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**CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION: MECHANISMS TO ENSURE  
LIFE LONG LEARNING FOR LEGAL PRACTITIONERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) is essential for maintaining and enhancing the competence, professionalism, and ethical standards of advocates in a dynamically evolving legal environment. It embodies the principle that legal learning extends beyond initial qualification to a lifelong process. CLE provides lawyers with structured opportunities to update their knowledge on recent legislative amendments, judicial precedents, and emerging fields such as cyber law, environmental law, and data protection. It also addresses practical skills including drafting, advocacy, negotiation, client counselling, and adaptation to technological advancements like digital case management and e-filing systems.

In India, although CLE is not yet uniformly mandatory, judicial pronouncements and regulatory efforts have increasingly recognized its importance. State Bar Councils and the Bar Council of India play pivotal roles in promoting CLE through training sessions, refresher courses, seminars, and collaborations with law universities and judicial academies. Notably, the Bar Council of Kerala has formalized CLE by instituting mandatory refresher courses tied to the renewal of the Certificate of Practice, ensuring advocates remain updated and professionally competent.

Globally, many jurisdictions have embraced mandatory CLE frameworks to sustain high professional standards. For example, the United States requires attorneys to complete CLE credits annually, with topics including ethics and emerging legal issues. Countries like Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and several European nations have developed structured CPD (Continuing Professional Development) models, reflecting a shared commitment to ongoing legal education.

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Mechanisms to ensure effective CLE include mandatory credit requirements, refresher courses, regulatory supervision by Bar Councils, online learning platforms, collaborative academic programs, and professional seminars. CLE also underscores the reinforcement of ethics and professional responsibility, a critical aspect emphasized in landmark judgments such as Bar Council of Maharashtra v. M.V. Dabholkar.

Ultimately, CLE is vital for elevating the quality of legal services, reducing advocate inefficiency that contributes to case backlogs, fostering a culture of lifelong learning, and strengthening public trust in the justice system. Its institutionalization is a necessary step toward a more competent, accountable, and credible legal profession.

## INTRODUCTION

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) represents the understanding that legal learning does not conclude with obtaining a formal law degree; rather, it is an ongoing, lifelong endeavour essential for sustaining professional competence within the legal domain. In a legal order marked by continual statutory revisions, shifting judicial interpretations, and new legal domains, continuing legal education provides a systematic framework to keep members of the legal profession current, capable, and ethically grounded. In an age of globalization and swift technological change, legal practice has grown more intricate and transnational. Continuing Legal Education equips lawyers entering the profession to navigate cross-border legal matters, adapt to novel regulatory regimes, and confront emerging ethical dilemmas. Consequently, CLE is not merely optional professional enrichment but a vital requirement to uphold competence, accountability, and public confidence in the legal vocation.<sup>2</sup> From a jurisprudential standpoint, continuing legal education is closely tied to the rule of law, accepted professional norms, and the effective dispensation of justice. This fiduciary status carries with it the duty to stay informed and proficient, since deficient legal knowledge or obsolete practices can harm litigants' rights and erode public faith in the justice system.<sup>3</sup>

In India, although CLE is not uniformly compulsory across all jurisdictions, its significance has been repeatedly acknowledged through court rulings and regulatory discourse. The Supreme Court of India has observed that the quality of justice is deeply influenced by the

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<sup>2</sup> N.R. Madhava Menon, *Clinical Legal Education* (Eastern Book Company, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Upendra Baxi, "The Rule of Law in India," *Survival* 54(3) (2012): 55–70.

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training and competence of legal professionals.<sup>4</sup> The regulatory regime overseen by the Bar Council of India likewise stresses the necessity of upholding high standards in legal education and professional conduct.<sup>5</sup> It is indispensable for an advocate's professional growth because it helps maintain their competence, ethical standards, and productivity. Law is a dynamic field, with ever-changing statutes, rules, and technological shifts that demand learning beyond initial qualification. CLE initiatives serve this purpose by offering structured opportunities for lawyers to refresh their knowledge, refine their skills, and stay abreast of contemporary trends. The Advocates Act, 1961 and the Bar Council of India Rules underscore professional standards and ethical behaviour, yet India currently lacks a uniform, mandatory CLE framework. Nonetheless, judicial pronouncements and comparative international models increasingly treat CLE as an occupational duty rather than a discretionary activity. Thus, continuing legal education has become essential for preserving excellence, responsibility, and the credibility of the legal profession.

