

Strong Workforce Program
Public Sector & Public Safety: Legal Services
Careers
Regional Workforce Advisory Meeting
Proceedings
April 2, 2026
Virtual

Introduction

The Los Rios Community College District, in partnership with Valley Vision and in collaboration with Sierra College, Yuba Community College District, and Lake Tahoe Community College, invests in Strong Workforce funding to organize and convene Regional Advisories. The objectives of the Regional Advisories are to build strong relationships between employers, educators, and the workforce that:

- Provide timely information on skills gaps and workforce needs, informing partners on major industry trend information.
- Improve the efficiency of the advisory process for educators and employers.
- Reflect a regional view of workforce needs and assets.
- Provide opportunities for more systemic, ongoing engagement, including workforce partners in key industry sectors.

Regional Advisory meetings provide crucial insights for guiding investments and improvements in Career Education (CE) programs to meet the rising demand for middle-skilled positions. This report summarizes the Spring 2026 Regional Advisory meeting, which focused on careers in the Public Sector & Public Safety with an emphasis on the growing demand for legal services across both private and public industries. It includes key findings, best practices, and detailed minutes from the discussions, highlighting the expanding role of analysts in the regional economy.

Valley Vision supports a robust talent pipeline through our multiple Workforce development initiatives. We prepare our regional workforce for the future by addressing skills gaps, advancing research, aligning efforts, and strengthening systems. Valley Vision's workforce efforts are supported by the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), the Golden Sierra Workforce Development Board (WDB), the North Central Counties Consortium, the Yolo WDB, the Los Rios Community College District, and others.

The Strong Workforce program provides Career Education opportunities to increase social mobility and fuel regional economies with skilled workers.

Key Findings

- Entry level legal service roles in Greater Sacramento serve as pillars for regional economic mobility, with starting wages for all middle skill occupations consistently exceeding the living wage threshold of \$21.19 per hour for a single adult. This baseline ensures that even those entering the field for the first time are positioned for financial stability. Highly technical positions command significant pay; court reporters earn a median hourly wage of \$47.34, markedly higher than that of general legal support occupations in the region.
- A gap persists between the number of local graduates and actual market demand; for paralegals specifically, the region generates approximately 400 annual job openings but confers only 111 related degree awards. This means that local educational institutions are currently fulfilling less than 28% of the regional hiring need for these essential legal support roles.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) has reached a high saturation point in legal workflows, with 77% of professionals using AI for document review and 74% leveraging it for legal research. This represents a permanent evolution in middle skill task execution, where mastery of digital tools is now a standard requirement for office productivity. However, industry experts emphasize that while AI excels at clerical scanning and summarizing, significant human oversight remains necessary for accuracy and ethical verification.
- Industry leaders agree that human centric soft skills are the most important asset in the current market, often outweighing technical skills. Many candidates from prestigious academic backgrounds fail the interview process because they lack flexibility, cannot take constructive criticism, or fail to ask clarifying questions and take detailed notes. In a field where clients often face frightening legal situations, the ability to show empathy and hold a client's hand is an essential human skill that AI will never be able to replace.
- The rapid integration of generative AI is creating concerns about skill erosion among emerging legal professionals. Employers and practitioners noted that increased reliance on AI assisted writing may weaken critical competencies such as legal analysis, research, and courtroom advocacy. Participants shared that technology should complement, not replace, foundational legal training and uplifted that education providers to expand hands on, practice based learning opportunities that reinforce essential professional and ethical skills.
- While Spanish and ASL remain the highest demand languages, a deficit of certified interpreters for Farsi, Arabic, and Mandarin creates substantial accessibility gaps. Certified core interpreters are required when available, but the current shortage means the courts frequently struggle to meet the linguistic needs of Sacramento's diverse population. Furthermore, the high cost of certification exams often exceeding \$500 serves as a financial barrier for talented bilingual individuals from lower income backgrounds.

Meeting Proceedings

Welcome and Introduction

Caitlin Blockus, Senior Project Manager at Valley Vision, opened the advisory by explaining the growth within the legal services sector within the regional workforce ecosystem. She was joined by Diangelo Andrews, who served as the session's facilitator. The meeting served as a collaborative bridge between the Los Rios Community College District and industry practitioners to ensure that educational curricula remain responsive to rapidly changing legal environments.

