CAREER KIT

Prosecutor Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become a Prosecutor

2026-11 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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SECTION 1

At a glance

To become a prosecutor you need a bachelor's degree, a law degree (JD) from a law school, a passing score on a state bar exam, and then a job with a district attorney, state attorney general or US Attorney's office. That is about seven years of school after high school, usually followed by a few months of bar study, and law school tuition alone often runs $90,000 to $250,000. BLS does not publish a separate figure for prosecutors, but all lawyers earned a median of $159,670 in May 2025, and lawyers in local government earned a median of $131,390.

Timeline	7 years of school (4-year bachelor's + 3-year JD) plus bar exam; about 7.5–8 years total
Typical cost	$100,000–$300,000+ (mostly law school tuition; scholarships and loan forgiveness can reduce it)
Education	Bachelor's degree plus a Juris Doctor from a law school
License	State bar license (pass the bar exam and character review)
Median pay	$131,390 per year (lawyers in local government, BLS May 2025); no separate prosecutor figure
Job outlook	+5% (2025–35) for lawyers, faster than average; about 28,700 openings a year

SECTION 2

Step-by-step path

1. Earn a bachelor's degree

Time: 4 years · Cost: $20,000–$120,000

Law schools accept any major, so choose one that builds reading, writing and analytical skills, such as political science, history, criminal justice, English or economics. Your GPA matters for admission and scholarships. Join debate, mock trial or a campus legal clinic, and try to land an internship at a district attorney's office.

2. Prepare for and take the LSAT

Time: 3–6 months · Cost: $250–$1,500 (exam plus prep)

Most law schools require the LSAT, which tests reading comprehension, logical reasoning and analytical reasoning. Plan three to six months of study and take multiple full practice tests. LSAC administers the exam; confirm the current fee and format on lsac.org. Some schools accept the GRE, so check each school's policy.

3. Choose an ABA-approved law school

Time: 3-6 months for applications · Cost: $50–$100 per application

Most states require a degree from an ABA-accredited law school to sit for the bar exam. Compare tuition, bar passage rate, and especially graduates' employment in government and prosecution. Many schools run criminal law clinics and externships with DA offices that are the best route to a job.

4. Complete law school and gain prosecution experience

Time: 3 years · Cost: $30,000–$80,000 per year

Law school takes three years full-time. Take criminal law, criminal procedure, evidence and trial advocacy. Seek summer internships or externships with a prosecutor's office, a public defender or a judge; they build skills and relationships, and many offices hire their interns.

5. Pass the bar exam and character review

Time: 2–3 months of study · Cost: $500–$3,000 (fees and prep)

Each state licenses lawyers. Most states give the Uniform Bar Exam or a similar exam, plus a character and fitness review and sometimes an ethics exam (MPRE). Study full-time for about two months after graduation. BLS notes that a score on the bar exam can transfer across jurisdictions that accept it.

6. Apply to prosecutor's offices

Time: 3–9 months

Entry-level prosecutors are hired as assistant district attorneys, assistant state attorneys or assistant US attorneys. Local DA offices hire new graduates most often; the US Attorney's offices usually want some experience or a clerkship. Many start with misdemeanors and traffic court, then move to felonies as they gain trial experience.

7. Build trial experience and advance

Time: Ongoing

Moving up means handling more serious cases, joining specialized units such as homicide or special victims, or becoming a supervisor. Some prosecutors run for district attorney, an elected office in most states, or move into private practice or the bench.

SECTION 3

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Bachelor's degree tuition	$20,000	$120,000	In-state public universities are cheapest.
Law school tuition (3 years)	$70,000	$250,000	Check each school's ABA Required Disclosures for tuition and graduates' employment.
LSAT and prep	$250	$1,500	Exam fee plus optional prep course.
Law school application fees	$100	$1,000	Fee waivers are common for qualifying applicants.
Bar exam application, fees and prep	$500	$3,000	Varies by state; includes character review fees.
MPRE (professional responsibility exam)	$100	$150	
Professional clothes and relocation for first job	$0	$2,000	
Total	**$90,950**	**$377,650**	

Requirements

Education	A bachelor's degree and a Juris Doctor from an ABA-accredited law school in most states.
Bar admission	Passing a state bar exam and meeting its character and fitness standards. The license is issued by the state, and BLS says it usually requires passing the bar exam.
Admissions test	The LSAT (or the GRE at schools that accept it) for law school admission.
Character and fitness	Bar applicants disclose criminal history, financial problems, discipline and drug use. Honesty matters more than a clean slate.
Citizenship	Federal prosecutors (US Attorney's offices) require US citizenship. Most local offices do not, but check the posting.
Background check	Government offices run background checks, often including fingerprints and a review of social media and finances.
Skills	Persuasive writing and speaking, quick judgment under pressure, strong ethics and comfort handling disturbing evidence.

