

**Consumer Legal Guide**

# **Your Guide to Law-Related Careers**



**ILLINOIS STATE  
BAR ASSOCIATION**

If you are interested in the law there are a number of career options open to you. We have listed below a few law-related careers, with basic information on educational requirements and vocational possibilities.

## **BECOMING A LAWYER**

As to background education prior to attending law school, one should feel no constraints in terms of concentration as an undergraduate. Usually a liberal arts education is beneficial; however, those with educational backgrounds in accounting, business, health care, engineering or philosophy majors become effective and successful attorneys as well. The most vital aspect of the undergraduate education for law school is receiving good grades in whatever field of concentration you choose, as well as developing your general communication skills. The most important function of an attorney is the communication of ideas, both verbally and in writing. Other skills that you should be working to develop include a good vocabulary, a good memory, ability to listen, ability to express ideas and thoughts concisely and articulately, be able to comprehend complex written materials, and more.

Sometime prior to or during one's senior year in college, if going straight to law school, the LSAT admissions test, administered by the Law School Admission Council (<http://www.lsac.org/>) must be taken. Similar to the ACT or the SAT, the test is used by law schools in the admissions process. Law schools determine admissions on the basis of a formula computing grades and the LSAT tests score together, as well as other factors.

If you think you may be seriously interested in a law career, you may wish to consider contacting local law offices, legal service organizations or other law-related entities to see if they require any assistance, even as a volunteer, during what time you have available. Any exposure you can gain in the field will benefit you in your future career.

Law school routinely takes three years of full-time study; however, many of the law schools in Illinois accept part time students.

Applicants to the Bar in Illinois must: 1) be at least 21 years of age; 2) have a high

school diploma or the functional equivalent; 3) complete 90 semester hours in attendance at a qualified university; and 4) successfully attend and graduate from a law school accredited by the American Bar Association. Having met these requirements, the applicant must be of good moral character and general fitness to practice law, pass the bar examination and the “ethics test,” register with the Illinois Supreme Court and be sworn in.

Board of Admissions to the Bar  
625 South College Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62704  
Phone: 217.522.5917  
[www.ibaby.org](http://www.ibaby.org)

## **BECOMING A JUDGE**

The Illinois Constitution provides that eligibility to become a judge of the state court system of Illinois includes United States citizenship, an Illinois license as attorney-at-law, and residency in the geographic area that selects the judge.

Candidates for a seat on the Illinois Supreme Court, for most seats on the Illinois Appellate Court, and for Illinois Circuit Court Judge are nominated in the primary election and elected in the general election. The Illinois Supreme Court appoints a small, designated number of Appellate Court Judges. All Associate Judges of the Circuit Courts of Illinois are appointed by the Circuit Judges of each circuit.

Supreme Court Judges and Appellate Court Judges are elected for 10-year terms. Circuit Court Judges are elected for 6-year terms. Associate Judges are appointed for 4-year terms.

Elected judges may seek additional terms by running for retention on the non-partisan portion of the ballot in general elections. Voters are given the option of voting “yes” or “no” to retain a judge in office for another term. To win retention, a judge must receive 60% “yes” votes. Associate Judges may seek reappointment through the vote of the Circuit Judges. To win reappointment, an associate judge must receive 60% of the votes of the Circuit Judges.

The Illinois Supreme Court may fill vacancies in elected judicial positions by appointment until the vacancy is filled by election. This includes vacancies for the elected positions on

the Supreme Court, Appellate Court, and Circuit Court.

The State of Illinois is divided into 5 districts, which are subdivided into 22 judicial circuits. The first district (Cook County) elects 3 Supreme Court judges. The other 4 districts each elect 1 Supreme Court judge. Each district elects a number of appellate court judges. Every county of the State of Illinois elects at least 1 Resident Circuit Judge. Each circuit, as a whole, elects a number of at large Circuit Judges.