During the welcome, Sacramento City College and American River College shared a community college perspective on current developments within their legal studies programs. Kelly Gould, Professor of Administration of Justice and Legal Studies at Sacramento City College (SCC), detailed the institution's comprehensive approach to preparing its 2,200 enrolled students for diverse legal careers. The college offers a variety of specialized academic paths, including a Transfer Degree in Law, Public Policy, and Society and an evolving Pathway to Law School that currently serves roughly 240 students. Extends learning beyond the classroom through on vcampus criminal trial reenactments and internship opportunities with the Sacramento Police Department. The college also maintains a strong recruitment presence by hosting 16 virtual events each semester, connecting students with employers and agencies ranging from the Public Defender's Office to state and federal departments.

While at American River College, Kate Chang, Assistant Professor at American River College (ARC), joined Gould to provide insights into their ABA approved Paralegal Studies program, which has grown to serve over 300 students per semester. The program is specifically structured to produce entry level paralegals through two primary tracks: one for students already holding a degree who complete ten legal specialty courses, and a two year Associate's Degree path for new learners. ARC's student body skews toward early to mid-career professionals, with nearly 50% already possessing a bachelor's or master's degree prior to enrollment. To bridge the gap between education and employment, the college has recently expanded its community outreach to facilitate "matchmaking" between graduates and regional law firms, ensuring that students gain the practical skills such as civil procedure and legal research required by the American Bar Association and California statutory law.

Labor Market Information and Job Posting Insights

The labor market portion of the advisory was led by Anna Hoehenrieder, Research Analyst for the Greater Sacramento Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research. Hoehenrieder started the discussion with real world data, focusing specifically on

middle-skill occupations, which are defined as roles requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a four year degree. She noted that the legal services sector remains a strong, expanding component of the regional economy, spanning seven counties: Yolo, Sutter, Placer, El Dorado, Nevada, Yuba, and Sacramento. As shown in Figure 1, these top middle skill occupations have a massive employment footprint and substantial projected job growth over the next five years, signaling a clear opportunity for colleges to align their career education programs with high demand market expansion.

Occupation	2024 Jobs	5-Yr Projected Job Growth	5-Yr Annual Openings
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	3,214	8%	400
Court, Municipal, and License Clerks	2,390	9%	283
Legal Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	1,421	5%	212
Interpreters and Translators	716	2%	69
Title Examiners, Abstractors, and Searchers	411	0%	40
Legal Support Workers, All Other	398	8%	45
Court Reporters and Simultaneous Captioners	250	5%	27

Figure 1: Top Middle-Skill Occupations and Projected Growth

Paralegals and Legal Assistants represent the largest legal services occupation in the region with over 3,214 jobs and an 8% projected growth rate through 2029. Other key roles discussed included court, municipal, and license clerks, which account for 2,390 jobs, and legal secretaries and administrative assistants with 1,421 jobs.

A demographic analysis, featured in Figure 2, revealed a looming "retirement cliff" that will significantly impact future staffing levels across the region. For roles like Court Reporters and Legal Secretaries, over 60% of the current regional workforce is already over the age of 45. In Sacramento County specifically, 42.5% of legal secretaries are 55 or older, suggesting an urgent and massive need for replacement talent as these seasoned professionals exit the workforce over the next decade.