### **I. EVOLUTION OF CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA**

The idea of Continuing Legal Education in India has evolved gradually through statutory changes, judicial guidance, and initiatives by professional bodies. While the need for ongoing professional learning has long been acknowledged, a formal and mandatory CLE system is still in the process of development in India. Early on, the legal profession relied on a practical apprenticeship model. Under Section 24(1)(d) of the Advocates Act, 1961, an applicant for enrolment as an advocate had to train under a senior advocate. This arrangement functioned as professional mentorship, giving junior lawyers hands-on exposure to practice, court procedure, drafting, and advocacy under seasoned guidance. The apprenticeship aimed not only to build competence but also to foster collegiality and professional ethics among the Bar. However, the provision was removed in 1973, abolishing the apprenticeship requirement. The deletion of Section 24(1)(d) weakened the established route for practical legal training. Consequently, many newly enrolled advocates began practising without sufficient hands-on preparation, raising concerns about advocacy quality and professional capability.<sup>6</sup> The imperative for organised continuing legal education was highlighted by the Supreme Court in *State of Maharashtra v. Manubhai Pragaji Vashi*, The Court underscored the necessity of improving legal education in India and held that legal learning must be

<sup>4</sup>*Bar Council of India v. Bonnie Foi Law College*, (2009) 7 SCC 1.

<sup>5</sup> Bar Council of India, *Rules on Legal Education*, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> M. P. Jain, *Indian Legal System* LexisNexis, 7th edn., 2014.

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continuous and systematic to meet the profession's evolving challenges. The Court acknowledged the central role of the legal profession in administering justice and the consequent need for ongoing intellectual and professional development.<sup>7</sup>

In response, the Bar Council of India endeavoured to restore practical training and continuing education via the Bar Council of India (Training) Rules, 1995. These rules sought to reintroduce apprenticeship by mandating a period of training under senior advocates and requiring a training examination before independent practice.<sup>8</sup> The aim was to ensure that newly enrolled advocates received appropriate guidance and foundational professional training. However, the validity of these rules was challenged in *V. Sudeer v. Bar Council of India*. The Supreme Court held that the Bar Council lacked authority to reimpose compulsory training through subordinate legislation, since the statutory provision that formerly permitted such training—Section 24(1)(d)—had been repealed in 1973. Accordingly, the Court invalidated the Bar Council of India (Training) Rules, 1995, thwarting the regulatory attempt to revive the apprenticeship system.<sup>9</sup> Following that decision, efforts to strengthen legal education and practical training continued to receive judicial scrutiny.

In *Bar Council of India v. Bonnie FOI Law College and Others*, the Supreme Court considered multiple aspects of legal education reform. The Bar Council presented a detailed report by a three-member committee proposing reforms, which stressed the need to fortify legal education and professional training so advocates uphold high standards.<sup>10</sup> As part of reform measures, the Bar Council of India Rules of Legal Education, 2008 introduced institutional mechanisms to enhance legal education. Notably, Rule 34 of Chapter IV provided for a Directorate of Legal Education. The Directorate was charged with organising and administering educational programs for law students and practitioners, including the promotion and roll-out of Continuing Legal Education for advocates.

The establishment of the Directorate represented a key move toward formalising CLE in India. It was tasked with developing training programs, seminars, workshops, and other educational initiatives to raise professional competence among advocates, in addition to promoting research in legal education and fostering collaboration between law schools, bar associations, and professional bodies. Despite these advances, CLE in India faces persistent

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<sup>7</sup>*State of Maharashtra v. Manubhai Pragaji Vashi*, (1995) 5 SCC 730.

<sup>8</sup> Bar Council of India (Training) Rules, 1995.

<sup>9</sup>*V. Sudeer v. Bar Council of India*, (1999) 3 SCC 176.

<sup>10</sup> *Id* at 3

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challenges. Unlike jurisdictions such as the United States and the United Kingdom, India does not yet impose a uniform mandatory CLE requirement for practising lawyers. Participation in continuing education often depends on voluntary efforts by Bar Councils, law schools, and professional organisations, resulting in uneven implementation across regions. The mounting complexity of legal practice, rapid technological change, and the globalisation of legal services have, however, intensified calls for structured CLE in India. Many commentators argue that a mandatory CLE regime would substantially enhance professional competence and the quality of legal services. In sum, the development of continuing legal education in India traces a shift from informal apprenticeship models toward more organised institutional frameworks. While judicial interventions and regulatory reforms have advanced the cause, establishing a comprehensive and compulsory CLE framework remains an important objective for the future of the profession in India.

