law in California generally must be admitted and licensed by the State Bar. (Cal. Const., art. VI, Sec. 9.) The State Bar of California is a public corporation. Although originally a creature of statute, the State Bar is now "a constitutional entity within the judicial article of the California Constitution." (*Obrien*, *supra*, 23 Cal.4th at 48; *see* Cal. Const., art. VI, § 9; Bus. & Prof. Code, § 6001.) The State Bar's regulatory assistance is an integral part of the judicial function. (*Obrien, supra,* 23 Cal.4th at 48.) Emphasizing the *sui generis* nature of the State Bar as its administrative arm, the Supreme Court has made clear that "express legislative recognition of reserved judicial power over admission and discipline is critical to the constitutionality of the State Bar Act." (*In re Attorney Discipline System, supra,* 19 Cal.4th at 600, citing Bus. & Prof. Code § 6087.)

At the same time, the Legislature's exercise, under the police power, of a reasonable degree of regulation and control over the profession and practice of law in California, is well established. (*Obrien*, *supra*, 23 Cal.4th at 48.) The Legislature exercises regulatory authority pursuant to the State Bar Act and has authority to set the amount of license fees necessary to fund the disciplinary system. The Legislature has enacted statutes making protection of the public the highest priority of the State Bar (Bus. & Prof. Code §

6001.1) and subjecting the Executive Director, the General Counsel, and the CTC of the State Bar to Senate confirmation. (Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 6011(c), 6012(c), & 6079.5.) The Executive Director's current contract expires in July of this year.

The State Bar of California is the largest state bar in the country. As of June 15, 2026, there are a total of 301,500 State Bar licensees, which includes 202,117 active licensees, 2,308 judge members, 20,379 licensees who are "Not Eligible to Practice Law," and approximately 76,696 inactive licensees.[1] The State Bar's programs are financed mostly by annual license fees paid by attorneys as well as other fees paid by applicants seeking to practice law. The State Bar is governed by a Board of Trustees (Board). Pursuant to SB 36 Jackson (Ch. 422, Stats. 2017), the Board was required to transition to a 13-member Board comprised of Governor, Supreme Court, Assembly, and Senate appointees.

3. Attorney licensee fees

In 2019, based largely on recommendations from the California State Auditor and the Legislative Analyst's Office, the 2020 annual license fee was increased to $438 for active licensees and $108 for inactive licensees. This fee increase consisted of a $71 increase on an ongoing basis and a onetime fee increase of $52 for active licensees, and a $20 increase on an ongoing basis and a onetime fee increase of $13 for inactive licensees. The 2021 annual license fee was decreased to $395 for active licensees and $97.40 for inactive licensees through AB 3362 (Committee on Judiciary, Ch. 360, Stats. 2020). The decrease included the cessation of several of the onetime fee increases imposed in 2020. When all fees were added together, excluding the optional legal services fee, the total license fee for 2021 was $470 for active licensees and $137.40 for inactive licensees.[2] The 2022 annual license fee was the same as the license fee for 2021. (SB 211 (Umberg, Ch. 723, Stats. 2021.)

In 2024, the active license fee was raised by $88 and the inactive license fee by $23.60. As noted by the Assembly Judiciary Committee, the main drivers behind authorizing a fee increase was to protect State Bar employees from layoffs and benefit reductions.[3] The fee increase for leasing space in San Francisco is set to sunset on January 1, 2030; the fee increase for employee salaries and benefits is set to sunset January 1, 2028; and the fee increase for compliance reviews, audits of client trust accounts, and the diversion pilot program is set to sunset January 1, 2029.

Last year license fees remained static. (SB 253 (Umberg, Ch. 405, Stats. 2025.)) This bill keeps license fees at the same amount in 2027 as they were this year. The bill also

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[1] *Attorney Demographics*, State Bar of Cal. (current as of Jun. 15, 2026), available at https://apps.calbar.ca.gov/members/demographics.aspx.

[2] This amount includes the fee for the Attorney Diversion and Assistance Program of $10 for active licensees and $5 for inactive licensees, which last year was only $1 and $0, respectively. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6140.9(a).).

