



**VCERA**  
VENTURA COUNTY EMPLOYEES'  
RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION

**2026 VCERA**  
**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

**FOR DISABILITY RETIREMENT HEARING OFFICERS**

# 2026 VCERA Request for Proposal for Disability Retirement Hearing Officers

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# 2026 VCERA Request for Proposal for Disability Retirement Hearing Officers

## I. Introduction

The Ventura County Employees' Retirement Association ("VCERA") is soliciting proposals from qualified attorneys to serve on its panel of Hearing Officers who preside over administrative Disability Retirement hearings administered under the County Employees' Retirement Law of 1937 (CERL) and VCERA's disability retirement hearing procedures (i.e. Disability Hearing Procedures ("DHPs"), Disability Retirement Process, Disability Retirement Hearing Rules, and Ex Parte Communication Policy – all located on VCERA's website at <https://vcera.gov/members/active-members/disability-retirement>). VCERA seeks to establish a panel of experienced and impartial adjudicators to conduct evidentiary hearings, evaluate administrative records, and issue written proposed findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommended decisions to the VCERA Board of Retirement.

VCERA administers a defined benefit plan covering county and district employees. Disability Retirement applications are governed by the CERL and require independent adjudication when factual disputes arise. VCERA periodically contracts with Hearing Officers and intends to refresh and expand its panel in alignment with best practices and compliance with the CERL. Further discussion regarding disability retirement law can be found at [www.lacera.com/about\\_lacera/pdf/DisabilityRetirementLaw.pdf](http://www.lacera.com/about_lacera/pdf/DisabilityRetirementLaw.pdf).

Service on the panel may also occasionally involve assignments to make findings and recommendations regarding benefit entitlement determinations other than disability retirement matters.

## II. Scope of Services

### a. Expectations of Hearing Officers

Selected Hearing Officers will be expected to:

1. Conduct fair and impartial administrative hearings (in-person or virtual as required).
2. Review all submitted evidence, including medical, vocational, and employment records.
3. Administer oaths, manage evidentiary processes, and rule on motions and objections.
4. Maintain decorum and ensure a complete hearing record.
5. Prepare a written, well-reasoned **Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law** and recommended decisions to the VCERA Board of Retirement within the timeframe required by VCERA's governing disability retirement hearing procedures.
6. Provide availability for pre-hearing conferences when needed.
7. Adhere to VCERA policies (Disability Hearing Procedures ("DHPs"), Disability Retirement Process, Disability Hearing Rules and Ex Parte Communication Policy, referenced above), CERL requirements, and applicable due-process standards.

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## III. Qualifications

### a. Minimum Qualifications

Respondents must meet the following minimum standards:

- Active membership in good standing with the State Bar of California.
- Minimum of five (5) years of experience in administrative law, labor/employment law, disability retirement, or related adjudicatory fields.
- Have demonstrated prior experience conducting evidentiary hearings and drafting legal findings.
- Be free of conflicts of interest involving VCERA, the County of Ventura, district employers, or VCERA members.

### b. Desired Qualifications

The following qualifications are also desired:

- Prior experience adjudicating CERL disability retirement hearings.
- Knowledge of public-sector retirement systems and medical disability criteria.
- Experience serving as a neutral arbitrator, or administrative hearing officer.
- High-quality written decision-making samples.
- Familiarity with medical evaluation standards, administrative evidentiary rules, and public-sector benefit programs.
- Strong legal writing skills and experience producing reasoned findings.
- Ability to meet strict procedural timelines, consistent with adjudicatory standards

## IV. Submission Requirements

### a. Included Items

Proposals must include:

- Letter of interest.
- Current résumé or Curriculum Vitae (CV).
- Description of experience, including any CERL or public-sector pension work.
- Statement of active State Bar membership (with State Bar number) in good standing with the State Bar of California for a minimum of five years.
- Disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest, including disclosure of any gift or political contribution made to any officer, Board member or employee of VCERA within the past twenty-four (24) months.
- Redacted legal writing sample prepared solely by the respondent within the last year.