The significance of professional responsibility has been emphasised in cases like *Bar Council of Maharashtra v. M.V. Dabholkar*, where the Supreme Court highlighted the profession's role in preserving the dignity and integrity of the justice system<sup>11</sup>

## II. GLOBAL PRACTICES IN CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

The legal vocation requires a sustained commitment to learning and professional growth. Law continually evolves due to statutory changes, delegated legislation, judicial rulings, technological progress, and international influences. Consequently, legal professionals must perpetually refresh their knowledge and skills to remain competent and discharge their duties effectively. The rationale for continuing legal education arises from the fact that a lawyer's formal studies and enrolment do not signal the end of their learning. Professional competence demands ongoing education throughout a lawyer's career. Many countries have therefore adopted structured, often mandatory, CLE frameworks to ensure lawyers uphold high standards. Jurisdictions such as the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy each maintain various forms of obligatory continuing education. The following provides a concise overview of CLE regimes in select jurisdictions.

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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<sup>11</sup>Bar Council of Maharashtra v. M.V. Dabholkar, AIR 1976 SC 242

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The United States is frequently considered a frontrunner in establishing mandatory CLE. In most states, attorneys must accrue a designated number of CLE credits annually or over a defined reporting cycle to retain their licence. State bar authorities and judicial bodies oversee these requirements.<sup>12</sup>Typically, lawyers must complete roughly 10 to 15 hours of CLE each year, although specific mandates vary by state.<sup>13</sup> Several states stipulate that part of CLE must cover professional ethics, responsibility, and anti-bias training. Non-compliance can lead to sanctions, including suspension of practising privileges until requirements are met. CLE offerings in the U.S. are delivered by bar associations, law schools, professional organisations, and private providers, in formats such as seminars, workshops, online courses, conferences, and training sessions.

### CANADA

Canada utilises a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework for lawyers<sup>14</sup>. The CPD regime obliges practitioners to engage in educational activities aimed at preserving and enhancing professional competence. In several provinces, lawyers must complete a minimum of 12 CPD hours annually. These obligations are often particularly strict during the initial years of practice to help newly admitted lawyers transition into professional life programming in Canada addresses substantive law, professional ethics, practice management, and emerging legal topics. Formats include seminars, workshops, conferences, and online modules, with provincial law societies overseeing requirements and compliance. Professional bodies such as the Law Society of Ontario and other provincial law societies regulate and monitor CPD adherence.<sup>15</sup>

### AUSTRALIA

In Australia, continuing education is governed by law societies and regulatory agencies at the state and territory. In general, solicitors must obtain a minimum of about 10 CPD units annually, which can be earned via seminars, workshops, training programs, conferences, or academic activities.<sup>16</sup> The Australian CPD scheme emphasises practical competencies—

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<sup>12</sup>American Bar Association, *Continuing Legal Education Regulation* (ABA, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Federation of Law Societies of Canada, *Model Code of Professional Conduct* (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Law Society of Ontario, *Continuing Professional Development Requirements for Lawyers* (2022).

<sup>16</sup> Law Council of Australia, *Continuing Professional Development Guidelines* (2021)

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advocacy, legal research, client management, ethics, and professional responsibility—while also covering emerging legal fields and technological impacts on practice.

### **UNITED KINGDOM**

In the UK, professional development for legal practitioners is overseen by bodies such as the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Bar Standards Board.<sup>17</sup> Previously framed as fixed-hour requirements, the UK has shifted to a competence-based approach.<sup>18</sup> Under this model, lawyers regularly assess their professional abilities, identify learning needs, and pursue suitable training to preserve their standards. This approach encourages lawyers to specialise in areas like commercial law, international arbitration, intellectual property, and digital law, through seminars, online courses, research, and professional events.

### **EUROPE (GERMANY, FRANCE, ITALY)**

Several European states have introduced obligatory training requirements to secure continuous professional advancement. For instance, in Germany, lawyers are encouraged to pursue training coordinated by regional bar associations, often focusing on specialisations such as commercial, tax, or international law. In France, continuing legal education is mandatory: French lawyers commonly must complete at least 20 hours of professional training each year, including seminars and workshops organised by bar associations. In Italy, advocates are required periodically to take part in training programs and accumulate education credits to retain their licence. These European models illustrate a firm commitment to sustaining professional competence and ensuring lawyers remain conversant with legal developments over the course of their careers.

## **III. CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION IN KERALA**

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) serves as an essential mechanism to ensure that advocates remain professionally competent, ethically responsible, and updated with evolving legal developments. Recognising the growing need for structured professional development, the Bar Council of Kerala introduced the Bar Council of Kerala Legal Education (Training and

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<sup>17</sup>solicitors Regulation Authority, *Continuing Competence Framework* (UK, 2016).