## **BECOMING AN ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE**

Administrative Law Judges are normally employed in a civil service position by a public sector agency (usually a federal, state or municipal agency), thereby placing their work functions under the “Executive” branch of government, instead of the “Judicial” branch. In handling an administrative case, and Administrative Law Judge (sometimes referred to as “hearing officer,” “referee,” or “examiner”) must exercise functions, which are similar, but not identical to the role of an elected or appointed circuit court judge. See *Fulwood v. Heckler*, 594 F.Supp. 540, 547 (D.D.C. 1984).

For example, certain “similar” judicial functions performed by Administrative Law Judges include authority to perform the following “case” responsibilities:

- administer oaths and affirmations
- issue subpoenas authorized by law
- rule on offers of proof and receive relevant evidence
- take or cause depositions to be taken
- regulate the course of the hearing
- hold conferences for the settlement or simplification of the issues, and
- rule on procedural requests or similar matters.

However, certain differences include the fact that many Administrative Law Judges do not make final or binding decisions in their

cases, but issue findings or recommendations based on the evidence presented in the proceeding.

Furthermore, Administrative Law Judges tend to take a much more active part in the case in which they preside than do judges in the courtroom. Part of the administrative function in this regard includes active fact gathering from all parties involved in the case, fulfilling their obligation to make a clear record to anticipate a review of the findings by a higher agency authority and/or judicial authority. As a result of this mandate, these administrative officers will often be more actively involved by asking more direct questions of the parties and witnesses than their judicial counterparts in the circuit courts.

Many federal and state agencies hire Administrative Law Judges pursuant to Civil Service regulations and merit selection guidelines. Federal agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, National Labor Relations Board, Office of Management and Budget, employ many administrative law judges. State agencies such as the Department of Employment Security, Department of Revenue, Department of Children and Family Services, also hire these administrative professionals. All of these agencies require that an Administrative Law Judge possess a law degree from an accredited institution, and be a licensed attorney in good standing.

## **BECOMING A LAW LIBRARIAN**

Law librarians work in a variety of legal settings, but most commonly in law schools, large private law firms or government libraries. This profession demands specialized training. The American Association of Law Libraries states that “85% of those working as law librarians have a graduate degree in library science,” with most jobs requiring a master’s degree from an American Library Association accredited institution. Nearly 30% of all law librarians also have a Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree. It is often the case that law librarians at law schools also hold faculty status so they must have a law degree. There is usually no law degree requirement for law librarian positions in large law firms, corporations or public, county or governmental law libraries.

American Association of Law Libraries  
53 W. Jackson, Suite 940  
Chicago, IL 60604  
Phone: 312.939.4764  
<http://www.aallnet.org/services/>

## **BECOMING A LEGAL SECRETARY**

Being a legal secretary can be demanding and rewarding work. While college degrees are helpful, they are not necessary. What is needed is a good work ethic with attention to accuracy and detail-oriented proficiency. This isn't just a typing job. You may be asked to complete complicated tax documents or important divorce or child custody papers to be filed in the court. Taking this work seriously is paramount. Accuracy, grammar and spelling are all important. It is also important to have a working knowledge of basic accounting skills, as you may be responsible for billing clients. Be familiar with a variety of office machines, computers and other technologies. Legal secretaries in small firms may be responsible for answering phones, making appointments, preparing documents, creating and maintaining complex filing systems so the lawyers are able to check for conflicts between clients. This position requires a high degree of confidentiality and professionalism.

