

# STATE OF CALIFORNIA HIRING

## Handout Series #7

### OVERVIEW

The State of California employs over 3,000 attorneys in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the government. This handout focuses on jobs with executive branch agencies. By far the most state agency jobs are in Sacramento, followed by San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego, as well as several other locations. The California Department of Justice (DOJ), including the offices of the State Attorney General, is a major employer, with more than 800 attorneys in four cities. Many other state agencies have their own, substantially smaller, legal departments.

California state agencies follow California State Civil Service guidelines and hiring procedures. California residency is not required, and U.S. citizenship is required only for peace officer jobs. Securing employment with a state agency is competitive, and it is a somewhat cumbersome process where you will need to

- (1) Determine whether the department you are interested in has an examination open to all candidates for testing;
- (2) Participate in the written and/or oral examination for that department;
- (3) Be competitive enough in the examination to be placed on a hiring list for that department);  
and
- (4) Subsequently be selected for an interview in that department.

These steps are somewhat complicated by the fact that not all departments have their own examination process (smaller departments will “borrow” qualified applicants from another department’s hiring list, most often that of the Attorney General’s Office, when hiring legal staff.

### HELPFUL HINTS

If you are interested in working in a state agency there are a few **helpful hints** to keep in mind:

- Start early. The process of securing a job in a state agency can be a lengthy one, so don’t wait until the last minute to start this process. You will need patience and perseverance!
- Take every examination offered for attorneys. Since agencies use each other’s hiring lists, you may miss out on opportunities if you take only one exam and get on only one list. Note that some examinations for attorney positions may test your substantive knowledge and readiness for the particular work involved. Others, most notably the Attorney General’s examination, are more general questionnaires regarding your experience and accomplishments.

- Contact the Human Resources Department for the agency or department that you are interested in working with to inquire about any open examinations or open positions. You may also access a department's website as most agencies post their job and examination bulletins on their websites.
- Consider testing for and taking a job in an agency that might not be your first choice, since agencies sometimes hire from the "inside" (e.g., an attorney who is already civil-service qualified and working in another state agency). Once you have your foot in the door, you will have gained the ability to transfer to other departments or agencies, even if you would be changing practice areas.
- Find out what kind of work is done by state government lawyers. Many legal jobs in state agencies are akin to corporate counsel offices, and involve a good deal of transactional work. Most litigation is handled by the Attorney General's Office. With notable exceptions (e.g., the Department of Transportation, Fish & Game, DMV, EDD, PUC) few agencies handle their own litigation. Do some research to find out who does the kind of work you want to do. The best way to research the various state agencies is through their websites.
- Get experience. Completing a clinical or internship in a state agency is one of the best ways to gain State experience and become more competitive for vacant State attorney position. McGeorge has excellent clinical placements, including the various divisions of the Attorney General's Office, the California EPA, the California Resources Agency, the Department of Corporations, the Department of Fair Employment & Housing, the Department of Fish & Game, the Department of Food & Agriculture, the Franchise Tax Board, the Department of Social Services, the State Board of Equalization and the State Department of Water Resources. See the Clinical-Legal Education office at McGeorge for more information.

### **THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE (A.G.)**

As the California Department of Justice (DOJ) is the largest employer of attorneys in the executive branch, it is important to be familiar with its hiring procedures. In addition, other agencies often use the DOJ's eligibility lists for their legal staff recruitments. The A.G.'s Office provides legal services primarily in Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego and is organized into three divisions: Criminal Law, Civil Law and Public Rights. The DOJ hires both Graduate Legal Assistants (GLAs) and Deputy Attorneys General (DAGs).

The GLA exam is for 3D/4E students and recent graduates who are eligible to take the California State Bar examination.<sup>1</sup> The GLA exam is given only once a year (usually in the spring) and you must file for the exam two months prior to the exam date.

The DAG exam requires membership in the State Bar of California.<sup>2</sup> The DAG exam is given three times a year, usually in May, June and November. You must file for the exam two months prior to the exam date.

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<sup>1</sup> 3D/4E's may compete in the GLA exam but may not be appointed until they have eligibility to take the California State Bar examination.

Graduating students interested in working for the Attorney General's office *or any other state agency* should either (1) call (916) 324-5039, giving your name and address and indicating that you wish to complete an interest card to apply for the GLA and/or the DAG exams, or (2) submit an online request at the A.G.'s website, <http://www.ag.ca.gov/careers/index>.

Once you have indicated an interest in applying for the GLA or DAG exams, you will receive application materials as soon as the test is open. Applications will be mailed to you and you will be allowed 2-4 weeks to complete and return the application packet. This packet will give you all the necessary information regarding the application process.

After you take the GLA or DAG exam you will stay on the hiring list for one year. At the end of that year, you will be reminded by letter to take the exam again.

When vacancies in the DOJ occur, hiring authorities will screen and interview from this large pool (2,000+) of interested candidates. Candidates' names are then pulled by the computer on a random basis according to the location and area of practice for the vacancy. The candidates are then notified and may be requested to interview and/or to provide a resume, writing sample, or other documents.

**CURRENT LAW STUDENTS:** The DOJ has an excellent summer program. It is not necessary to complete civil service procedures to work there as a summer intern. Several sections conduct on-campus interviews and/or list these positions with the Career Development Office.

