



The State Bar of California

Committee of Bar Examiners Teleconference

Open Session Minutes
Thursday, December 14, 2023
11:33 a.m. – 2:01 p.m.

Time Meeting Commenced: The Committee of Bar Examiners meeting commenced in open session at 11:33 a.m. The meeting adjourned at 2:01 p.m.

Time Meeting Adjourned: 2:01 p.m.

Chair: Michael Cao, M.D

Committee Coordinator: Devan McFarland

Members Present: James A. Bolton, Ph.D., Michael Cao, M.D, Alex H. Chan, James Efting, Kareem Gongora [joined late], Paul A. Kramer, Esther P. Lin [joined late], Justice Shama H. Mesiwala, Ashley Silva-Guzman, Judge Renee C. Reyna [joined late], Vincent Reyes, Alan Yochelson

Members Absent: Robert S. Brody, Larry Kaplan, Alexander C. Lawrence, Jr.

State Bar Executive Staff Present: Donna Hershkowitz, Leah Wilson

OPEN SESSION

Call to Order

The Committee of Bar Examiners was called to order by Chair Cao.

I. Chair's Time

A. Roll Call

Roll call was taken and a quorum was established.

Call for Public Comment

Chair Cao called for public comment, inquiring as to whether there were person(s) who wished to comment on any agenda item. The following comments were provided to the Committee:

1. Margaret Molloy

Margaret Molloy provided public comment on item II. A. Action on Inspection Report, Probationary Status, and Termination of Registration – Peoples College of Law. Margaret Molloy spoke of the Peoples College of Law mission and mandate to serve a historically marginalized student population and their role in filling a large and ever-increasing gap in equitable access to a law school education, a lack of diversity in the legal profession and the lack of representation of California's diverse population in the administration of the legal system. Margaret Molloy urged the Committee to consider the law school's historically marginalized student population and vote to approve Peoples College of Law's request to remain open until May 2025.

2. Cynthia Anderson Barker

Cynthia Anderson Barker, a civil rights attorney, expressed their support for the Peoples College of Law. Cynthia Anderson Barker urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to fulfill the State Bar's mission and vote to approve Peoples College of Law's request to remain open until the current students graduate.

3. Katrina Hayes

Katrina Hayes, Los Angeles Tenants Union member, advised the Committee of Bar Examiners on the role the Peoples of College of Law's faculty and alumni have had in representing the union's tenants in court. Katrina Hayes expressed the importance in allowing Peoples of College of Law to remain open so their current and future students can continue to provide legal representation to those members of the population who do not have another means to afford representation.

4. Todd Hill

Todd Hill provided public comment on item II. A. Action on Inspection Report, Probationary Status, and Termination of Registration – Peoples College of Law. Todd Hill expressed their belief that Peoples College of Law has not met the obligations and rhetoric of the school as a beacon of access to the law for minority and vulnerable communities. Todd Hill expressed the Peoples College of Law has failed to meet its' statutory and legal obligations and it is the State Bar's duty to protect the public.

5. Angela Sombrano

Angela Sombrano, a graduate of the Peoples College of Law, requested the Committee of Bar Examiners allow the law school more time to reorganize to meet the regulatory obligations and allow the currently enrolled students to graduate.

6. Anabela Vasiva

Anabela Vasiva, a currently enrolled student at Peoples College of Law, expressed their support for the Peoples College of Law and urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to extend the law school's probation so the current students can graduate.

7. Esmail Venegas

Esmail Venegas, a currently enrolled student at Peoples College of Law, expressed their support for the Peoples College of Law and urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to extend the law school's probation so the current students can graduate.

8. Pasquale Thoris

Pasquale Thoris, an attorney and graduate of the Peoples College of Law, expressed the importance of access to legal services in underserved communities. Pasquale Thoris requested the Committee of Bar Examiners allow the law school more time to meet the probation requirements and the ability to continue to serve their students.

9. Nathan Gordon

Nathan Gordon, an attorney and graduate of the Peoples College of Law, provided public comment on their experience at the Peoples College of Law and the opportunity they had to attend the law school so they could represent their community and fight for the rights of minorities, the disabled and the elderly. Nathan Gordon expressed the harm that would result in these communities if the law school was to close.

10. Carlos Vasquez

Carlos Vasquez provided public comment as a concerned citizen and resident of Los Angeles. Carlos Vasquez expressed concern that the Peoples College of Law would be shut down and the negative effects the closure would have on unrepresented communities.

11. Alexander Hall

Alexander Hall, a first-year law student at Peoples College of Law, urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to allow the law school to continue to operate. Alexander Hall expressed the importance of social justice at the Peoples College of Law and the opportunity the law school provides to serve the community.

12. Gary Silbiger

Gary Silbiger, co-founder of the Peoples College of Law, advised of their goal to provide more outreach to the alumni and early supporters of the law school to include them in the decision-making process. Gary Silbiger also stated their interest in helping to form a Peoples College of Law Alumni Association.

13. Ira Spiro

Ira Spiro, former Dean of the Peoples College of Law and volunteer on several State Bar committees, expressed "they would hate to have to look back on my service on any State committee and remember that I took a vote to ruin the opportunity of half a dozen or so law students to complete their legal education."

14. Jairo

Jairo provided public comment on the unaccredited law school data and the decrease in unaccredited law schools, but the increase in students enrolling in unaccredited law schools. Jairo stated unaccredited law schools are vital to diversifying the legal profession and the closure of the Peoples College of Law would take opportunities away from underserved communities.