Legal Secretaries International, Inc.  
8902 Sunnywood Dr.  
Houston, TX 77088  
[www.legalsecretaries.org](http://www.legalsecretaries.org)

## **BECOMING A SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER FOR THE COURTS**

Sign language interpreters facilitate communication between the deaf and/or hard of hearing population and people who can hear. Courthouse interpreters must remain detached and unemotional and must translate accurately and take great care to not modify meaning or tone. Court interpreters may work in a variety of settings, including attorney-client meetings, depositions, trials, sentencing hearings, and more. Court interpreters may interpret

verbal conversations or may be asked to interpret written documents into American Sign Language (ASL). This profession usually requires specialized training. Interpreters must pay careful attention and understand what is being communicated, which means being familiar with courtroom procedures and terminology. Mental dexterity and a good memory are vital. High levels of professionalism and confidentiality are required. This profession is one that allows great flexibility in work hours and you may be asked to visit a variety of law offices or courtrooms. It should be noted that American Sign Language has its own grammatical rules, sentence structure, cultural nuances, idioms, etc, and involves much more than a simple literal translation. There is currently no certification or licensing of sign language interpreter; however, both the National Association of the Deaf and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf offer certification for sign interpreters and have developed an exam.

National Association of Judiciary Interpreters  
603 Stewart St., Suite 610  
Seattle, Washington 98101  
Phone: 206.267.2300  
<http://www.najit.org>

## **BECOMING A COURT REPORTER**

Court reporters have the responsibility of recording everything that is said by all of the parties participating in formal trials. Courses on becoming a court reporter are taught at community colleges, four-year universities and at private business schools. These training programs can take two to four years. High school graduation is required, and it is important that court reporters have strong language skills with a good vocabulary. The National Court Reporter's Association has lists of schools that offer courses in court reporting.

National Court Reporters Association  
8224 Old Courthouse Road  
Vienna, Virginia 22182-3808  
Phone: 703.556.6272  
[http://www.ncraonline.org/about/  
index.shtml](http://www.ncraonline.org/about/index.shtml)

## **BECOMING A LAW-ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONAL**

Most law enforcement officers must meet certain minimum requirements to serve as police or state troopers. These may include a minimum age requirement of 21 years; must be a citizen of the United States, must have a valid driver's license, must not have been convicted of a felony, must be a high school graduate and may require an associate of arts or sciences degree or other college credit and/or work experience. Applicants may also have to pass physical examinations (including agility, vision and strength) and written tests.

Illinois Law Enforcement Training  
and Standards Board  
600 S. Second St., Suite 300  
Springfield, IL 62704-2542  
Phone: 217.782.4540  
<http://www.ptb.state.il.us/>

## **BECOMING A COURT CLERK OR BAILIFF**

Court clerks administer oaths in courtrooms, take responsibility and custody of physical evidence introduced at trial, and help in the general administration of the trial by providing assistance to the judge and the attorneys. Court clerks should not be confused with the Clerk of the Court, usually an elected position. The Clerk of the Court is responsible for the court complex and is custodian of all court records, maintains dockets, collects fees, keeps minutes of court proceedings, files documents like licenses and wills, etc.

Bailiffs are often law enforcement officers, assigned to a courtroom to keep peace and assist the judge, courtroom clerks, witnesses and jury, and whose duties vary according to jurisdiction and judge but often include maintaining order in the courtroom. See "becoming a law-enforcement professional" above.

## **BECOMING A MEDIATOR**

Mediators do not decide cases; rather, mediators facilitate decisions between parties to help reach a fair and equitable settlement acceptable to both sides of an issue. Resolving disputes through mediation, or other forms of alternative dispute resolution, is becoming more and more popular as an economical and efficient means to settle disputes outside of the courts. Mediation is a voluntary procedure that requires full disclosure of all facts related to the dispute at hand. A mediator's role is to assist in discussions and help elicit as much information as possible.

Mediators should undergo specific training in mediation procedures and practices, through a trained and qualified organization. Mediators are held to strict standards of confidentiality, as are lawyers, though there are no official licensure or registration procedures. The Mediation Council of Illinois has set professional standards of practice for mediators, which states that "Mediators should hold either a bachelor of law degree; a J.D. degree, a master's degree, or equivalent training or experience in mental health or related disciplines. Mediators shall be in good standing in the professional organizations of their disciplines." In addition, their standards state "Mediators shall have undergone at least forty hours of training specifically in mediation, led by qualified mediators and/or by a recognized training organization before representing themselves to the public as mediators."

