

April 07, 2020

ABA urges states that cancel bar exams due to COVID-19 to consider alternatives for law grads

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CHICAGO, April 7, 2020 — The American Bar Association Board of Governors approved a [policy resolution](#) Tuesday that urges state licensing authorities to immediately adopt emergency rules that would authorize 2019 and 2020 law graduates who cannot take a bar exam because of the pandemic to engage in a limited practice of law under certain circumstances.

Nationwide, either the highest court or a bar admission group in each jurisdiction regulates licensing procedures for their states and territories. The rare policy resolution by the ABA board seeks to allow last year's and upcoming graduates of ABA-approved law schools to practice under the supervision of a licensed attorney if the July bar exam in their jurisdiction is canceled or postponed due to public health and safety concerns arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

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Yes

President Judy Perry Martinez said. “By justifiably postponing bar examinations, states are protecting law students and the public’s health, but the lives and careers of law graduates are being adversely affected.

“We are offering guidance to state bar admission authorities that will assist them while still taking every precaution to guarantee clients are competently and professionally served,” she continued. “This guidance for an emergency law graduate rule will not only help the recent law graduates work within the legal sector in a meaningful way, but also will add more people to help address the increase in legal needs for individuals and businesses caused by this pandemic.”

The resolution’s report noted that these legal needs “are already enormous and will continue to grow,” and that tens of thousands of graduating law students could “serve the public in this crisis” and improve access to justice for all U.S. residents.

While the approximate 600 members of the ABA House of Delegates typically set policy at the ABA Midyear and Annual Meetings, ABA rules allow the Board of Governors to consider resolutions from ABA entities on urgent ABA or national issues between meetings of the House. This has happened, however, only a handful of times in several decades.

The ABA is the largest voluntary association of lawyers in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges

in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education,

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