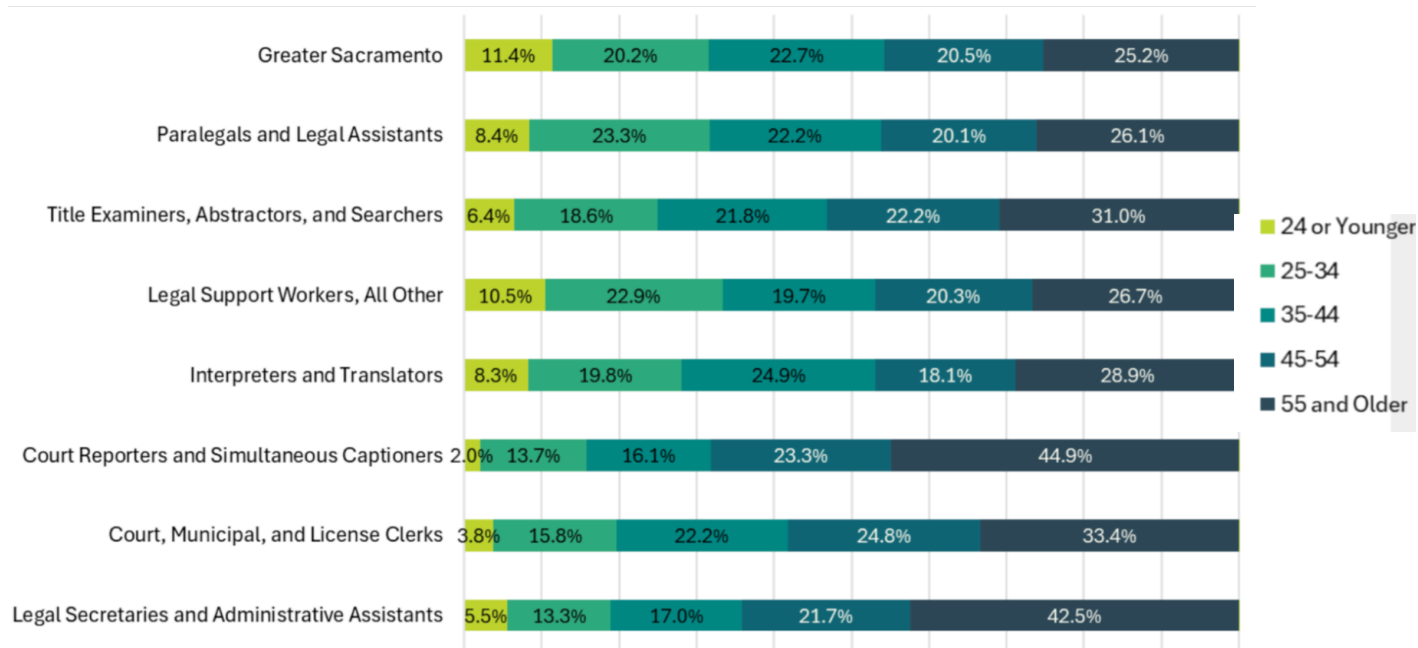


Figure 2: Demographics & Age

Hoehenrieder reported that entry level wages for all seven tracked middle skill occupations were higher than the regional living wage of \$21.19 per hour for a single adult. This high floor for earnings establishes the legal services sector as a reliable and effective pathway for economic mobility in the Greater Sacramento area. As shown in Figure 3, court reporters and simultaneous captioners earn a median wage of \$47.34 per hour, making this one of the highest paying middle skill careers currently available to students. This figure is included to provide a side by side comparison of regional earnings and educational requirements across various legal support roles.

Occupation	Entry-Level Hourly Earnings	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	\$28.78	\$36.97	Associate's degree
Court, Municipal, and License Clerks	\$25.86	\$29.59	High school diploma or equivalent
Legal Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	\$24.07	\$29.11	High school diploma or equivalent
Interpreters and Translators	\$26.81	\$32.31	Bachelor's degree
Title Examiners, Abstractors, and Searchers	\$28.31	\$35.60	High school diploma or equivalent
Legal Support Workers, All Other	\$29.45	\$40.93	Associate's degree
Court Reporters and Simultaneous Captioners	\$24.93	\$47.34	Postsecondary nondegree award

Figure 3: Middle-Skill Earnings Comparison

Despite these high wages, a massive supply demand gap persists that threatens to stall regional operations if not addressed. For Paralegals and Legal Assistants, there are approximately 400 annual openings, but only 111 regional awards conferred annually. This means that local educational institutions are currently meeting only about 28% of the total regional hiring need for these essential legal support roles.

For Court Reporters, the supply gap is even more severe and has reached a state of emergency for local court administrations. Only three awards were granted in the region last year, even though there were 27 annual job openings recorded. This shortage has forced courts to prioritize felony criminal proceedings, often leaving civil, family law, and probate courts with no official record of proceedings, which can severely hinder the appeals process for clients.

