

Professional Licensure

States should provide support for the costs associated with professional licensure through grant aid or affordable loans.

Currently, individuals studying for a professional licensure exam have limited financial support available to them. While federal financial aid can cover the fees to take the exam itself, other expenses, such as preparation courses and living expenses, are ineligible for this assistance. Without savings or family support to rely upon, students – especially those of limited means – are left with very few financing options: private loans, working full-time during the study period, or foregoing a preparation course.

In the legal field, the fees for the bar exam are typically only a small portion of the funds needed to ensure success. Exam preparation services are a significant out-of-pocket expense, but they are essential to maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of bar study. These other costs often present unnecessary financial challenges and barriers to exam passage.

By supporting individuals' professional licensure pursuits, states can ease the barrier to entry and ensure critical jobs are filled in their economies. Because advanced education and professional licensure can lead to increased earnings, states can expect a positive return on their investment.

- *For those with advanced degrees, the labor force participation rate is higher for those with a license than those without in 2017.¹*
- *Median weekly earnings for individuals employed full-time in legal occupations were significantly higher for those with a license than those without in 2017.²*
- *Median annual taxes (federal, state and local) paid are highest among professional degree recipients, followed by doctoral and master's degree recipients.³*

Though policymaking considerations will vary by state, states have a number of options for types of support and how to best target these funds.

TYPES OF SUPPORT:

- ***Grant aid**, funds which do not need to be repaid, would be the most beneficial and effective to support individuals pursuing a professional license.*
- ***Affordable state loans** could also benefit those pursuing a professional license. These loans should offer more competitive interest rates and terms than those offered in the private market.*

TARGETING SUPPORT:

- *Support could be limited to occupations experiencing a shortage of qualified workers, such as legal aid.*
- *Support could be conditional based on certain requirements, such as requiring recipients to remain in the state and work in underserved communities for a specific period of time.*

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. Current Population Survey - Labor Force Statistics, Table 50. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat50.htm>

² U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. Current Population Survey - Labor Force Statistics, Table 55. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat55.htm>

³ College Board. 2016. *Education Pays 2016: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2016-full-report.pdf>