



DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
BUREAU OF SECURITY AND INVESTIGATIVE SERVICES

P.O. Box 989002, West Sacramento, CA 95798-9002

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Private Investigator License FACTSHEET

Requirements for Licensure

A private investigator is an individual who amongst other duties (1) investigates crimes, (2) investigates the identity, business, occupation, character, etc., of a person, (3) investigates the location of lost or stolen property, (4) investigates the cause of fires, losses, accidents, damage or injury, or (5) secures evidence for use in court. Private investigators may protect persons only if such services are incidental to an investigation; they may not protect property. An individual, partnership, or corporation licensed as a private investigator may employ a qualified manager to manage the business on a day-to-day basis. To be eligible to apply for licensure as a private investigator/qualified manager, you must meet the following requirements:

- Be 18 or older.
- Undergo a criminal history background check through the California Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Applicants are responsible for paying all Live Scan, FBI and DOJ processing fees at the time of fingerprinting. [For more information on the Live Scan process, the associated fees, click here.](#)

ALERT: Per FBI guidelines, you must submit your application to the Bureau before completing a criminal history background check. To prevent application processing delays, keep a copy of the Live Scan form, which must include the ATI number and the signature of the Live Scan Operator.

NOTE: You must complete a criminal history background check even if you have previously submitted fingerprints for another BSIS license, registration, certificate, or permit.

- Have at least three years (2,000 hours each year, totaling 6,000 hours) of compensated experience in investigative work;

or

have a law degree or completed a four-year course in police science plus two years (4,000 hours) of experience;

or

have an associate degree in police science, criminal law, or justice and 2 ½ years (5,000 hours) of experience.

Experience must be certified by your employer and have been received while you were employed as a sworn law enforcement officer, military police officer, insurance adjuster, employee of a licensed PI or licensed reposessor, arson investigator for a public fire suppression agency, or an investigator for the public defender's office. (Work as a process server, public records researcher, custodial attendant for a law enforcement agency, bailiff,

agent who collects debts in writing or by telephone after the debtor has been located, or person who repossesses property after it has been located is not considered qualifying experience.)

- Pass a two-hour multiple-choice examination covering laws and regulations, terminology, civil and criminal liability, evidence handling, undercover investigations and surveillance. A copy of the Private Investigator Act will be sent to you¹; and
- Upon notification that you have passed the examination, you must submit a licensing fee to:

Bureau of Security and Investigative Services
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To apply for a Private Investigator license, submit:

- Completed application²,
- Two recent passport-quality photographs,
- The application fee³,

How to submit your application:

- Online through BreEZe⁴: The Bureau recommends submitting and paying for your application online as it bypasses the Cashiering Office, which can reduce the processing time by up to two weeks.
- By mail: submit all required documents and payment(s) to:

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Firearms Permit

When working as a private investigator/qualified manager, you may **not** carry a gun on duty without a valid firearms permit issued by the Bureau or a screen print of the Bureau's approval obtained from the Bureau's web site. Also, a firearms permit issued by the Bureau **does not** authorize you to carry a concealed weapon. You may **not** carry a concealed weapon on duty without a Concealed Weapons Permit (CCW) issued by local authorities, nor carry a caliber handgun not listed on your firearms permit.

To apply for a firearms permit, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or have permanent legal immigration status.
- Be at least 21 years of age.

¹ Review the Private Investigator Act at http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayexpandedbranch.xhtml?tocCode=BPC&division=3.&title=&part=&chapter=11.3.&article=

² Access the Private Investigator application packet at https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/pi_app.pdf

³ Review the Bureau's fees at https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/newfees.pdf

⁴ Apply online at <https://www.breeze.ca.gov>

- Pass a course in the Power to Arrest. The eight-hour training covers responsibilities and ethics in citizen arrest, relationship with police, limitations on Power to Arrest, restrictions on searches and seizures, criminal and civil liabilities, terrorism, code of ethics and personal and employer liability and other relevant topics.
- Pass a course in the carrying and use of firearms. The 14-hour (8 hours classroom, 6 hours range) training course covers moral and legal aspects, firearms nomenclature, weapons handling and shooting fundamentals, emergency procedures and range training. The course must be given by a Bureau-certified firearms training instructor at a Bureau-certified training facility. Written and range exams are administered at the end of the course. Costs of training are determined by the training facility.
- Submit a firearms permit application⁵ and the application fee⁶
- Complete a criminal history background check through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the California Department of Justice (DOJ). Applicants are responsible for paying all Live Scan, FBI and DOJ processing fees at the time of fingerprinting. [For more information on the Live Scan process, the associated fees, click here.](#)
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NOTE: You must complete a criminal history background check even if you have previously submitted fingerprints for another BSIS license, registration, certificate, or permit.

How to submit your application:

- By mail: submit all required documents and payment to:
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Note: A firearms permit expires two years from the date of issuance. **An applicant must requalify four times during the life of the permit: twice during the first year after the date of issuance, and twice during the second year.** Requalifications must be at least four months apart.

Insurance Requirements

Private Investigators that are 1) not organized as an LLC and 2) who carry a firearm and 3) provide armed bodyguard services incidental to an investigation for which the Private Investigator has been previously hired to perform are required to carry commercial general liability policy of insurance issued by an insurance company authorized to transact business in California that provides minimum limits of insurance of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) for any one loss or occurrence due to bodily injury, including death, or property damage, or both.

Private Investigators organized as a Limited Liability Company (LLC) must maintain a policy or policies of insurance against liability claims for acts, errors, or omissions arising out of the private

⁵ Access the initial Firearms Permit Application at http://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/fq_initial.pdf

⁶ Visit https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/newfees.pdf to view the Bureau's fees

investigator services it provides. For an LLC with five or fewer managing members, the aggregate liability limit shall not be less than one million dollars (\$1,000,000). For an LLC with more than five managing members, an additional one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) of insurance must be obtained for each person named as a managing member not to exceed five million dollars (\$5,000,000) in any one designated period.

"Protection of the public shall be the highest priority for the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services in exercising licensing, regulatory and disciplinary functions. Whenever the protection of the public is consistent with other interests sought to be promoted, the protection of the public shall be paramount."