[3] Asm. Jud. Comm. analysis AB 3279 (2023-24 reg. sess.) as amended Feb. 9, 2024 at pp. 8-9.

authorizes attorneys to file for inactive status through December 31 of the calendar year prior to becoming inactive.

4. Discipline system

The State Bar Act provides that protection of the public is the highest priority of the State Bar and that whenever the protection of the public is inconsistent with other interests sought to be promoted, protection of the public is to be paramount. (Bus. & Prof. Code § 6001.1.) The Office of Chief Trial Counsel (OCTC) is charged with receiving complaints against attorneys, conducting investigations, determining whether to file formal charges, and prosecuting cases in the State Bar Court. OCTC is headed by a Chief Trial Counsel (CTC), who is to be appointed by the Board and subject to confirmation by the Senate. The CTC is appointed for a four-year term and may be reappointed for additional terms. The State Bar Court is an independent professional court that hears cases regarding attorney discipline and makes recommendations to the Supreme Court regarding suspension or disbarment of an attorney for violations constituting professional misconduct or conviction of serious crimes. The Supreme Court makes the ultimate decision regarding suspension or disbarment of a licensed attorney. California is the only state that has an independent court dedicated to ruling on attorney discipline cases.

In the wake of the scandal surrounding the State Bar's mishandling of disciplinary complaints against Tom Girardi, the Legislature and the State Bar have worked to reform the State Bar's discipline system. Prior bills enacted several reforms to address deficiencies highlighted through various audits and reports.

This bill seeks to make several additional changes to enhance the discipline system. First, it clarifies that a felony conviction, whether or not it involves moral turpitude, and a misdemeanor conviction involving moral turpitude constitute cause for disbarment or suspension. The bill also clarifies that once a conviction is final, postconviction proceedings do not change the effect of the conviction for discipline purposes under the State Bar Act unless they result in a finding that the conviction is void for lack of subject matter jurisdiction or that the attorney convicted is factually innocent, in which case the court shall treat the conviction as if it did not occur.

The bill requires that when the State Bar requests records, communications, and documents as part of a disciplinary investigation they must be provided to the State Bar notwithstanding attorney-client privilege or the Attorney Work Product doctrine. Any information provided will not violate, waive, or extinguish the duty to maintain a client's confidence, attorney-client privilege, or the Attorney Work Product doctrine. Existing law already applies this requirement to records, communications, and documents requested as part of a compliance review or investigative audit. All documents provided are to remain confidential unless disclosure is needed to fulfill the State Bar's duties under existing law and that these records are not public records under the California Public Records Act. Additionally, the bill allows the chief trial counsel or their designee to compel, by subpoena, the attorney who is the subject of an investigation.

The bill also updates the notice transmitted to attorneys facing discipline to make clear that the failure to respond to the State Bar will result in a default judgment and loss of the right to practice law in California.

5. Client Security Fund

Under existing law, the Client Security Fund (CSF) seeks to protect consumers of legal services by mitigating losses caused by the dishonest conduct of California attorneys. The CSF is funded through a mandatory contribution that is collected as part of the annual bar fee statement – active licensees contribute $40, and inactive licensees contribute $10. Under the State Bar's rules, the following types of dishonest conduct can lead to reimbursement of up to $100,000 from the fund: (1) theft or embezzlement of money or the wrongful taking or conversion of money or property; (2) failure to refund unearned attorney fees paid to the lawyer in advance where the lawyer performed no services, or an insignificant portion of the services; (3) the borrowing of money from a client without the intention or reasonably anticipated ability to repay the money; (4) obtaining money or property from a client by representing that it would be used for investment purposes when no investment is made; and (5) an act of intentional dishonesty or deceit that directly leads to the loss of money or property that actually came into the lawyer's possession. (State Bar Rule 3.431.)

Existing law requires a publicly reproved or suspended licensee to reimburse amounts owed to the CSF as a condition to continue practicing law. The amount owed is added to and becomes a part of the license fee for such an attorney. This bill provides that failure to reimburse the CSF as part of a license fee is a basis for suspension and repayment is a required condition to transfer the licensee's status from a suspension.