### **HOW TO FIND INFORMATION ON ALL STATE AGENCIES**

There are a number of official sources for information about employment with state agencies. In some cases, agencies send notifications of upcoming GLA or attorney examinations directly to the CDO. When this occurs, such notices are listed on McGeorgeCareersOnline.

The best way to learn about which agencies have examinations open to all outside State civil service candidates for testing is to log on to the State Personnel Board's website (shown below) or review the "state exams" section of *Capitol Weekly*, a newspaper available in the CDO. These sources will give you the examination title, the department giving the examination and the final filing date. When you find an examination you are interested in applying for, you will need to obtain a copy of the examination announcement from the department conducting the examination.

⇒**Internet Website:** <http://www.spb.ca.gov> [State Personnel Board]; [link] "state jobs"; [tab] "how to apply"; [tab] "find exam"; [link] "exam bulletins"; [drop down menu] "recruitment type: open"; [drop down menu] "job category: legal occupation"

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<sup>2</sup> Applicants must have active membership in the State Bar of California before they will be eligible for appointment. Applicants who are not members of the State Bar but who are eligible to take the California State Bar examination will be admitted to the examination but will be not considered eligible for appointment until they are admitted to the State Bar.

## **THE APPLICATION**

Once you have determined that the examination is “Open” to all candidates, you will need to complete an online “State Application for Examination” (Form STD.678).

<b>ADDRESSES:</b>	CA State Personnel Board 801 Capitol Mall Sacramento, CA 9581 (916) 653-1705	Employment Development Dept. 2901 50th Street Sacramento, CA (916) 227-0300
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Read or listen to the examination announcement carefully. *LATE APPLICATIONS ARE NOT ACCEPTED*. The completed application is an example of your reading comprehension skills, your ability to follow directions, and your attention to detail. Be sure to ascertain whether a cover letter, transcript or writing sample is required. When completing the State application, be sure to read the examination announcement thoroughly and be sure to include all pertinent information on your application. The more information you provide the better, as this will make the examination analyst’s job in determining your qualifications for that particular examination much easier.

## **THE EXAMINATION**

For some agencies (such as the DOJ), the application is your examination and there is no further testing component. Other agencies require an application and a test of your substantive knowledge about a subject. The DOJ conducts examinations a few times each year, while other agencies may only test once every few years.

For those agencies that require a substantive test, read the section of the Exam Bulletin entitled, “Examination Information” carefully. It will tell you what type of test will be used and what effect (known as “weight”) each component will have on your final score. Also read the “Scope” section, which tells you what subjects will be covered in an examination. The exam bulletin included as Attachment “E” contains a scope section. Acquaint yourself with the mission/functions of the department you are interviewing for.

There are written tests and oral test/interviews. The written tests are usually multiple choice; some are narrative. For the oral test/interview you will want to be prepared to talk about your education and experience, why you feel you are prepared for the job and your career goals.

## **CAPITOL WEEKLY**

The *Capitol Weekly* is the “Newspaper of Record for California State Government”. It is not produced by the State Personnel Board, but by an outside vendor. The **State Exams** section lists exams if you are not yet a state employee. You may apply for and take an examination listed as “Open” for which you are qualified. An easy to follow explanation of how to read an exam listing is given.

There is also a list of and information about more than 1,000 open jobs for those who are either already State employees or have eligibility based on successfully competing in a State examination. These include all departments and all positions, attorney and non-attorney. Along with the listings, there

are many interesting articles on what's going on in our state Capitol. A copy of the *Capitol Weekly* is available in the Career Development Office.

### **EMPLOYMENT LISTS**

The names of candidates who have successfully competed in the State examination process are placed on an employment list. In order to be placed on an employment list, the candidate must obtain a score that will place them as "reachable" on that list. Any candidate who scored high enough to be placed in the top 3 ranks (score groupings) is considered "reachable". When there is a job opening in an agency, applicants in the top 3 ranks are contacted by way of a letter. Candidates must respond to the agency that sent the contact letter within a specified time frame. As candidates respond to the contact letters (whether interested, not interested, or not responding), candidates in the lower ranks move up the list. Note that failure to respond to the contact letter places the candidate as "inactive" on the employment list, so it is very important to return the contact letter, even if the candidate is not interested in the particular vacancy.

### **INTERVIEWING**

When an agency is ready to move on to the interviewing process, it will use criteria specific to the vacancy it is hiring for in order to identify applications of the most qualified candidates and to schedule interviews for those candidates. Not all individuals who replied to the contact letter that they were interested in an opening will be selected to interview, regardless of their eligibility on an employment list. Although a candidate may have eligibility (be reachable) on an employment list, her/his qualifications (knowledge, skills and abilities) also determine how competitive he/she is for the specific position. In some instances, following initial interviews, a department may call candidates back for a second interview.

The hiring agency typically narrows down those interviewed to the top 3 candidates and will then conduct reference checks. The hiring department will also contact its human resources department to confirm the candidates' eligibility, either by placement on the list or current State employment with transfer eligibility, before extending an official job offer.

Interviews with State agencies can differ from interviews with private sector employers. In order to maintain consistency, the interviews often follow a script so that all interviewees are asked the same questions. This may make the interview seem more formal. Also, many interviews are tape recorded.

When participating in the interview process with a state agency, as with any other interview, it is important to arrive on time, dress professionally, appear focused and confident, and provide detailed examples of past or present experience that show suitability for the open position.