



Frequently Asked Questions Private Investigator (PI)

1. What are the licensing requirements for a Private Investigator?

The general requirements for a Private Investigator are:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Three years of compensated experience totaling not less than 6,000 hours in investigative work, while employed by law enforcement agencies, collection agencies, insurance agencies, banks, courts, and other private investigation agencies, etc.
- A college degree in criminal law, criminal justice or police science can be substituted for part of the experience.
- Pass a written exam.
- Undergo a criminal history review.

2. What forms and documents must be included in the application packet?

- Private Investigator Application for License (Form 31B-4)¹
- Personal Identification Form: Private Investigator Principals, Corporate Officers, Managing Members, and Private Investigator Qualified Manager (Form 31B-9)²
- Private Investigator Request for Authorization of Business Name (Form 31B-12)³
- Private Investigator Qualified Manager Qualifying Experience (Form 31B-8)⁴
- **Corporate Applicants Only:**
 - Copy of endorsed Articles of Incorporation (Domestic Corporation) or copy of endorsed Statement and Designation by a Foreign Professional Corporation Form (Foreign Corporation) filed with the Secretary of State (SOS), and
 - Copy of Statement of Information filed with the SOS
- **LLC Applicants Only:**
 - Copy of endorsed Articles of Organization of a Limited Liability Company (Domestic LLC) or copy of endorsed Application to Register a Foreign Limited Liability Company (Foreign LLC) filed with the California Secretary of State (SOS),
 - Copy of Copy of Statement of Information filed with the SOS, and
 - Certificate of Liability Insurance.

¹ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/pi_app.pdf#page=11

² https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/pi_app.pdf#page=13

³ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/pi_app.pdf#page=16

⁴ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/pi_app.pdf#page=18

3. How do I apply?

You can apply online⁵ using BreEZe, which bypasses the Cashiering Office and can reduce the application processing time by up to two weeks. Alternatively, you can submit your application and payment to the Bureau by mail to:

Bureau of Security and Investigative Services
P.O. Box 989002
West Sacramento, CA. 95798-9002

4. How much does it cost to be licensed as a Private Investigator?

Visit https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/newfees.pdf to view the BSIS fee schedule.

5. How do I retake the Qualified Manager exam?

If you did not pass the exam, complete and submit the Application for Qualified Manager Reexamination⁶ along with the reexamination fee⁷. You may also submit a request for reexamination online using BreEZe, which updates in real-time. Create a BreEZe account, pay the application fee, and submit your application for reexamination online⁸. Once the request for reexamination is processed, you will receive a new eligibility notification and instructions for scheduling your exam with PSI, Inc.

Mail application and fee to:
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6. What is the length of term for a Private Investigator (PI) company license?

The Private Investigator license is valid for two years.

7. When does a Private Investigator license become delinquent?

The Private Investigator license becomes delinquent 30 days after expiration.

8. How long after the expiration of my license am I able to renew it?

You are able to renew a Private Investigator (PI) license up to three years after expiration. If, after three years you fail to renew, you must submit a new application and begin the application process again to be licensed as a PI.

9. How do I change my business name?

To change your business name, you must complete and submit the Private Investigator Request Company Name Change Form/Request Additional Fictitious Business Name Form⁹ along with the applicable fee⁷. You can submit your name change online in

⁵ <https://www.breeze.ca.gov>

⁶ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/qm_reexam.pdf

⁷ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/newfees.pdf

⁸ <https://www.breeze.ca.gov>

⁹ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/pi_namechange.pdf

BreEZe⁵, which bypasses the Cashiering Office and can reduce application processing times by up to two weeks. Alternatively, you can mail the form and fee payment to:

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PO Box 989002
West Sacramento, CA 95798-9002

10. Can a Private Investigator use a post office box for an address?

Yes. A Private Investigator may list a Post Office box (PO Box) as the Address of Record (AOR) only if mail delivery to the business address is not possible, or if the place of business is located at the licensee's personal residence. NOTE: if providing a PO Box as the AOR, you must provide the Bureau with your residence address. This request must be explained in writing. Otherwise, the company must state address by street, number and city. In addition, no licensee shall conduct business from any location other than the location for which a license or branch office registration was issued.

11. How long does it take to process a new license following a request for a change of name, address or branch office?

The processing time will vary, typically a name change and/or address change or branch office change will take approximately four to six weeks.

12. There has been a change in the type of ownership/entity after receiving the Private Investigator license. What do I have to do?

Licenses cannot be transferred or reassigned to new entities. A change of ownership constitutes a new entity. You must submit a new application with appropriate fees. For example, if you apply and become licensed as a sole owner and later decide to form a partnership or corporation, you must apply for a new license. Partners can be added to a partnership license without obtaining a new license.

13. Can a Private Investigator carry a concealed weapon?

Yes. A Private Investigator may carry a concealed weapon on duty if he/she has a current and clear BSIS exposed firearms permit and possesses a concealed weapons (CCW) permit issued by a local law enforcement agency.

14. Are Private Investigators who have concealed weapon permits also required to have the Bureau's exposed weapons permit while on duty?

Yes. Even though a Private Investigator may possess a concealed weapons (CCW) permit, he/she must also complete and pass the Bureau-approved firearms training course and obtain the Bureau's exposed firearms permit prior to carrying and using a firearm on duty.

15. Can a Private Investigator act as a bodyguard?

A Private Investigator may protect individuals. However, he/she may only do so in connection with a case that he/she had been previously hired to investigate.

16. Is a Private Investigator required to carry liability insurance?

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 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. For additional information on insurance requirements for PIs organized as an LLC, visit Private Investigators Organized as Limited Liability Company.¹⁰

17. Can a Private Investigator "ambulance chase"?

No. Private Investigators are prohibited from soliciting business from anyone who has sustained a bodily injury as a result of an accident or from soliciting business from a family member of anyone who has sustained a bodily injury or death. However, they may solicit business from persons having an indirect interest in the injury, such as the injured person's attorney, insurance company or employer.