6. Client Trust Account Protection Program (CTAPP)

The State Bar instituted CTAPP in the wake of the Tom Girardi scandal, which at its core involved misappropriation of client funds. In order to prevent such a situation from ever happening again, the State Bar instituted a trust account monitoring program. The program is designed and intended to alert the State Bar to potential client fund issues long before a consumer can be defrauded by their attorney. This bill makes operational changes to the statute governing the CTAPP program. It specifies what information a financial institution is to provide the State Bar annually for IOLTA accounts, including the name of the attorney or law firm associated with the client trust account, the attorney's State Bar license number, if provided to the financial institution, and the trust account balance as of December 31 of the previous year.

7. Closed session authorization

In 2004, the right of public access was enshrined in the California Constitution with the passage of Proposition 59 (Nov. 3, 2004, statewide gen. elec.),[4] which amended the California Constitution to specifically protect the right of the public to access and obtain government records: "The people have the right of access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business, and therefore the meetings of public bodies and the writings of public officials and agencies shall be open to public scrutiny." (Cal. Const., art. I, sec. 3 (b)(1).) The California Constitution requires a statute to be broadly construed if it furthers the people's right of access and narrowly construed if it limits the right of access, and requires a statute that limits the public's right of access to be adopted with findings demonstrating the interest protected by the limitation and the need for protecting that interest. (Cal. const. art. I, § 3(b)(1).)

Bagley-Keene generally requires state bodies to conduct their meetings openly and make them accessible to the public. The State Bar Act provides authorizations for the State Bar to meet in closed session for various reasons generally related to private or sensitive nature of the matters being discussed, including matters related to the Committee of Bar Examiner's (CBE) consideration of moral character. This bill provides additional closed session authorizations for the CBE's consideration of any matter that would disclose individual applicant information that is already confidential pursuant to Section 6060.25 of the Business and Professions Code.

Additionally, the bill authorizes closed session meetings for matters related to the Regulation and Discipline Committee's or the board's discussion or consideration of any disciplinary matter that is confidential and matters that the board has found would constitute an unwarranted invasion of the privacy of an individual licensee if discussed in an open meeting. The bill provides that this limitation on the access to open meetings is necessary to allow the State Bar of California to fully accomplish its objectives, including, but not limited to, its licensing, regulatory, and disciplinary functions.

8. California Lawyers Association

In 2017, the Legislature enacted major reforms to the structure of the State Bar by separating its trade association functions from its regulatory functions. (SB 36 (Jackson, Ch. 422, Stats. 2017.)) The Legislature recognized the inherent conflict of interest in having a unified bar and made it clear that after deunification the State Bar was to focus on its core licensing, regulatory, and discipline functions. The trade association functions were transferred to the California Lawyers Association (CLA), a private, nonprofit corporation established in statute. As it has been almost 10 years since

[4] Prop. 59 was placed on the ballot by a unanimous vote of both houses of the Legislature. (SCA 1 (Burton, Ch. 1, Stats. 2004))

deunification occurred, this bill seeks to make further changes to effectuate the intent of SB 36.

Prior to SB 36, the trade association aspects of the State Bar were housed in what was referred to as the sections of the State Bar. In order to join a section of the State Bar, an attorney would make an election of their annual licensing fee statement. Due to this, SB 36 required that the State Bar collect CLA's dues as part of the annual licensing fee collection process, which at the time seemed prudent to ease the transition. However, this current practice makes the State Bar the only regulatory body in the state that oversees a profession while concurrently collecting dues for a trade association of its licensees. This practice seems incongruent with the role of a licensing and regulatory agency, which is further highlighted by the fact that CLA has the authority to lobby the State Bar. As such, this bill ends the requirement of the State Bar to collect fees on behalf of CLA as of January 1, 2030, and makes conforming changes. To further complete the process of deunification, the bill removes the requirement that the State Bar assist CLA in receiving recognition from the American Bar Association.

