

Prosecutor

You decide who gets charged with a crime and then you have to prove it. Government pay, courtroom experience nobody else gets this early.

TYPICAL PAY

\$159,670

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$78k to \$352k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

District attorney offices, state attorney general offices, federal p...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Grades strong enough for a good college. Debate and writing matter more than any particular subject.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major. Law schools care about your grade point average and your test score, not what you studied. Take the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) in your junior or senior year.
- 3 Law school** 3 years
Three years for a Juris Doctor (JD) degree. Do the criminal clinic, do moot court, and intern at a prosecutor's office every summer.
- 4 Pass the bar exam** Summer after graduation, results in the fall
Your state's exam plus a separate ethics test, the MPRE (Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination). Then a character and fitness review before you are admitted.
- 5 Get hired and get trained** First 1 to 2 years on the job
Offices hire in classes and start you on traffic, misdemeanors and preliminary hearings before you touch a felony.

Pros and cons

- + Courtroom experience years ahead of other lawyers
- + You answer to the public, not a billing target
- + Loan forgiveness makes the low salary survivable
- You will earn far less than classmates in private practice
- Caseloads are crushing in most offices
- You see the worst of what people do to each other, in detail

Good to know

The real power is deciding not to charge

A prosecutor can look at an arrest and drop it. No judge reviews that choice and no jury hears about it. It is the least visible and most important thing the job does.

Almost nothing goes to trial

The overwhelming majority of criminal cases in the United States end in a plea agreement. A prosecutor who tries a dozen cases in a year is busy, and most of the job is negotiation, paperwork and judgment call.

Optional boosts

Two summers interning at a prosecutor office. Trial advocacy and moot court. A judicial clerkship. Willingness to move.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Lawyers (23-1011.00)
National Conference of Bar Examiners: Uniform Bar Examination
National District Attorneys Association
Federal Student Aid: Public Service Loan Forgiveness

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/prosecutor>



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