15. Daniel Marquez

Daniel Marquez, UCLA Law School graduate, advised the Committee of Bar Examiners of their experience working with Peoples College of Law alumni over their twenty-year career working at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. Daniel Marquez expressed

that Peoples College of Law graduates have been and continue to be instrumental in protecting the rights of renters, consumers, and disabled people. Daniel Marquez urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to allow the Peoples College of Law to remain open and provide the necessary resources so the school can do so.

16. Clemente Franco

Clemente Franco, Peoples College of Law board member, expressed their disillusionment with the current situation and urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to look at the law school as a partner to address some of the issues the State of California.

17. John Duane

John Duane, Peoples College of Law professor, advised the Committee of Bar Examiners on the role volunteers play at the Peoples College of Law and effects the pandemic had on the law school's volunteer base. John Duane spoke of the administrative and resource challenges the Peoples College of Law has faced over the past several years and the importance of partnership and support from the State Bar rather than adversarial relationship. John Duane urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to, at the very least, allow the current students to graduate and provide the law school with the opportunity to try to work in partnership with the State Bar to come into compliance.

18. Ana Maria Lobos

Ana Maria Lobos, Interim Dean of the Peoples College of Law, provided public comment on the December 14, 2023, Peoples College of Law inspection report. Dean Lobos disagreed with the State Bar's findings of noncompliance and advised all Peoples College of Law students were provided with a complete and accurate disclosure statement prior to enrollment. Dean Lobos also disagreed with the report's findings that the law school's leadership is unclear and disagreed with the report's findings that the law school is not following its own curriculum plan. In addition, Dean Lobos addressed the report's findings that at least one faculty member teaching a course is not a licensed attorney and contested that the rules and guidelines do not require professors to be licensed attorneys. Dean Lobos also responded to the report's concerns that the law school has not found a new building to purchase and addressed these concerns by advising the purchase of a building depends on whether the Committee of Bar Examiners will allow the school to stay open. Dean Lobos asked the Committee of Bar Examiners to extend the probation until May 2024 to allow the school the opportunity to bring itself into full compliance or at the very least, allow the school to remain open to allow their current students to graduate.

19. Bill Maestats

Bill Maestats, a licensed attorney with 40 years of legal practice, conveyed the vital function the Peoples College of Law provides to the State of California and urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to allow the law school to remain open.

20. Dan Kaplovitch

Dan Kaplovitch, an instructor at the Peoples College of Law, advised the Committee of Bar Examiners of their role as an instructor of criminal procedure and evidence in addition to overseeing the Criminal Defense clinic. Dan Kaplovitch urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to allow the law school to remain open.

21. Keeairra Dashiell

Keeairra Dashiell, a current student at the Peoples College of Law, provided public comment on their experience at the law school and shared their personal background, including being sentenced to life in prison at 18 years old. Keeairra Dashiell shared that while incarcerated they wrote the petition that ultimately reduced their sentence. Keeairra Dashiell also raised the issue that Peoples College of Law's position as a fixed facility and the problem that would pose in transferring to a different institution if the school were to be forced to close as there are only two other fixed facilities in the State of California and both are at least 100 miles away. Another issue raised is the problem that would arise with the duplication of courses if the current Peoples College of Law students were forced to transfer upon the law school's closure.

22. Robert D. Skeels

Robert D. Skeels, a graduate of and current instructor at the Peoples College of Law, advised the Committee of Bar Examiners of the law school's cluster plan and confirmed the plan ensures each student receives courses on all substantive subjects tested on the California Bar Examination. Robert D. Skeels implored the Committee of Bar Examiners to allow the law school to remain open.

23. Christian Contreras

Christian Contreras, a civil rights attorney, and Peoples College of Law board member emphasized the importance of a school like the Peoples College of Law especially in a time where advocates are vital. Christian Contreras urged the Committee of Bar Examiners to allow the law school to remain open until at least May 2024.

II. Educational Standards

A. Action on Inspection Report, Probationary Status, and Termination of Registration – Peoples College of Law

MOVED, that the Committee of Bar Examiners adopts the October 2023 Inspection Report of Peoples College of Law and all of its findings and recommendations as set forth in Attachment A and finds that the law school is not in compliance and has not made adequate progress toward compliance for the reasons set forth in that report as well as the law school's failure to fulfill its duties regarding Rule 4.241 Disclosures. The committee therefore withdraws the registration of Peoples College of Law and terminates its degree-granting authority effective as of May 31, 2024.

FURTHER MOVED, any students whose studies are still in process as of May 31, 2024, will need to complete or transfer to complete their legal education, and the law school is directed to support their students in their transfer.

FURTHER MOVED, Peoples College of Law will not be allowed to accept new enrollments and must adhere to all rules and guidelines during this time.

FURTHER MOVED, that the law school is directed to identify a custodian of records to assist students and graduates with transcript requests and advise its students and alumni as well as the State Bar of the procedure for requesting records.

Moved by Alex H. Chan, seconded by Ashley Silva-Guzman

Ayes – (9) James A. Bolton, Ph.D, Michael Cao, M.D, Alex H. Chan, Kareem Gongora, Paul A. Kramer, Esther Lin, Ashley Silva-Guzman, Vincent Reyes, Alan Yochelson

Noes – (3) James Efting, Justice Sham H. Mesiwala, Bethany Peak

Abstain – (0)

Recuse- (0)

Absent – (4) Robert S. Brody, Larry Kaplan, Alexander C. Lawrence, Jr., Judge Renee C. Reyna

Minutes adopted.

CLOSED SESSION

None.

ADJOURN