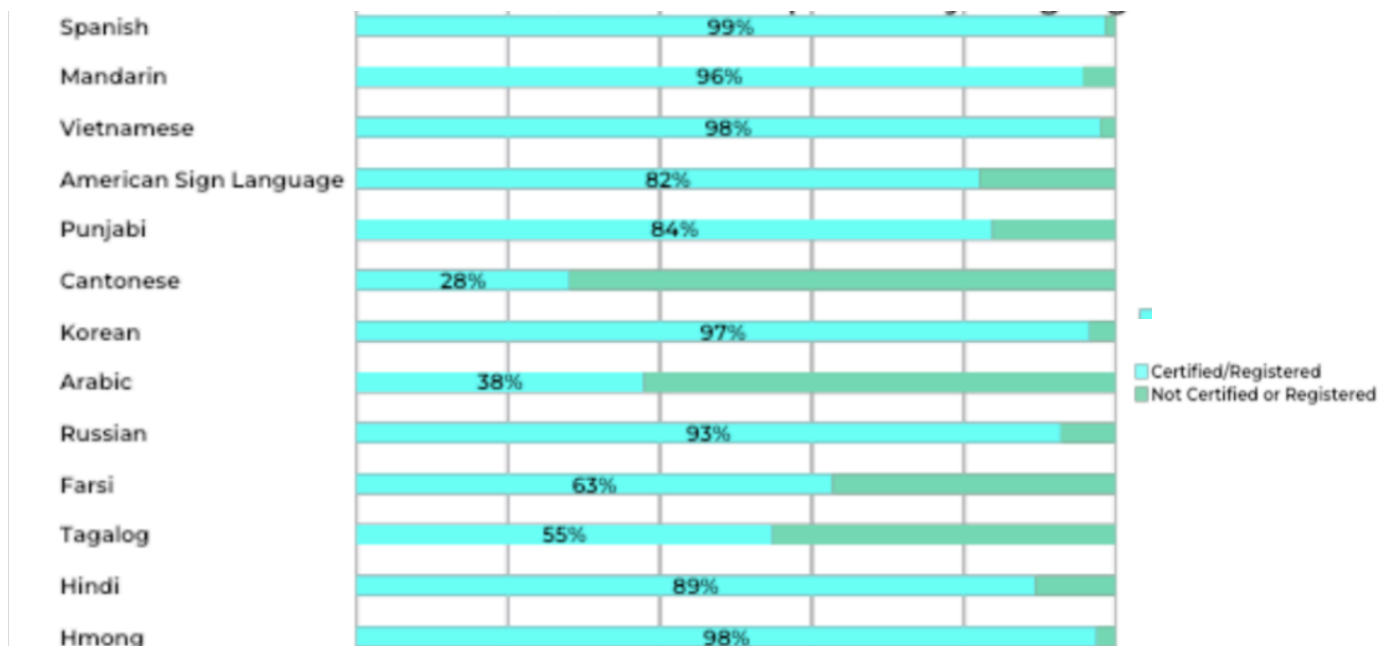


Figure 4: Court Interpreter Shortage by Language

The impact of these shortages is felt most acutely in the court systems' ability to provide constitutionally mandated services to a diverse population. Hoehenrieder mentioned a significant Court Interpreter Shortage, particularly for certified specialists in languages such as Farsi, Arabic, and Mandarin. Without these certified professionals available, court dates are frequently pushed back, creating an administrative backlog that compromises the justice system's overall efficiency and fairness.

A large portion of the data presentation was dedicated to the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the legal profession, a trend that is reshaping entry level expectations. Hoehenrieder shared that AI is already deeply integrated into legal workflows, with 77% of professionals utilizing it for document review and 74% using it for legal research. However, she clarified that while AI is excellent at scanning and

summarizing, it still requires significant human oversight for accuracy and ethical verification. As illustrated in Figure 5, the adoption of these tools is widespread across both legal and government sectors. This figure is important to include because it visualizes the specific areas where automation is most prevalent, signaling to educators and students that AI literacy is no longer optional but a foundational requirement. For job seekers, this data means that while technical proficiency in AI tools provides a competitive edge, the skills have shifted toward high level human oversight, accuracy verification, and ethical judgment skills that AI cannot currently replicate.



Figure 5: Impact of AI on Legal Professions

Professional surveys indicate that as AI takes over clerical tasks, the value of human workers has shifted toward higher level cognitive and interpersonal skills. There has been an over 50% increase in employer demand for "AI proof" soft skills such as problem-solving, creativity, and interpersonal communication. Educators were encouraged to ensure students understand the limitations of AI, particularly regarding the need for institutional knowledge that can only be gained through years of practical experience.

The data further examined the specific industries in which these professionals are employed, helping students target their job searches. As you can see from the *Top Aligned Industries (Figure 6)*, paralegals and legal secretaries, lawyers' offices are the primary employers, accounting for 61% and 52% of jobs, respectively. However, the public sector is also a major player, with state and local governments employing the vast majority of court clerks and a significant portion of the region's court reporters and interpreters.