Professional Development) Rules, 2025 to institutionalise CLE and enhance the standards of the legal profession within the State.<sup>19</sup>

A central feature of the 2025 Rules is the introduction of a mandatory **Refresher Course**, designed to ensure that practising advocates periodically update their knowledge and skills. The primary objective of this course is to maintain professional competence, strengthen ethical awareness, and ensure familiarity with recent legislative enactments and judicial pronouncements. In a dynamic legal system where laws continuously evolve through amendments and precedents, such ongoing education is indispensable for safeguarding the quality of legal services and ensuring effective representation of litigants.<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, the Rules link the renewal of the Certificate of Practice (COP) with the successful completion of a refresher course. Under Rule 14(1), every advocate must complete at least one certified refresher course conducted or recognised by the Bar Council of Kerala Advocates Academy within a period of five years preceding the application for COP renewal.<sup>21</sup> Failure to comply with this requirement may result in rejection of the renewal application, unless the Bar Council permits relaxation in exceptional circumstances under Rule 14(2).<sup>22</sup> This provision ensures that advocates periodically refresh their professional knowledge as a condition for continuing legal practice.

The refresher course is structured as a short-term professional training programme conducted by the Advocates Academy of the Bar Council of Kerala. Typically, it consists of a three-day programme comprising approximately 15–20 hours of instruction, culminating in an assessment. The curriculum includes core areas of legal practice, recent developments in law, professional ethics, and advocacy skills. Instruction is delivered by a diverse group of experts, including senior advocates, judges, law professors, and subject specialists, thereby combining theoretical insights with practical experience.<sup>23</sup>

Upon successful completion of the course and assessment, participants are awarded a certificate containing relevant details such as enrolment number, course duration, and a

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<sup>19</sup>Bar Council of Kerala, *Legal Education (Training and Professional Development) Rules*, 2025.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Rule 14(1).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Rule 14(2).

<sup>23</sup>Bar Council of Kerala, Circular No. CIR-1/2026 dated 10 February 2026

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unique certificate identification number. This certificate serves as proof of compliance and is verified by the Bar Council during the COP renewal process.<sup>24</sup>

Non-compliance with the refresher course requirement carries significant consequences. An advocate who fails to produce proof of completion at the time of renewal may have their application rejected and may be transferred to the “Miscellaneous Roll.” During this period, the advocate may be treated as a non-practising member and may be restricted from appearing before courts or filing vakalatnamas.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, the introduction of mandatory refresher courses under the 2025 Rules marks a significant step towards formalising continuing legal education in Kerala. By linking professional practice with periodic training, the Bar Council of Kerala has sought to promote lifelong learning, enhance professional standards, and strengthen the administration of justice in the State.

#### **IV. BENEFITS OF CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION FOR LAWYERS**

- Enables lawyers to remain updated about changes in law.
- Raises awareness on diverse topics such as technological innovations, mental health, and client sustainability.
- Enhances legal knowledge and practical skills, allowing more effective client representation
- Expands professional networks by bringing together practitioners from varied backgrounds, fostering collaboration and exchange
- Supports continuous improvement whether practising in firms or solo practice.
- Provides access to experts, as many CLE programs feature leading legal authorities who offer practical insights on current issues.
  
- Another benefit of CLE for lawyers is that they maintain being active and experienced attorneys resulting in enhanced client trust.

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<sup>24</sup>Bar Council of Kerala, *Legal Education (Training and Professional Development) Rules, 2025*, Rule 14(3).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, Rule 17

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## V. MECHANISMS FOR ENSURING CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

Continuing Legal Education is fundamental to maintaining advocates' competence, ethical standards, and effectiveness. Given law's dynamic nature—statutes changing, new laws enacted, and precedent evolving—mechanisms have been developed to ensure lawyers engage in lifelong learning.

### ➤ **Mandatory Continuing Legal Education**

Mandatory continuing legal education Requirements highly effective mechanism is the imposition of mandatory training obligations. Regulators may require practising lawyers to complete a set number of CLE hours or credits within defined periods. Approved activities include seminars, workshops, conferences, certificate programs, and professional training. Mandatory CLE helps advocates stay abreast of legislative updates, procedural changes, and emerging areas like cyber law, arbitration, intellectual property, and environmental law, while also sharpening advocacy, drafting, and courtroom skills. The Bar Council of India, under the Advocates Act, 1961, has the power to frame rules on professional standards and legal education. State Bar Councils likewise may organise or oversee CLE initiatives within their territories.

