



## MORAL CHARACTER DETERMINATIONS: BEST PRACTICES AND TALKING POINTS FOR LAW SCHOOLS

These best practices and talking points were developed with the input of law school deans on the Moral Character Working Group and are intended to assist law schools in advising students or prospective students about the moral character determination process for those seeking admission to the State Bar of California (State Bar). They are provided to ensure that law schools feel properly equipped to assist students with the moral character determination process and that law students receive adequate information.

### GENERAL INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

- Law schools report greatest consistency and best information sharing when a specific person is designated as a point-of-contact for students with questions related to the moral character determination process.
- Law schools may refer students or prospective students to the materials related to moral character on the State Bar's website at <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Admissions> to best learn about the moral character determination process prior to beginning the moral character application.
- Law schools are encouraged to clarify issues or questions related to moral character with the State Bar by contacting the assigned moral character person of the day at 800-843-9053.
- Prior to matriculation or during orientation, law schools have found it helpful to inform students that each jurisdiction has its own requirements for admission to the practice of law and the requirements likely include a moral character determination or a character and fitness assessment. Law schools are encouraged to inform students of the admissions requirements specific to California and to urge students to research the jurisdictions in which they will be seeking admission.
- Law schools may suggest that students begin collecting information and documentation for the moral character application well in advance of the date by which they wish to submit an application to ensure the necessary information has been obtained.
- Law schools should repeatedly remind students that it is the applicant's responsibility to become aware of the moral character determination requirements, to read and understand the instructions, to update the application when changes occur, and to timely comply with all requests for further information.

## **TIMELINE**

- The moral character process may take a minimum of six months (180 days) to complete, so early submission is strongly encouraged.
- It is the State Bar's goal to notify an applicant if a moral character application is deemed complete and therefore in "filed" status, or incomplete, within 60 days of submission.
- The initial processing time may vary based on the time of year, as the volume of applications fluctuates.
- If a moral character application is considered incomplete, a student has sixty (60) days to remedy the deficiencies or the application will be deemed abandoned.
- If additional information is requested after the application is considered complete and filed, a student has ninety (90) days to comply with the request or the application will be deemed abandoned.

## **PROVIDING INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION**

- Students should respond to each question completely, accurately, and to the best of their ability.
- Students should contact applicable entities to obtain the necessary documentation, such as the court, arresting agency, or other licensing agency.
- If documentation cannot be obtained, a student may submit a letter from the entity stating the reason the documentation is unavailable.
- At the time the moral character application is submitted, applicants may submit supplemental narratives to provide additional information, such as the rehabilitative activities in which the applicant has engaged.

## **CONCERNS REGARDING INFORMAL CONFERENCES**

- Attendance at an informal conference is not mandatory, but it provides students an opportunity to further discuss and clarify their backgrounds.
- A student may retain legal counsel to attend an informal conference with them, but counsel is not required and may only observe, rather than participate in, the conference.

## **CONCERNS REGARDING PAST SERIOUS MISCONDUCT**

- There is no act of misconduct that, in and of itself, automatically disqualifies an applicant from obtaining a positive moral character determination.
- Candor, honesty, and rehabilitation are given significant weight in consideration of an application.
- The rehabilitation standard suggests rehabilitative activities, such as community service or participation in rehabilitative programs.
- A very small number of applicants are denied a positive moral character determination each year.

- Applicants who are denied a positive moral character determination have avenues for appeal and are allowed to reapply after a specified period of time.

**FOR QUESTIONS THAT CANNOT BE ANSWERED BY LAW SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

- Direct the student to submit an inquiry in the Applicant Portal at [admissions.calbar.ca.gov](https://admissions.calbar.ca.gov) or call the State Bar 800-843-9053 and ask to speak with the assigned moral character person of the day.