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- Professional references (minimum of three). Please include name, contact information and a brief description of professional association.

## V. Publication and Submission Instructions

### a. Publication Instructions

This RFP will be published at/to:

- a. VCERA website – [www.vcera.gov](http://www.vcera.gov)
- b. CALAPRS website – [www.calaprs.org](http://www.calaprs.org)
- c. SACRS website – [www.sacrs.org](http://www.sacrs.org)
- d. LinkedIn – [www.linkedin.com/company/ventura-county-employees-retirement-association-vcera/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/ventura-county-employees-retirement-association-vcera/)
- e. Facebook – [www.facebook.com/vcera](http://www.facebook.com/vcera)
- f. Various local attorney associations
- g. Mailed and/or emailed to known individuals whom VCERA believes may have an interest in submitting a response

### b. Submission Instructions

Proposals must be submitted electronically in PDF format to:

**VCERA Disability Retirement Benefits Unit**  
**Katrina Peña, Disability Retirement Benefits Manager**  
**Email:** RFP@vcera.gov  
**Subject Line:** *Hearing Officer RFP Submission – [Your Name]*  
**Due Date:** Friday, July 10, 2026 by 5:00 pm Pacific Daylight Time  
Late submissions may not be considered.

## VI. Evaluation and Selection Criteria

### a. Evaluation Criteria

VCERA will evaluate proposals using factors such as:

- Demonstrated experience and expertise in administrative hearings.
- Quality of writing samples and analytical depth.
- Understanding of disability retirement adjudication under CERL.
- Professionalism, clarity, and completeness of the proposal.
- Absence of conflicts of interest.

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## b. Selection Process

VCERA will conduct an initial review of all submitted proposals to determine whether they are complete and responsive to the requirements of this RFP. Proposals that do not address all required elements or fail to provide sufficient information for evaluation may be rejected without further consideration.

Following the initial review, proposals that meet the minimum thresholds will be evaluated against the criteria listed in Qualifications and Submission Requirements Sections of this RFP. VCERA may conduct interviews with selected finalists to further assess qualifications, writing quality, adjudicatory experience, and overall fit for service as a VCERA Disability Retirement Hearing Officer.

Appointments to the Hearing Officer panel will be made based on demonstrated qualifications, impartiality, experience with disability retirement adjudication, and VCERA's operational needs.

## VII. Schedule

- RFP Issued – June 24, 2026
- RFP Inquiry Deadline – July 8, 2026
- RFP Submission Deadline – July 10, 2026
- Proposed Contract Effective date – July 27, 2026

## VIII. Terms and Conditions for Receipt of Proposals

### a. Inquiries Regarding RFP

All inquiries must be submitted in writing to [RFP@vcera.gov](mailto:RFP@vcera.gov) above by 5:00 pm on Wednesday, **July 8, 2026**. Responses will be provided to all interested parties.

### b. Reservation of Rights

- To establish a panel of Hearing Officers from which assignments will be made;
- To decline to select any respondent; or
- To reissue or revise this RFP at its discretion.

All proposals may be subject to public disclosure under the California Public Records Act once the selection process has concluded.

VCERA reserves the right to request clarifications or additional information.

VCERA may reject any or all proposals, reissue this RFP, or modify the process at its discretion.

Submission of a proposal constitutes agreement to comply with VCERA's applicable policies and procedures.

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## IX. APPENDIX

### a. Sample Hearing Officer Contract

#### **REFEREE SERVICES AGREEMENT**

THIS AGREEMENT, to be effective as of the 27<sup>th</sup> day of July 2026, by and between the BOARD OF RETIREMENT (hereinafter referred to as "Board") of the VENTURA COUNTY EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION (hereinafter referred to as "Association"), and \_\_\_\_\_ (hereinafter referred to as "Contractor").