The Assembly Judiciary Committee heard from several local bar associations that the phrasing of existing law relating to the generation of low-cost continuing education course materials may preclude them from developing their own low-cost continuing education program. Although the existing law appears to permit an "incorporated non-profit association of attorneys" to generate continuing education requirements, the law could be read to grant CLA the exclusive right to develop low-cost trainings. To ensure that all attorney associations can produce low-cost continuing education documents, this bill would delete the specific reference to CLA and replace that reference with the phrase "a voluntary association of attorneys." This would not preclude CLA from creating continuing education materials, but will guarantee that all official bar associations can produce such materials as well. Nothing in this bill changes the existing requirement that the State Bar approve a continuing education provider.

9. <u>Affinity programs – Amendment</u>

As an additional aspect of the deunification of the State Bar was providing for the governance of how various affinity funds that were operated by the former sections of the State Bar would transfer to CLA and be used going forward. Section 6141.3 of the Business and Professions Code requires certain funds to be utilized for "diversity, equity and inclusion, access to justice, and civic engagement efforts." Last year, concerns were raised about a lack of transparency from CLA regarding the use of revenues generated from the State Bar "affinity programs." The affinity programs are offered by CalBar Connect and are designed to provide discounts on services to attorneys, including malpractice insurance and other office management services. Currently, most of the revenue is provided to CLA and California Change Lawyers (the former charitable arm of the State Bar before deunification) with the remainder going to fund legal aid.

To ensure that these funds were being spent in an efficient manner, last year SB 253 (Umberg, Ch. 405, Stats. 2025) required CLA to report on how it spends its affinity revenues. That report, released in January 2026, provided top-line spending numbers but lacked the specificity stakeholders were seeking.

According to the Assembly Judiciary Committee:

> […] the California Lawyers Association has now ended its contract with CalBar Connect to coordinate offering the discounted services to its members. Presumably the Association will develop its own program and CalBar Connect will once again partner directly with the State Bar. Given all of these developments, stakeholders proposed to the Committee to reform the affinity fund distribution formula. Recognizing the termination of the relationship between CalBar Connect and the California Lawyers Association, this bill would remove the California Lawyers Association from the list of entities receiving affinity fund revenues. The fund would now grant two-thirds of the funds to Change Lawyers and one-third to fund legal services. […][5]

Due to concerns from CLA, the author has agreed to amend the bill to delay the implementation of this change by one year.

10. <u>The State Bar is a state agency</u>

The bill provides that the State Bar act is not to be construed to affect or alter the status of the State Bar of California as a state agency within the judicial branch that serves as the administrative arm of the Supreme Court of California for matters relating to attorney admission, attorney discipline, and the regulation of the practice of law. This provision is declaratory of existing law and is bolstered by the changes made by the Legislature in SB 36 to separate the bar from its professional association functions and require the State Bar to focus on its core missions of licensing, regulation, and discipline. The bill also makes a number of legislative findings and declarations to this effect, including that that no provision of the State Bar Act is to be construed to establish the State Bar as an entity independent of the State of California.

11. <u>Disability testing accommodations</u>

The Assembly Judiciary Committee notes that since the pandemic there has been a growing number of complaints from examinees seeking disability-related accommodations for taking the bar exam. As a result, AB 3279 (Committee on Judiciary, Ch. 227, Stats. 2024) required the State Bar to begin reporting to the Legislature about the annual number of complaints received about the testing accommodation process. The first report is due in July.

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[5] Asm. Jud. Comm. analysis AB 2784 (2025-26 reg. sess. as amended Apr. 8, 2026.

Due to the Supreme Court's plenary role in admitting attorneys to practice law and the separation of powers between the different branches of government, it is not clear if the Legislature has the authority to impose many of the reforms that advocates are seeking for testing accommodations. However, further amendments may be considered at a later date to address the results of the report.

12. Other miscellaneous changes

The State Bar noted that an institution of higher education was holding itself out as a "school of law" despite not being an accredited institution or even offering the juris doctorate degree. Accordingly, this bill amends existing law related to accrediting law schools to make it clear that a person or entity may not hold themselves out as a law school unless they are accredited by the American Bar Association or the State Bar and awards juris doctorate degrees.

