

Regulations Governing Applications for Admission to Virginia Bar Pursuant to Rule of the Supreme Court of Virginia 1A:1, effective December 1, 2018.

INTRODUCTION

Each person who has met the educational requirements and has proved that he or she satisfies the character and fitness requirements as established by the law of Virginia may seek admission to the Virginia State Bar by taking the Virginia Bar Examination. A primary purpose of the Virginia Bar Examination is to determine whether an applicant is able to demonstrate his or her current minimum competency to engage in the practice of law in Virginia.

In addition to admission to the Bar by examination, the Supreme Court of Virginia, in its discretion under Code § 54.1-3931, has determined that a person who has been admitted to practice law before the court of last resort of a state or territory of the United States or the District of Columbia for a minimum of five years, who has been admitted to the bar of a Reciprocal Jurisdiction, hereinafter defined, and who has been engaged in the lawful practice of law on a full-time basis for at least three of the immediately preceding five years, may seek to demonstrate that he or she has made such progress in the practice of law that it would be unreasonable to require the person to take an examination to demonstrate current minimum competency. In other words, an applicant's experience in the practice of law may, at the discretion of the Court, be accepted as adequate evidence of current minimum competency in lieu of the bar examination. For purposes of admission without examination, "full-time" means practicing law for a minimum of 32 hours per week.

The Supreme Court of Virginia has assigned to the Virginia Board of Bar Examiners (the "Board") the responsibility to assess the information furnished by an applicant for admission without examination and to determine, from the information so furnished, whether the applicant's experience in the practice of law is sufficient to demonstrate his or her current competence, good character, and fitness to practice law in Virginia.

In order to guide the Board in its determinations, the Court has adopted the following criteria to be applied by the Board in assessing applications for admission to the bar of Virginia without examination:

THRESHOLD REQUIREMENTS

1. Reciprocity. The Board will consider an application for admission without examination only from a person who has been admitted to practice before the court of last resort of a jurisdiction (i.e., a state or territory of the United States, or the District of Columbia) that permits lawyers licensed in Virginia to be admitted to practice without taking a bar examination in such jurisdiction (a "Reciprocal Jurisdiction"). The purpose of the reciprocity requirement is to encourage other jurisdictions to grant the same privilege to Virginia lawyers.

2. Minimum Period of Bar Admission. Before being eligible to apply for admission without examination, the applicant must have been admitted to practice law before the court of last resort of a state or territory of the United States, or the District of Columbia, for at least five years.

3. Requirement of Minimum Current Practice. An applicant may apply for admission without examination only if the applicant has been engaged in the full-time practice of law for at least three of

the last five years immediately preceding his or her application for admission to the Virginia State Bar. Except as provided in Threshold Requirement 4 below, the applicant must have been licensed to engage in the practice of law in the jurisdiction where such practice occurred. Practice from an office located in a foreign country will not be accepted as qualifying practice unless it is the full-time practice of the law of the United States and/or any of its states and territories. Persons holding a Virginia Corporate Counsel Certificate under Part I of Rule 1A:5 may receive credit as provided in such Rule. Persons holding a Virginia Legal Aid Counsel Certificate under Rule 1A:9 may receive credit as provided in such Rule.

4. Practice of law. For purposes of admission without examination, “practice of law” ordinarily means (i) private practice as a sole practitioner or for a law firm, legal services office, legal clinic, or similar entity; (ii) practice as an attorney for a corporation, limited liability company, partnership, trust, individual or other entity, provided such practice involved the primary duties of furnishing legal counsel, drafting legal documents and pleadings, interpreting and giving advice regarding the law, and preparing, trying or presenting cases before courts or administrative agencies; (iii) practice as an attorney for the federal or a state or local government with the same primary duties as described above regarding attorneys for a corporation; (iv) employment as a judge for the federal or a state government; (v) service as a judicial law clerk for a state or federal court; or (vi) service on active duty in a branch of the armed forces of the United States as a judge advocate or law specialist, as those terms are defined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, 10 U.S.C. § 801, as amended, provided that such position requires a valid license to practice law and involves the same primary duties as described above regarding attorneys for a corporation. With the exception of the positions described in (iv) and (v) above, qualifying law practice must have involved an attorney-client relationship and, with the exception of the positions described in (iv), (v) and (vi) above, must have occurred subsequent to having been issued a license to engage in the practice of law in the jurisdiction where the law practice was conducted, unless the applicant establishes, by satisfactory evidence, that such practice is permitted by statute, rule, court order, or by written confirmation from the admitting or disciplinary authority of the jurisdiction where the practice occurred. The applicant must demonstrate that he or she meets the practice of law requirement to the satisfaction of the Board. The Board may require the applicant to produce substantiating evidence which may include, but is not limited to, a detailed description of legal services provided, letters from clients and/or opposing counsel, certification of a judge, samples of work product, and detailed time records. In addition, the Board may require the applicant to appear personally before the Board and furnish such additional information as may be required. For purposes of admission without examination, “practice of law” ordinarily does not mean document review work.

