



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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Bar Exam to be Online Remote Essay Test

Accommodations to be provided for individuals with disabilities

LANSING, MI, May 18, 2020 – The Michigan Supreme Court announced today that the [Board of Law Examiners](#) (BLE) will administer a one-day bar exam on July 28, 2020, in the form of a remote, online essay-format exam instead of the traditional two-day in-person examination. The BLE is working with Michigan’s five law schools (and the University of Toledo) to make sure that individuals with disabilities who cannot take the exam online are able to take the test in person with appropriate measures to protect their health. Holding an online July exam will place applicants on the same path as prior July examinees so that those who pass will become licensed lawyers in Michigan at the same time as those taking the bar exam in previous years.

“The board conducted extensive research and consultations to make this decision, including outreach to Michigan public health officials and law school deans, while monitoring developments in the pandemic and approaches of other states,” said Justice Brian K. Zahra, the Court’s liaison to the BLE. “I am confident the Michigan essay examination will adequately test the applicants’ legal knowledge and skill. The public can be confident that those who pass this exam will have requisite knowledge of state law to become a member of the Michigan bar. Likewise, law school graduates can sit for the exam without risking public health.”

To implement the decision, the Court entered [Administrative Order No. 2020-15](#) pursuant to its constitutional and statutory authority to supervise and regulate the practice of law. The order requires accommodations for in-person testing be provided to applicants under the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, applicants who did not register to take the exam on a laptop must contact the BLE if they are unable to take the exam on a computer.

The BLE recommended that the Court take this action based on five key considerations:

1. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services informed the BLE that they cannot predict with certainty that any in-person examination could be safely administered in 2020. In addition, the lead times necessary to secure adequate facilities and prepare to administer an in-person examination under unknown conditions (i.e. proctors, PPE, social distancing, self-reporting of health conditions, etc.) present insurmountable obstacles.
2. An essay-only exam will test applicants’ knowledge of Michigan law, and a passing score will be sufficient to conclude an applicant should be admitted to the Bar. Experts will work with the BLE to determine an appropriate passing score based on results from previous July exams.
3. The software provider of the BLE’s in-person laptop exams has confirmed its ability to conduct an online essay exam and to verify that the administration was honest.
4. Administering the bar exam in July keeps applicants on the traditional track toward becoming an attorney.
5. The 15-question essay exam covers both state and federal law that would be addressed in the 200 question Multistate Bar Exam, which cannot be administered online this year.

Given that applicants will be on the same professional track as previous July examinees, the BLE did not recommend any limited licensure scheme be adopted.

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