SECTION 4

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Test the path

Days 1–30

Goal: Confirm you want a prosecutor's career before taking on law school debt.

- ☐ Sit in on a day of court and watch a prosecutor handle a docket.
- ☐ Contact your local DA's office and ask about internships and volunteer programs.
- ☐ Take one free LSAT diagnostic test.
- ☐ Review ABA Required Disclosures for employment rates at 5 schools.
- ☐ Estimate your total cost with a loan calculator.

Phase 2: Build your application

Days 31–60

Goal: Prepare a competitive law school application.

- ☐ Create an LSAT study plan with 6–10 full practice tests.
- ☐ Draft a personal statement that shows analytical ability and public service motivation.
- ☐ Ask two professors and one employer for recommendations.
- ☐ Register for the LSAT and a CAS account with LSAC.
- ☐ List scholarships and fee waivers.

Phase 3: Apply and plan funding

Days 61–90

Goal: Submit applications and map out how you will pay.

- ☐ Submit applications to at least six schools across reach, target and safety.
- ☐ Apply for scholarships and ask about public interest awards.
- ☐ Research Public Service Loan Forgiveness rules.
- ☐ Plan for criminal law clinic and DA internship placement.
- ☐ Check your target state's bar requirements.

SECTION 5

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- ☐ College transcripts
- ☐ LSAT score report
- ☐ Personal statement and resume
- ☐ Letters of recommendation
- ☐ FAFSA and financial aid documents
- ☐ State bar character and fitness records

SECTION 6

Exams & how to prepare

LSAT

What it is: A standardized test used for law school admission, measuring logical reasoning, analytical reasoning and reading comprehension, plus a writing sample.

How to prepare: Take 6–10 full timed practice tests and review every missed question. Official LSAC practice materials are the best source.

Bar exam (Uniform Bar Exam or state exam)

What it is: The state licensing exam for lawyers, typically testing multistate multiple-choice and essay questions and performance tasks.

How to prepare: Use a commercial bar prep course, take timed practice essays, and study full-time for 8–10 weeks.

MPRE

What it is: A two-hour, 60-question exam on professional responsibility required by most states.

How to prepare: Study the ABA Model Rules and take practice questions; many take it during law school.

Character and fitness review

What it is: A background review by the bar, not an exam, but it can delay admission.

How to prepare: Disclose everything accurately and gather records early.

SECTION 7

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to be a prosecutor rather than a defense attorney?

Tip: Explain your belief in seeking justice, not just convictions.

2. What does it mean that a prosecutor's duty is to seek justice?

Tip: Mention Brady obligations and fair charging decisions.

3. Describe a time you handled a difficult ethical decision.

Tip: Choose a real case where you chose the right path over the easy one.

4. How would you handle a case with a sympathetic defendant?

Tip: Show you can be fair and consider the victim and community.

5. How do you handle a heavy caseload?

Tip: Describe organization and prioritization.

6. Tell me about your trial experience.

Tip: Highlight mock trial, clinic or internship work.

7. How would you explain a plea offer to a victim?

Tip: Show empathy and clear communication.

8. What would you do if you realized evidence had not been shared with the defense?

Tip: Disclose immediately.

9. How do you deal with disturbing evidence?

Tip: Show a healthy coping approach.

10. Why this county or office?

Tip: Research the office's priorities.

SECTION 8

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Argued motions and conducted direct examination as a certified student attorney in the law school's criminal clinic.
- Interned 300 hours in a DA's office reviewing police reports and drafting charging memos for 60+ cases.
- Won Best Oralist at a regional mock trial tournament against 24 teams.
- Researched and wrote 15 bench memos on search and seizure and evidence issues.
- Assisted victims and witnesses with court preparation and communication.
- Maintained a 3.6 GPA while working 20 hours a week.

SECTION 9

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Choosing a school with high tuition and weak government placement.
2. Waiting until 3L year to look for prosecution internships.
3. Underestimating the character and fitness disclosure.
4. Not studying with a structured plan for the bar exam.
5. Assuming a bar license works in every state.

SECTION 10

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

SECTION 11

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **BLS: Lawyers**

https://www.bls.gov/ooh/legal/lawyers.htm

- **LSAC**

https://www.lsac.org/

- **ABA Required Disclosures**

https://www.abarequireddisclosures.org/

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
$78,360	**$159,670 per year (all lawyers); $131,390 for lawyers in local government**	$351,600

Outlook: BLS projects lawyer employment to grow 5% from 2025 to 2035, adding about 40,600 jobs, with roughly 28,700 openings a year. May 2025 median pay for lawyers was $178,380 in federal government, $131,390 in local government and $115,330 in state government. Starting prosecutor salaries are usually lower than private firm pay but come with public service loan forgiveness eligibility.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 data (BLS does not report prosecutors separately) — https://www.bls.gov/ooh/legal/lawyers.htm

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.