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# California Supreme Court Won't Lower Bar Exam Passing Score

California's cut score is the second-highest in the nation behind Delaware.

Ross Todd, The Recorder

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The state Supreme Court on Wednesday announced it will not lower the passing score for the state's bar exam—or the so-called “cut” score.

In [a letter](#) to Michael G. Colantuono, the president of the state bar's Board of Trustees, and Leah Wilson, the bar's executive director, members of the high court said, “Although the lower pass rates associated with the recent administrations of the California bar exam have generated concerns, the downward trend in pass rates appears to be consistent with a broader national pattern. Based on that review and balancing all considerations, the court is not persuaded that the relevant information and data developed at this time weigh in favor of departing from the longstanding pass score of 1440.”

Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye [told lawmakers this past spring](#) that the court would need a “fully developed analysis with supporting evidence” to justify a reduction. California's cut score is the second-highest in the nation behind Delaware.

Law school deans, students and Democratic state lawmakers have been pressing the court to lower the cut score. A California State Bar committee stocked with law school deans [recommended in August](#) that the Supreme Court reduce the bar exam passing score by up to 6.25 percent. The Law School Council endorsed setting the state's passing score at a lower range than a prior state bar committee pitched as appropriate. A survey of 4,188 July 2017 exam-takers found that more than 90 percent said the score should be reduced.

Attorneys already licensed to practice in the state largely backed keeping the higher score, [according to a bar survey](#) of more than 34,000 California-licensed attorneys. Nearly 80 percent of respondents said the cut score should be left unchanged.

After months studying the issue, the state bar ultimately [told the Supreme Court](#) last month that it could justifiably lower the bar passage score or leave it as is.

*Ross Todd is bureau chief of The Recorder in San Francisco. He writes about litigation in the Bay Area and around California. Contact Ross at [rtodd@alm.com](mailto:rtodd@alm.com). On Twitter: [@Ross\\_Todd](https://twitter.com/Ross_Todd).*

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