Homeless shelter displaces July bar exam test site in San Diego

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The location where the exam was intended to take place will be used for a homeless shelter during the same period as the bar exam, Amy Nuñez, the bar's director of admissions, wrote in an email Tuesday.

"Approximately 150 people, including families and children, are scheduled to be housed right above the bar exam, which raised concerns of potential noise or disruption, given that school would be out during this summer period," Nuñez wrote. "The facility could not promise that there would be no disruptions. Staff erred on the side of caution and decided to seek alternative options in San Diego; however, no suitable locations were found as of March 1, when applications become available."
Homeless Shelter Displaces July Bar Exam Test Site In San Diego
By Henrik Nilsson | Mar. 11, 2020

It’s the first time since the 1990s that San Diego won’t be able to offer a site for the exam, according to University of San Diego School of Law Dean Stephen C. Ferruolo.

He is sympathetic to the facility providing a homeless shelter, Ferruolo said in an interview Tuesday, but said the lack of communication from the bar has aggravated the problem.

Ferruolo said he was made aware of the issue after students started complaining about the lack of a test site for the exam in San Diego. His law school then scrambled to find adequate local test sites.

“We’ve reached out to various schools and universities to see if their gymnasiums might be available, and we reached out to Qualcomm, proposing alternative spaces, but none of them seemed to work,” Ferruolo said. “They don’t work because of the rigidity of the bar’s requirements. Their exact language from their email was that they couldn’t find a suitable testing area. What exactly that means, I don’t know.”

As of Tuesday, the bar was only offering exam locations in San Diego for applicants with disabilities who have been granted accommodation, according to the bar website. Other students will have to look for other sites in surrounding areas, such as Ontario, Anaheim, Pasadena or Palm Springs, the dean said.

San Diego is home to three law schools: Southwestern Law School, Thomas Jefferson School of Law and University of San Diego School of Law. According to the California Bar Examination reports, 454 students from those schools took the test for the first time in February and July 2019.

“My concern is with the more disadvantaged students. We have part-time students who have families, who work and who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Those are the ones that we haven’t heard from and that we are concerned about,” Ferruolo said. “One of the issues in California is the disparate impact of a high cut score on the bar exam on underrepresented minorities. This just adds to the problem of unfairness. It’s another hurdle.”
According to Kathleen S. Bolus, assistant director of academic success and bar programs and adjunct professor at University of San Diego School of Law, several students have expressed concerns to their law schools about the added stress and financial pressure of having to travel to take the bar examination will cause.

Students at California Western School of Law were also disappointed and shocked when they heard there wouldn't be any test sites in San Diego this year, Carly E. Sassi, assistant director of bar programs at that school explained.

"The cost and the travel are huge, and the unplanned cost added to the situation," Sassi said Tuesday. "We had no idea that this was going to happen, so nobody planned for this."

Sassi said the bar had not communicated with the school that there wouldn't be any test sites in San Diego for the July exam. It became known when students voiced their concerns.

"We confirmed with the state bar on Monday [the day after registrations opened]. But we called the State Bar; we didn't receive any sort of notice from the bar at all," Sassi said.

Nuñez, the bar admissions director, said the agency hopes to return San Diego to the list of test centers for laptop applicants for future examinations.