18. A Private Investigator has been hired to conduct an investigation. Who must he/she divulge information to?

A Private Investigator may not release information acquired during an investigation to anyone other than his or her client, unless otherwise instructed by the client. However, if there are any criminal offenses, information may be released to local law enforcement or the district attorney.

19. Can a Private Investigator do anything that a police officer can do?

No. A Private Investigator has no law enforcement authority even if he/she has been hired by law enforcement to perform an investigation. A Private Investigator is an ordinary citizen and can only make citizen's arrests.

20. Can an unlicensed person who is working for a licensed Private Investigator make or distribute business cards?

No. An unlicensed person may not use any form of identification which gives the impression that he/she may be licensed as a Private Investigator.

¹⁰ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/industries/insurance_pi.pdf

21. What type of information must appear on business cards and other forms of advertisements?

The business name, business addresses or telephone number, and license number of the licensee must appear on the advertisement as they appear in the Bureau's records. Advertisements include, but are not limited to, business cards, stationery, brochures, flyers, newsletters, paid advertisements in any media form, and telephone book listings.

22. Can an applicant who has been denied a license or a licensee who has been served an accusation to revoke a license go before the Disciplinary Review Committee (DRC)?

No. He/she must make an appeal before an administrative law judge during an administrative hearing. Appeals may be made before DRC only with respect to firearms permits if there are allegations of firearms violations.

23. How do I prove my investigative experience?

The claimed years of qualifying experience must be substantiated by a written certification from the employer, subject to verification by Bureau staff. Only an employer or his or her designated agent may certify this claimed experience.

24. What if my employer (or certifier) is unwilling to certify my experience?

An employer who is a licensee shall respond in writing within 30 days to an applicant's written request for certification of the applicant's work experience and either provide the certification or the reason for denial. If the applicant is unable to obtain a written response or reason for denial and the applicant states under penalty of perjury that the employer (licensee's) reasons for denial are invalid or insufficient, the director may require that the employer (licensee) provide the Bureau with all relevant employment records maintained regarding the applicant. The Bureau will use these records to substantiate the applicant's employment experience.

25. Can an employee of a Private Investigator bill clients?

No. The licensee is solely responsible for the conduct of his or her business and may not allow anyone to independently advertise, engage clients, furnish reports, or bill clients. All business is under the control of the licensee and must be conducted under the name of the licensee.

26. Are a Private Investigator's findings required to be submitted to the client in writing?

Investigative reports must be submitted in a manner agreed upon by the investigator and the client. If there is no agreement, oral reports are as acceptable as written reports. Investigative reports must be submitted to the client upon demand if payment has been rendered. Private Investigators must make every effort to ascertain that the information acquired is factual and correct. While the Bureau has no jurisdiction over fees, licensees must provide clients with a fee schedule or reasonable explanation of how charges are calculated should the client question the licensee's billing.

27. Can Private Investigators represent themselves as government officials?

No. Private Investigators may not present themselves as anyone other than a Private Investigator. The law prohibits the use of any title, uniform, insignia, identification card or any statement which gives the impression that they are connected with any federal or state agency.

28. Can a Private Investigator enter property without an owner's consent?

No. A Private Investigator may not enter any private building without the owner's consent.

29. Can a Private Investigator use a badge?

No. A Private Investigator may not carry or wear a badge in connection with an investigation since it may mislead others to believe that he or she is a peace officer or other government official.

30. Once a license is obtained, can the licensee conduct business at a location other than what appears in the Bureau's records?

No. A licensee may only conduct business at the location shown in the Bureau's records unless he or she obtains a branch office certificate.

31. How do I notify the Bureau of my change of address?

You must notify the Bureau in writing within 30 days of such change. Submit a completed Address Change (Company) form¹¹, by email to PrivateInvestigators@dca.ca.gov or mail the form to:

Bureau of Security and Investigative Services
PO Box 989002
West Sacramento, CA 95798-9002

32. If I lost my Private Investigator license or it was destroyed or damaged, how do I obtain a duplicate?

If you have lost or destroyed your Private Investigator license, submit the Application for Replacement of Private Investigator Company License¹². You may also submit a request for a replacement license online using BreEZe, which updates in real-time. Create a BreEZe account, pay the application fee, and submit your application for a replacement license online¹³.

Mail the application and fee to:
Bureau of Security and Investigative Services
P.O. Box 989002
West Sacramento, CA 95798-9002

Please allow 6-8 weeks for replacement, if submitting by mail.

¹¹ https://www.bsis.ca.gov/forms_pubs/company_chngadd.pdf

¹² <https://www.bsis.ca.gov/replacementlicense/pi.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.breeze.ca.gov>

33. How do I obtain a Private Investigator photo identification?

Private Investigators must contact PSI at (877) 392-6422. PSI staff will schedule appointments for photos at one of their California centers. The photo identification card costs \$6 and is paid to PSI. Visit <https://www.bsis.ca.gov/licensees/photoid.shtml> and <https://www.bsis.ca.gov/licensees/photoid.pdf> for additional information.

34. The name/address was misspelled on my license. Is there a fee for a new one? No.

An error made by the Bureau should be corrected without charge. Please clarify the error in writing, include proof of the Bureau's error (preferably a copy of the submitted application), and submit by email to bsis@dca.ca.gov or by mail to:

Bureau of Security and Investigative Services

PO Box 989002

West Sacramento, CA 95798-9002

(This does not apply to address changes when submitted after a renewal was paid and already mailed.)