5. Legal Education. The applicant must have received either (i) a J.D. degree from a law school that was approved by the American Bar Association at the time of such applicant’s graduation, or (ii) a J.D. degree from a law school not approved by the American Bar Association at the time of such applicant’s graduation (including a J.D. degree from a foreign law school), and an LL.M. from a law school approved by the American Bar Association at the time of such applicant’s graduation, and passed a bar exam in a state or territory of the United States, or the District of Columbia.

6. Bar Examination History. The applicant must have failed no more than two bar examinations of any of the states or territories of the United States (including Virginia), or the District of Columbia, and must have failed no bar examination within the five years immediately preceding the application

for admission to the Virginia State Bar.

7. Instruction in Virginia Law. The applicant must have completed twelve hours of instruction approved by the Virginia Continuing Legal Education Board on Virginia substantive and/or procedural law within six months immediately prior to filing an application and must have read and be familiar with the Virginia Rules of Professional Conduct.

ASSESSMENT OF FITNESS AND PROGRESS

If an applicant provides satisfactory evidence that he or she meets all of the above threshold requirements, the Board will thereafter determine from the evidence provided by the applicant and the results of any investigation conducted by the Board or its designee whether such applicant (i) is a person of honest demeanor and good moral character and possesses the requisite fitness to perform the obligations and responsibilities of a practicing attorney, and (ii) has made such progress in the practice of law that it would be unreasonable to require the applicant to take an examination to demonstrate current minimum competency. The applicant has the burden to prove by clear and convincing evidence that he or she is a person of honest demeanor and good moral character and possesses the requisite fitness to perform the obligations and responsibilities of a practicing attorney and thus is a proper person to practice law in Virginia. If an applicant fails to answer any question on the Character and Fitness Questionnaire or which is otherwise propounded by the Board, or to supply any requested documentary material, the Board may find that the applicant has not met the burden of proving his or her good moral character.

The primary purposes of character and fitness screening before admission to the Virginia Bar are to assure the protection of the public and safeguard the system of justice. An attorney should be one whose record of conduct justifies the trust of clients, adversaries, courts, and others with respect to the professional duties owed to them. A record manifesting a significant deficiency in the honesty, trustworthiness, diligence, or reliability of an applicant may constitute a basis for denial of admission. The revelation or discovery of any of the following may be treated as cause for further inquiry before the Board decides whether the applicant possesses the character and fitness to practice law:

- A. commission or conviction of a crime;
- B. violation of the honor code of the applicant's college or university, law school, or other academic misconduct;
- C. making of false statements or omissions, including failing to provide complete and accurate information concerning the applicant's past;
- D. misconduct in employment;
- E. other than an honorable discharge from any branch of the armed services;
- F. acts involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation;
- G. abuse of legal process;
- H. neglect of financial responsibilities;

- I. neglect of professional obligations;
- J. violation of an order of a court;
- K. denial of admission to the bar in another jurisdiction on character and fitness grounds;
- L. disciplinary action by a lawyer disciplinary agency or other professional disciplinary agency of any jurisdiction, including pending, unresolved disciplinary complaints against the applicant;
- M. commission of an act constituting the unauthorized practice of law, or unresolved complaints involving allegations of the unauthorized practice of law; or
- N. any other conduct which reflects adversely upon the character or fitness of an applicant.

The Board will determine whether the present character and fitness of an applicant qualifies the applicant for admission to the practice of law. In making this determination, the following factors will be considered in assigning weight and significance to the applicant's prior conduct:

- i. age of the applicant at the time of the conduct;
- ii. recency of the conduct;
- iii. reliability of the information concerning the conduct;
- iv. seriousness of the conduct;
- v. factors underlying the conduct;
- vi. cumulative effect of the conduct or information;
- vii. evidence of rehabilitation;
- viii. positive social contributions of the applicant since the conduct;
- ix. candor of the applicant in the admissions process; and
- x. materiality of any omissions or misrepresentations.

In addition, an application will not be approved unless the applicant is a member in good standing of the bar of the Reciprocal Jurisdiction at the time the Board receives the character report and conducts its review of that report. If the applicant's license has ever been suspended or revoked in any jurisdiction, it must be fully reinstated and in good standing (no pending disciplinary charges).

In evaluating whether an applicant has demonstrated satisfactory progress in the practice of law for admission to the practice of law in Virginia without examination, the Board considers whether the following requirements are evident from the information supplied by the applicant and from the investigative report:

- 1. Knowledge of the fundamental principles of law and the ability to recall that knowledge, to reason, to analyze, and to apply one's knowledge to relevant facts;

2. The ability to communicate clearly, candidly and civilly with clients, attorneys, courts, and others;
3. The ability to exercise good judgment in conducting one's professional business;
4. The ability to conduct oneself with a high degree of honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness in all professional relationships and with respect to all legal obligations;
5. The ability to conduct oneself with respect for and in accordance with the law and the Rules of Professional Conduct;
6. The ability to avoid acts that exhibit disregard for the health, safety and welfare of others;
7. The ability to conduct oneself diligently and reliably in fulfilling all obligations to clients, attorneys, courts, and others;
8. The ability to use honesty and good judgment in financial dealings on behalf of oneself, clients, and others;
9. The ability to comply with deadlines and time constraints; and
10. The ability to conduct oneself professionally and in a manner that engenders respect for the law and the profession.

Last amended by Order dated September 13, 2023; effective November 12, 2023.