Existing law requires the State Bar to send licensees "a certificate issued under the direction of the board evidencing the payment" once the Bar received a licensees' annual fee. This provision of law is outdated and was enacted when most attorneys paid their licensing fees via check and needed proof of the payment to seek reimbursement from their employer. The State Bar has moved to an online payment portal system and ceased issuing physical membership cards to every attorney in the state. Accordingly, this bill repeals these provisions.

13. Stakeholder statements

The State Bar of California supports the bill, except that it takes no position on Sections 5, 8-11, 18, 21, and 22 of the bill (provisions related to CLA and affinity programs).

The State Bar writes:

> The State Bar of California is pleased to support AB 2784 (Judiciary), which maintains attorney license fees at the current level and includes various governance and operational amendments to the State Bar Act adopted as priorities by the State Bar's Board of Trustees.
>
> AB 2784 includes provisions to enhance public and consumer protection, including amendments that:
>
> - Ensure improved reporting of client trust account information by financial institutions;
> - Prevent consumer confusion by limiting the types of institutions that can call themselves law schools;
> - Ensure the Office of Chief Trial Counsel has access to client trust account information as part of disciplinary investigations; and

- Clarify that the Office of Chief Trial Counsel's authority to take investigative depositions extends to the attorneys themselves, and not just witnesses.

The bill also includes language to clearly reflect the role of the State Bar as a regulatory state agency within the judicial branch of California government, update statutory language to more accurately reflect confidential matters about discipline or applicants for admission or that must be addressed in closed session, and make technical amendments to revise or repeal obsolete language. All of these changes are important to advance these important public protection and consumer protection solutions. For these reasons, we support AB 2784.

SUPPORT

State Bar of California

OPPOSITION

1 individual

RELATED LEGISLATION

Prior Legislation:

SB 253 (Umberg, Ch. 405, Stats. 2025) among other things kept license fees at the same amount as in 2024.

AB 3279 (Committee on Judiciary, Ch. 227, Stats. 2024) among other things increased active licensee fees by $88.

SB 40 (Umberg, Ch. 697, Stats. 2023) authorized the State Bar to collect annual licensing fees in the same amount as 2022 and made other changes, including strengthening conflict of interest statutes and requiring Senate confirmation of the executive director and general counsel of the State Bar.

AB 2958 (Committee on Judiciary, Ch. 419, Stats. 2022) authorized the State Bar to collect annual licensing fees of $395 for active licensees and $97.40 for inactive licensees and enacted other reforms.

SB 211 (Umberg, 2021, Ch. 723, Stats. 2021) authorized the State Bar to collect annual licensing fees of $395 for active licensees and $97.40 for inactive licensees and enacted other reforms. The bill required the Auditor's Office to conduct an independent audit to determine if the discipline process adequately protects the public from misconduct by licensed attorneys or those who wrongfully hold themselves out as licensed attorneys.

AB 3362 (Committee on Judiciary, Ch. 360, Stats. 2020) authorized the State Bar to collect annual licensing fees of $395 for active licensees and $97.40 for inactive licensees and enacted other reforms.

SB 176 (Jackson, Ch. 698, Stats. 2019) authorized the State Bar to collet annual licensing fees of $438 for 2020 and enacted other reforms.

AB 3249 (Committee on Judiciary, Ch. 659, Stats. 2018) authorized the State Bar to collect annual licensing fees of $390 for 2019 and enacted other reforms, including a strengthening of the attorney discipline system.

SB 36 (Jackson, 2017, Ch. 422, Stats. 2017) authorized the State Bar to collect active membership dues of up to $390 for the year 2018; reformed the State Bar Act by creating what is now the California Lawyers Association; changed the composition of the State Bar Board; and enacted various reforms to remove politics from the Board.

PRIOR VOTES

Assembly Floor (Ayes 73, Noes 0)
Assembly Judiciary Committee (Ayes 12, Noes 0)
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