Occupation	Top Industry of Employment	2nd Industry of Employment	3rd Industry of Employment
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	Offices of Lawyers - 61%	State Government - 19%	Local Government - 6%
Court, Municipal, and License Clerks	State Government - 59%	Local Government - 39%	Offices of Lawyers - 1%
Legal Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	Offices of Lawyers - 52%	State Government - 31%	Local Government - 9%
Legal Support Workers, All Other	State Government - 65%	Offices of Lawyers - 13%	Federal Government - 8%

Figure 6: Top Aligned Industries

The job posting analysis further highlighted the technical expectations regional employers have for new candidates in an increasingly digital environment. Beyond general Microsoft Office proficiency, job seekers are now expected to master Document Management Systems, Westlaw, and Case Management Software such as CaseMap or DocuSign. Having proficient mastery in software competencies is becoming a standard requirement for legal support roles in both the public and private sectors to ensure office productivity.

Paralegals, Legal Secretaries, and Legal Support Workers	Other Workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Office • Document Management Systems • Law Practice Management Software • Westlaw (Legal Research) • Adobe Acrobat • LexisNexis • Productivity Software • Case Management Systems • DocuSign • CaseMap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Office • Productivity Software • Case Management Systems* <p>*Just for Court, Municipal, and License Clerks</p>

Figure 6: Top 10 Specialized Software Skills

Hoehenrieder concluded by stressing that the typical entry level education listed by the federal government often differs from actual local employer preferences in Sacramento. In this region, having a specialized certificate or an Associate’s degree provides a significant competitive advantage, even for roles where the formal federal requirement

is only a high school diploma. To help bridge this gap, the COE recommended that regional training programs and colleges focus on addressing financial barriers, such as interpreting exam fees that can exceed \$500 for certain certifications.

The regional legal services market is characterized by strong earning potential but is simultaneously facing a workforce shortage across several specialized sectors. The combination of an aging workforce nearing retirement and a significant gap between the number of annual job openings and local graduates creates an urgent need for expanded educational pipelines and proactive recruitment strategies. As technological advancements like AI continue to reshape the industry, the data explains that while technical proficiency remains necessary, the true premium for future legal professionals will lie in their ability to master the human centric soft skills that remain resistant to automation.

Keynote Speaker: Cal Law Pathways

Kaitlin Jackson, Director of [California Law \(Cal Law\) pathways](#), delivered a keynote speech on the systemic mission to elevate the diversity gap within California's legal profession. She highlighted a disparity in representation, while people of color constitute 63 % of the state population, they make up only 36% of licensed attorneys. Kaitlin emphasized that Cal Law functions as a statewide initiative, partnering with over 90 organizations, including 36 community colleges and 16 ABA-accredited law schools, to create a clear, formalized roadmap from high school through law school and into legal careers. This approach is designed to demystify the legal field for students who may have previously viewed these careers as out of reach.

Central to Cal Law's mission is supporting the holistic applicants who bring vital experience to the justice ecosystem. Jackson shared that over 70% of Cal Law students are first generation college students, many of whom have been personally impacted by the legal system or have witnessed injustices in their own communities. By valuing cultural knowledge and community perspectives, the program prepares students to return to their communities as advocates who can navigate complex legal systems related to housing stability, employment rights, and immigration, said Kaitlin.

In addition to academic preparation, the program provides professional development and removes financial barriers to entry. Jackson detailed the "Seven Course Pathway" that leads to a certificate, providing students with law school application fee waivers and access to specialized mentorship, internships, and networking opportunities like "Day at the Court." She noted that the legal profession encompasses much more than attorneys, actively encouraging students to explore support roles such as paralegals, court reporters, and mediators. Cal Law aims to create a prepared workforce that represents the diversity and resilience of the communities it serves.

Panel Discussion: Legal Services and Workforce Strategies

During the panel discussion, regional employers and practitioners shared insights into the evolving landscape of legal services across the public and private sectors, with a particular focus on integrating new technologies, the persistent need for foundational legal skills, and strategies for navigating regional workforce shortages. The conversation highlighted how these diverse entities, ranging from the state's largest law firm to specialized county offices, are adapting their recruitment and training to meet current industry demands. Panel representatives included:

- *Jeff Henderson – Recruitment Manager, California Department of Justice*
- *Rick Heyer – Supervising Attorney, Sacramento County Public Defender's Office*
- *Kimberly Clark – HR Director, Downey Brand LLP*
- *Gustavo Figueroa – Deputy District Attorney, Yolo County District Attorney's Office*
- *David Delaini – Professor and Attorney, Sacramento City College*

The Private Sector Experience Gap and Specialized Training

Panelists provided a look at the economic realities governing private sector hiring, explaining that large regional firms rarely have the financial runway to hire recent or inexperienced graduates for billable paralegal positions. Speakers said that because paralegal time is billed directly to corporate and private clients, there is an immediate, non-negotiable marketplace expectation of baseline expertise in highly technical, specialized areas. These corporate workflows include independent entity formation, drafting complex commercial leases, and navigating the rigid electronic filing systems required for fast paced litigation.

