



California Rules of Court

(Revised July 1, 2020)

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Rule 9.45. Registered legal aid attorneys

(a) Definitions

The following definitions apply in this rule:

- (1) "Eligible legal aid organization" means any of the following:
 - (A) A nonprofit entity in good standing in California and in the state in which it is incorporated, if other than California, that provides legal aid in civil matters, including family law and immigration law, to indigent and disenfranchised persons, especially underserved client groups, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, people of color, juveniles, and limited English proficient persons; or
 - (B) A nonprofit law school approved by the American Bar Association located in California or accredited by the State Bar of California that provides legal aid as described above in subdivision (A).
 - (C) Entities that receive IOLTA funds pursuant to Business and Professions Code, section 6210, et seq., are deemed to be eligible legal aid organizations.
- (2) "Active licensee in good standing of the bar of a United States state, jurisdiction, possession, territory, or dependency" means an attorney who:
 - (A) Is a licensee in good standing of the entity governing the practice of law in each jurisdiction in which the attorney is licensed to practice law, who has not been disbarred, has not resigned with charges pending, or is not suspended from practicing law for disciplinary misconduct in any other jurisdiction; and
 - (B) Remains an active licensee in good standing of the entity governing the practice of law in at least one United States state, jurisdiction, possession, territory, or dependency other than California while practicing law as a registered legal aid attorney in California.

(Subd (a) amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (j) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007; previously amended effective January 1, 2019.)

(b) Scope of practice

Subject to all applicable rules, regulations, and statutes, an attorney practicing law under this rule may practice law in California only while working, with or without pay, at an eligible legal aid organization, as defined in this rule, and, at that institution and only on behalf of its clients or customers, may engage, under supervision, in all forms of legal practice that are permissible for a licensee of the State Bar of California.

(Subd (b) amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (a) effective November 15, 2004; previously amended and relettered effective January 1, 2007; previously amended effective January 1, 2019.)

(c) Requirements

For an attorney to qualify to practice law under this rule, the attorney must:

- (1) Be an active licensee in good standing of the bar of a United States state, jurisdiction, possession, territory, or dependency;

- (2) Meet all of the requirements for admission to the State Bar of California, except that the attorney:
 - (A) Need not take the California bar examination or the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination; and
 - (B) May practice law while awaiting the result of his or her Application for Determination of Moral Character;
- (3) Comply with the rules adopted by the Board of Trustees relating to the State Bar Registered Legal Aid Attorney Program;
- (4) Practice law under the supervision of an attorney who is employed by the eligible legal aid organization and who is a licensee in good standing of the State Bar of California;
- (5) Abide by all of the laws and rules that govern licensees of the State Bar of California, including the Minimum Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) requirements;
- (6) Satisfy in his or her first year of practice under this rule all of the MCLE requirements, including ethics education, that licensees of the State Bar of California must complete every three years and, thereafter, satisfy the MCLE requirements for the registered legal aid attorney's compliance group as set forth in State Bar Rules 2.70 and 2.71. If the registered legal aid attorney's compliance group is required to report in less than thirty-six months, the MCLE requirements will be reduced proportionally; and
- (7) Not have taken and failed the California bar examination within five years immediately preceding initial application to register under this rule.

(Subd (c) amended and renumbered effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (b) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007; previously amended effective January 1, 2019.)

(d) Application

The attorney must comply with the following registration requirements:

- (1) Register as a legal aid attorney; submit a separate application for each eligible legal aid organization; file an Application for Determination of Moral Character with the State Bar of California; and comply with Rules of Court, rule 9.9.5, governing attorney fingerprinting;
- (2) Submit to the State Bar of California a declaration signed by the attorney agreeing that he or she will be subject to the disciplinary authority of the Supreme Court of California and the State Bar of California and attesting that he or she will not practice law in California other than under supervision of an attorney at an eligible legal aid organization during the time he or she practices law as a registered legal aid attorney in California; and
- (3) Submit to the State Bar of California a declaration signed by a qualifying supervisor on behalf of the from each eligible legal aid organization in California. The declaration must attest:
 - (i) that the applicant will work, with or without pay, as an attorney for the organization;
 - (ii) that the applicant will be supervised as specified in this rule;
 - (iii) that the eligible legal aid organization and the supervising attorney assume professional responsibility for any work performed by the applicant under this rule;
 - (iv) that the organization will notify the State Bar of California within 30 days of the cessation of the applicant's employment with that employer in California; and
 - (v) that the person signing the declaration believes, to the best of his or her knowledge after reasonable inquiry, that the applicant qualifies for registration under this rule and is an individual of good moral character.

(Subd (d) amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (c) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007.)

(e) Duration of practice

A registered legal aid attorney must renew his or her registration annually and may practice for no more than a total of five years under this rule.

(Subd (e) amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (d) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007.)

(f) Application and registration fees

The State Bar of California may set appropriate application fees and initial and annual registration fees to be paid by registered legal aid attorneys.

(Subd (f) amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (e) effective November 15, 2004; previously amended and relettered effective January 1, 2007.)

(g) State Bar Registered Legal Aid Attorney Program

The State Bar may establish and administer a program for registering California legal aid attorneys under rules adopted by the Board of Trustees of the State Bar.

(Subd (g) amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (f) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007; previously amended effective January 1, 2019.)

(h) Supervision

To meet the requirements of this rule, an attorney supervising a registered legal aid attorney:

- (1) Must have practiced law as a full-time occupation for at least four years in any United States jurisdiction;
- (2) Must have actively practiced law in California for at least two years immediately preceding the time of supervision and be a licensee in good standing of the State Bar of California;
- (3) Must assume professional responsibility for any work that the registered legal aid attorney performs under the supervising attorney's supervision;
- (4) Must assist, counsel, and provide direct supervision of the registered legal aid attorney in the activities authorized by this rule, approve in writing any appearance in court, deposition, arbitration or any proceeding by the registered legal aid attorney, and review such activities with the supervised registered legal aid attorney, to the extent required for the protection of the client or customer;
- (5) Must read, approve, and personally sign any pleadings, briefs, or other similar documents prepared by the registered legal aid attorney before their filing, and must read and approve any documents prepared by the registered legal aid attorney before their submission for execution; and
- (6) May, in his or her absence, designate another attorney meeting the requirements of (1) through (5) to provide the supervision required under this rule.

(Subd (h) amended and renumbered effective March 1, 2019; adopted as subd (g) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007; previously amended effective January 1, 2019.)

(i) Inherent power of Supreme Court

Nothing in this rule may be construed as affecting the power of the Supreme Court of California to exercise its inherent jurisdiction over the practice of law in California.

(Subd (i) amended and relettered effective January 1, 2007; adopted as subd (h) effective November 15, 2004.)

(j) Effect of rule on multijurisdictional practice

Nothing in this rule limits the scope of activities permissible under existing law by attorneys who are not licensees of the State Bar of California.

(Subd (j) amended effective January 1, 2019; adopted as subd (i) effective November 15, 2004; previously relettered effective January 1, 2007.)

Rule 9.45 amended effective March 1, 2019; adopted as rule 964 by the Supreme Court effective November 15, 2004; previously amended and renumbered effective January 1, 2007; previously amended effective January 1, 2019.