Types of State Legal Jobs

The California state government employs lawyers in many capacities, most typically in the State Attorney General’s Office, but also in many other departments and agencies. State agencies may also have non-practicing positions that appeal to law school graduates who do not wish to practice law. The hiring process for any California State Government job requires taking an “examination” (for legal positions, often just an extended application) and getting listed on the state eligibility list for employment at the level the job is rated. This handout focuses on how to navigate that process.

Legal positions with the state exist in many fields, including criminal appellate prosecution, criminal defense as a state public defender, environmental law, consumer law, labor law, education, etc. For those wondering what kind of work is available in the state government, we recommend the State Personnel Board website – www.spb.ca.gov --- which is discussed in detail below. This is the entry portal for anyone who wishes to apply for a post-graduate permanent position. Students can use it also to learn about the types of agencies and jobs available by looking at the current postings.

For students, we recommend checking the On Campus Interview (OCI) listings. Not all state agencies come to campus, but some do. For those employers, the first step in getting them to know you would be to interview on campus when they come. We also recommend getting to know which state agencies employ lawyers, as many do not come to campus, but may have summer programs that will provide valuable experience or valuable contacts for when you are able to apply to work for that agency. Attend panels featuring state-employed attorneys, and talk to Career Office staff about which state agencies interest you.

State vs. City and County Jobs

City and county governments employ lawyers, most commonly as District Attorneys prosecuting criminal cases, or City Attorneys and County Counsel handling a wide variety of civil work, often including litigation, municipal law, land use, employment and many other areas. This handout does not address how to apply for city or county positions; it focuses on applying for State Jobs. For those interested in prosecuting state level criminal cases as a District Attorney or defending such cases as a Public Defender, keep an eye out for On-Campus Interviews, as some DA and PD offices only
hire through OCI. There’s no need to wait until August of your 2L year to meet and talk
with attorneys in those offices though; consider setting up an informational interview
with someone in those offices now.

Why Work for the State

Those who seek government work often wish to serve the public, work on issues of
public significance affecting many people, and wish to advance within the state system
as they become increasingly experienced. As government work often does not have an
easily ascertainable client, those who crave intense client interaction and appreciation
may not find it in government work.

State lawyers usually have more manageable work hours than large firms, good job
benefits and some degree of job security for work well done.

The Steps for Applying for a State Job

Applying for a CA State Legal Job before you are bar-certified:
- Position title is “Graduate Legal Assistant” (GLA)
- The GLA is a paid position directed at students who are eligible to sit for the Bar
  exam or who have recently taken the Bar exam and are awaiting results.
- GLA positions are temporary (12 months) – the hope is that if the individual
  performs well and openings are available, a permanent staff attorney position will
  be theirs once they pass the bar.

Two Step Process, for students and grads:

1. “Examination Bulletin”
   - The applicant must become "list" eligible through the examination process.
   - The “examination” step ranks qualified candidates.
   - Take the examination ASAP!
   - Go to www.jobs.ca.gov and search openings putting in the term “Graduate Legal
     Assistant.”
   - Look under the “exams” tab for “open Bulletins.”
   - Often an examination can be used for other departments.
   - Often recent grads use the DOJ open bulletin – we understand most other
     agencies will accept the DOJ eligibility list.
   - The “examination” is really an initial questionnaire. It must be filled out completely
     – do not skip any questions.
   - It is complicated getting the complete questionnaire. That is also a 2 step
     process:
     o You must download, complete and print out STD. 678.
       https://jobs.ca.gov/pdf/std678.pdf
     o You must also complete the other 4 parts of the Bulletin
       and%20QA_CDCR_DFEH_DOJ%20%20Rev%203.2014.pdf
• Submit the completed questionnaire forms, with a transcript, to the physical address specified in the exam bulletin.
• Read the GLA Exam Bulletin very carefully. The exam has experience-based questions meant to gauge the candidate’s knowledge and experience as they relate to the knowledge, skills and abilities of the classification. Applicants should carefully consider all of their experiences and education to determine if any of their experiences satisfy the questions’ requirements. Applicants should answer all questions to the best of their ability.
• All grads who are anticipating wanting to apply to any Open Vacancy GLA jobs should immediately complete the exam process. It takes some time for the exam to be scored, and an applicant cannot submit a job application until after they have received their exam score.

2. “Job Vacancies” Open Position Notices
• Once the applicant has taken the exam and received a score (it may take several weeks to receive the score), the applicant can then apply for an open GLA position.
• Please note that the Job Vacancy/Opportunity Notice provides very detailed application requirements that must be strictly followed.
• We are informed that YOU MUST FIRST RECEIVE AN EXAM SCORE TO BE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR AN OPEN POSITION. SO APPLY ASAP!

Additional Resources:

Attorney-General at the California Department of Justice
Career opportunities and information on internship programs.
http://ag.ca.gov/careers.php

California State Homepage
Provides numerous links to California and other state government’s web sites.
http://www.ca.gov

Directory of Official State, County, and City Government Websites
With links to numerous personnel offices, it is one of the best places to look for state government jobs.
http://www.statelocalgov.net
STATE CIVIL SERVICE PROCESS

Obtain exam announcement and standard State application form from the State Personnel Board or the Employment Development Department. Announcements are also available on the internet @ http://www.sbp.ca.gov

Fill out application and send or take in person by the final filing date. (The bulletin will indicate the final filing date and mailing address).

If application meets minimum qualifications, an announcement that the application was accepted and notice of written test date will be sent in the mail:

OR*

Take written examination. (If written only examination)

If application is rejected because minimum qualifications are not met, reapply when the minimum qualifications are completed.

Receive written examination results.

Wait for announcement for oral examination appointment.

Receive date for qualifications appraisal interview (oral examination).

Prepare for oral examination by studying scope of exam on examination announcement.

Take oral examination.

Receive final results of examination.

Receive notices of job openings.*

Hiring Interview

If selected for the job, receive job offer.

If not selected, wait for further notices of job openings.

If selected for the job, serve probation period of 6-12 months depending on the classification

THEN

Permanent Appointment

*Many examinations do not have written exams.

**Will receive notices once candidate is within the top three ranks (scores).