#### Recitals

Pursuant to the provisions of section 31533 of the Government Code, the Board is authorized to provide for the conduct of hearings by a referee in connection with the determination of applications of members of the Association for disability benefits under the County Employees Retirement Law of 1937 (Ch. 3 of div. 4 of tit. 3 of the Government Code).

Contractor has experience with respect to evidentiary hearings and is a member of the State Bar of California (active membership no. \_\_\_\_\_).

The Board intends to retain the services of Contractor as a referee to conduct said hearings.

IT IS THEREFORE AGREED:

#### Services To Be Performed

1. Contractor agrees, when available, to act as a referee in connection with the conduct of hearings and the review of cases pursuant to section 31533 of the Government Code.
2. Such services shall be performed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the County Employees Retirement Law of 1937, as amended, and pursuant to any specific requirements imposed by the Board, and such services shall include, but shall not be limited to, the conduct of hearings, the review of evidence, and the rendering of

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a written report which shall contain proposed findings of fact, conclusions of law, and a recommended decision, provided that said written report shall be rendered within ninety (90) days after the case has been submitted to Contractor and include service of said written report to all parties.

3. Contractor may request an extension from the Board of any time limitation established in this contract, on an individual case basis, when done in writing, and upon a showing of "good cause" as to said request.

4. If Contractor requires more than forty (40) billable, non-travel hours to complete a hearing assignment, Contractor will provide written notice to VCERA, with copies to all parties, concerning the reason(s) for the additional time required.

5. Contractor shall be familiar with the Association's "Disability Hearing Procedures," "Disability Retirement Process," "Disability Retirement Hearing Rules", and "Ex Parte Communication Policy."

6. The Board is under no obligation to submit cases to the Contractor, but it may do so at its pleasure.

## Compensation

7. Compensation to Contractor for the above services shall be at the following rates:

(a) If the written report is rendered within ninety (90) days after the case has been submitted, or within any time extension granted by the Board pursuant to paragraph 3 above, Contractor shall be entitled to Two Hundred and Fifty Dollars (\$250.00) per hour;

(b) Contractor shall be entitled to elect to be compensated for necessary and reasonable travel time to and from Ventura County pursuant to the rate set forth above, or to be reimbursed for mileage (at the IRS business standard mileage rate) and hotel (or other lodging) at a reasonable rate. Overnight stays will be reimbursed if deemed reasonable based on the Contractor's travel time to Ventura County. Reimbursements will be made only upon submission of receipts by the Contractor. Contractor will be reimbursed for hotel and mileage ***or*** compensated for travel time, but not both;

(c) Contractor shall be compensated for meals at a daily per diem rate of \$74 only if it is necessary for the Contractor to stay overnight;

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(d) If the written report is not rendered within ninety (90) days from the date the case has been submitted, or within any time extension granted by the Board pursuant to paragraph 3 above, the Board may transfer the case to another referee, in which event the original referee shall not receive any fee for services performed in connection with said case;

(e) If a hearing scheduled before the Contractor is continued or cancelled less than fourteen (14) calendar days before the date agreed upon by all parties, or set by the Board, the Board shall pay to the Contractor the sum of One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00), which includes all costs associated with the hearing, including, but not limited to, travel time, mileage reimbursement and other associated hearing costs.

## Term of Contract

8. This agreement shall apply for all services provided by the Contractor, performed on or after July 27, 2026, and shall continue through June 30, 2029, at which time it shall terminate. However, either party may terminate this agreement sooner upon ten (10) days written notice to the other party. Any cases pending before the Contractor at the time of termination shall be immediately transferred to the Board. If this agreement is terminated at the request of the Contractor, the Contractor shall not receive any fees for services performed in connection with any cases that are pending as of the effective date of the termination, except those wherein a written report has been provided to the Board. If this agreement is terminated at the request of the Board, the Contractor shall be entitled to the compensation earned prior to the effective date of termination as provided for in this agreement, computed pro rata up to and including that date. The Contractor shall be entitled to no further compensation as of the date of termination.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Amy Herron, Retirement Administrator

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contractor