Because these highly specific, practical skills are structurally difficult to master within the constraints of a traditional, theory heavy classroom environment, private firms heavily prioritize lateral candidates who already possess at least one to two years of verified experience working under a supervising attorney. This strict experience requirement creates a challenging experience paradox for recent community college graduates. To resolve this structural barrier, panelists strongly pushed community colleges to move beyond generalized advisory boards and forge deeper, localized relationships with regional firms. This proactive collaboration would enable educational institutions to map out exactly which offices have the organizational infrastructure and financial "appetite" to provide structured on the job training and paid apprenticeships, effectively creating a sustainable bridge to close this significant experience gap.

Public Sector Entry Points and Recruitment Realities

From the public sector perspective, speakers identified roles such as Office Assistant positions as an important regional on-ramp into the legal system. While these roles are entry-level and experience high turnover due to lower starting pay, they allow individuals to enter the county system and eventually be promoted into Legal Secretary, Paralegal, or Investigator positions. Panelists also highlighted that investigators in public defense roles often do not require [POST certification](#), making the position a viable entry point for individuals with varied life experiences rather than traditional law enforcement backgrounds.

Regarding state level recruitment, panelists discussed unique challenges at the Department of Justice, highlighting a significant "government lag" in technology adoption and high security hurdles. Speakers explained that state positions are governed by strict Minimum Qualifications (MQs), which can unfortunately disqualify talented applicants who are shy of the required experience by only a few months. To combat talent shortages, speakers emphasized that their agencies are currently prioritizing upskilling and cross-training existing staff to ensure competency across multiple functional silos.

Technological Integration and the Role of AI

Speakers addressed the growing operational tension between the rapid adoption of generative technologies and the critical preservation of foundational hard skills among incoming legal professionals. Panelists expressed serious concern that interns and entry level staff are increasingly relying on generative AI platforms to draft legal briefs and complete complex writing assignments, which inadvertently diminishes their ability to perform the independent legal analysis and oral advocacy required in a live courtroom. To counter this digital dependency, speakers strongly advocated for community colleges to expand practical, hands-on coursework in areas such as rules of evidence, comprehensive legal research, and detailed investigative report writing. While acknowledging that AI excels at initial clerical tasks such as scanning large datasets and summarizing basic case text, panelists emphasized that the regional legal field remains deeply cautious about total automation, maintaining a firm insistence that absolute human oversight is required to uphold stringent ethical standards, ensure procedural accuracy, and protect client confidentiality.

The Importance of Soft Skills

The panel unanimously agreed that soft skills are the most important asset for any legal professional in the current market, often outweighing technical prestige. Speakers noted that many candidates from prestigious academic backgrounds fail the interview process because they lack flexibility, cannot take constructive criticism, or fail to ask clarifying questions and take detailed notes. Panelists concluded that in a field where clients often face the most frightening moments of their lives, the ability to "hold a client's hand,"

show empathy, and make them feel heard is an essential human skill that AI will never replace.

Conclusion

The panel's insights showed the importance of the regional need for a legal workforce capable of balancing rapid technological adaptability with traditional legal rigor. While the industry is actively embracing AI and other digital tools, the clear mindset among regional leaders is that these advancements ultimately elevate rather than diminish the value of high level human competencies. By focusing on inclusive hiring strategies, such as public sector on-ramps and intentionally prioritizing the development of essential soft skills, the Greater Sacramento region can build a more powerful, agile, and diverse legal talent pipeline that effectively meets the immediate operational needs of both public and private employers.

To ensure the long term sustainability of this pipeline, faculty, workforce boards, and regional employers are urged to actively pursue deeper, direct collaborations that successfully bridge the traditional experience gap identified by industry speakers. Industry stakeholders are strongly invited to engage early with students through experiential learning opportunities, local internships, career fairs, and informational interviews to help demystify entry level pathways and support candidates through rigorous certification processes.

Please [click here](#) to view the detailed event materials and access a video recording. You can also access comprehensive labor market data on legal services careers compiled by the Center of Excellence for the Greater Sacramento region [here](#). Additionally, if you're interested in staying updated on the latest news, insights, and opportunities in workforce development, you can sign up for [Valley Vision's newsletter](#) here.

For more information about the report and labor market data provided, please contact:

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