Mediation Council of Illinois, Inc.  
3540 N. Southport, Suite #453  
Chicago, IL 60657  
Phone: 312.641.3000  
[www.mediationcouncilofillinois.org](http://www.mediationcouncilofillinois.org)

## **BECOMING A LEGAL ASSISTANT OR PARALEGAL**

While Illinois does not license or regulate legal assistants or paralegals, there are courses of study that you can take at a range of community colleges, universities or specialty schools in Illinois. The American Bar Association can

provide a list of accredited paralegal/legal assistant programs across the country. The definition of a “legal assistant” as defined by the ABA Standing Committee states, “A *legal assistant or paralegal is a person, qualified by education, training or work experience who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity and who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible.*”

It is important to stress that Illinois legal assistants/paralegals must work under the direct supervision of a lawyer licensed to practice in Illinois. As a legal assistant/paralegal you will be expected to maintain confidentiality with regard to the lawyer’s clients and business. You will, in effect, be accountable to the lawyer for all your professional work.

Illinois Paralegal Association  
PO Box 452  
New Lenox, IL 60451-0452  
Phone: 815.462.4620  
IPA@ipaonline.org

## **WORKING FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AS A LAWYER, PARALEGAL OR OTHER LEGAL PROFESSIONAL**

There are numerous options for those interested in pursuing careers with the federal government. Because of the variety and complexity of job offerings, we recommend you research:

- The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) via [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov) (click on employment then click on support vacancies)
- The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) via [www.jobs.irs.gov](http://www.jobs.irs.gov) (click on other professional careers)
- The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) via [www.dea.gov](http://www.dea.gov) (click on job applicants)
- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) via [www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov) (click on jobs then click on types of jobs at ATF)

**There are numerous other professions that could be considered law-related. You could become a:**

Corrections Officer

Forensic Scientist

High School Law/Government/  
Political Science Teacher

Human Resources/Personnel Director

JAG Officer (Judge Advocate General)  
or Military Lawyer

Legal Nurse Consultant

Legal Researcher (Lexis/Nexus, Westlaw)

Legislator or Other Elected Official

Lobbyist

Parole Officer or Probation Officer

Private Investigator or Private Detective

Transportation Security Screener/  
Customs Officer

Victim Advocate

Additional information on many professions can be found through the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://bls.gov/home.htm> and specific information for students can be found at <http://bls.gov/k12/index.htm>

For more resources on law-related education, visit the Illinois State Bar Association's LRE Website at <http://www.isba.org/Sections/lawrelateded.asp>

**This pamphlet is prepared and published by the Illinois State Bar Association as a public service.**

Every effort has been made to provide accurate information at the time of publication.

For the most current information, please consult your lawyer. If you need a lawyer and do not have one, call Illinois Lawyer Finder at (800) 922-8757 or online **[www.IllinoisLawyerFinder.com](http://www.IllinoisLawyerFinder.com)**

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### **Pamphlets Available**

Adoption

Advice to Newly Marrieds

Auto Accidents

Automobile Insurance and Accidents

Bankruptcy for Individuals

Being a Guardian

Buying a Car

Buying a Home

Buying on Time

Estate Planning

General Practitioner

Getting a Divorce

Guide to Jury Service

Health Care Privacy

Landlord-Tenant

Law-Related Careers

Patients' Rights

Rights of Gays, Lesbians, BiSexual and Transgender

Selling a Home

Starting a Business

What is a Living Trust

Your Guide to Illinois Traffic Courts

Your Health Care

Your Rights if Arrested

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For more information on legal issues or to obtain single copies of each of the pamphlets listed above (free to individuals), please visit **[www.ISBALawyers.com](http://www.ISBALawyers.com)**

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**ILLINOIS BAR CENTER**  
424 S. Second Street  
Springfield, IL 62701-1779  
[www.isba.org](http://www.isba.org)