### ➤ **Refresher Courses for Practicing Advocates**

Refresher courses are targeted programs designed to update practitioners on recent statutes, seminal judgments, and procedural changes—especially useful for experienced advocates to maintain pace with the evolving legal framework. Topics often include:

- Recent amendments in criminal and civil laws
- Changes in procedural laws
- Developments in constitutional jurisprudence
- Emerging fields such as technology law, arbitration, and data protection

These courses are commonly delivered by State Bar Councils, law universities, judicial academies, and professional institutions.

### ➤ **Role of Bar Councils and Regulatory Supervision**

Bar Councils play a central role in implementing CLE. The Bar Council of India and State Bar Councils promote professional competence and ethical standards via measures such as:

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- Organising training sessions and seminars
- Partnering with academic institutions
- Keeping records of CLE participation
- Encouraging advocates to undertake professional development

➤ **Collaboration with Law Universities and Judicial Institutions**

Collaboration between Bar Councils and academic bodies is another key mechanism. Leading law schools and research centres often run continuing education modules, certificate courses, and advanced training for practising lawyers. Institutions like the National Judicial Academy, National Law School of India University, and State Judicial Academies provide programmes on specialised topics, allowing advocates to learn from judges, scholars, and senior practitioners. Academic partnerships ensure CLE blends theoretical insights with practical skills.<sup>5</sup> Online and Distance Learning Programs Technological progress has broadened CLE delivery through webinars, virtual workshops, digital courses, and online certifications. Online programs enable lawyers to participate without geographic constraints, access recorded lectures, research resources, case law databases, and discussion forums—beneficial for advocates in remote areas with limited access to traditional training

➤ **Professional Seminars, Workshops, and Conferences**

Regular engagement in seminars, workshops, and conferences organised by Bar Associations, legal research bodies, universities, and professional groups offers platforms for:

- Discussing recent case law
  - Analysing legislative changes
  - Sharing best practices
  - Interacting with judges, senior counsel, and academics
- Networking and knowledge exchange at such events significantly aid continual professional development.

➤ **Legal Research, Publication, and Academic Contribution**

Encouraging advocates to conduct legal research and publish contributes to CLE. Writing articles, case notes, books, and academic papers requires critical engagement with legal

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doctrines and developments. Participation in research deepens a lawyer's understanding and fosters scholarly contributions to the law.

➤ **Certification, Credits, and Evaluation Systems**

Some CLE regimes use credit-based evaluations, requiring advocates to earn specified CLE credits through approved activities and providing certification upon successful completion of courses, tests, or assignments. These systems promote accountability and help maintain the standard and impact of CLE programs.

➤ **Use of Legal Technology and Digital Resources**

Familiarity with legal technology is becoming central to CLE. Advocates are encouraged to master legal databases, e-filing, AI tools, and virtual court platforms. The Supreme Court's e-Committee has promoted digital court reforms through the e-Courts project. Training in e-filing, virtual hearings, and digital case management forms an important component of CLE.

➤ **Role of Professional Ethics Training**

Continuing education also encompasses instruction in professional ethics and responsibility. Advocates must be conscious of their duties to clients, courts, and society; CLE often includes modules on conduct, disciplinary norms, and ethical advocacy.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The importance of Continuing Legal Education in enhancing advocates' efficiency—and thereby addressing case backlog in India—cannot be overstated. Advocate inefficiency considerably contributes to the accumulation of pending matters, delaying justice and straining judicial resources. Such inefficiencies often stem from inadequate preparation, weak case-management skills, and limited legal proficiency mitigates these problems by providing continuous instruction and training on recent legal developments, procedural changes, and technological innovations. Regular participation in CLE enables advocates to boost their overall competence, refine practical skills, and acquire specialised knowledge, which helps them manage caseloads more effectively, reduce adjournments, and deliver timely and accurate representation. Furthermore, CLE modules that stress accountability and ethics are vital for preserving the profession's integrity. Ethical practitioners are less likely to engage in conduct that causes procedural delays or substandard case handling. By fostering an ethic of professional responsibility and lifelong learning, CLE supports the credibility of the legal

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system. Imposing stronger regulatory standards and performance reviews alongside comprehensive CLE initiatives would enhance advocates' accountability and effectiveness. Such measures ensure practitioners meet high standards of conduct and continually upgrade their knowledge and skills. In conclusion, CLE is a pivotal instrument in addressing advocate inefficiency and reducing India's case backlog. By investing in ongoing professional development for advocates, the legal profession can facilitate swifter justice delivery, improve client satisfaction, and bolster public trust in the judiciary. Strengthening advocates' capabilities through CLE is a necessary stride toward a more efficient, reliable, and just legal system.



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