

For Immediate Release

Disability Rights and Racial Justice Organizations
Urge Chief Justices to
Endorse Bar Applicants' Diploma Privilege During Pandemic
COVID-19 Disproportionally Impacts People of Color and People with Disabilities

(October 6, 2020 -- Washington, D.C.)– In-person bar examinations during the COVID-19 pandemic pose a significant danger for communities of color and people with disabilities because of the disproportionate infection and death rates in those communities, [a letter](#) sent by disability and civil rights groups to the Conference of Chief Justices said today.

The organizations urge the conference to endorse the widespread adoption of temporary diploma privilege, for individuals applying for admission to the bar during the ongoing pandemic. This policy would allow qualified law school graduates to practice law without sitting for the bar exam during the pandemic.

The letter also describes the disproportionate adverse impact that online bar examinations have on both groups due to inaccessible software, proctoring systems that present risks of inappropriately flagging individuals in these groups, less access to reliable internet service and quiet test-taking environments, and other factors.

The letter's authors point out that temporary diploma privilege is the most sensible, fair and equitable option for bar admission during the pandemic in light of the discriminatory risks associated with in-person and remote bar examinations. For those states that decline to use temporary diploma privilege, the letters' authors urge that steps be taken to ensure that both safe administration of in-person bar examinations and open-book remote bar examinations be made available.

The Conference of Chief Justices is comprised of the chief justices of the highest courts of each state. These courts administer or play a role in administering the bar admission process in each state.

“Black Americans are severely underrepresented in the legal profession. At a time when our country is dealing with an economic recession disproportionately impacting communities of color and other underrepresented groups, the legal profession must consider how bar examination processes during the pandemic may exacerbate existing and longstanding inequities in our legal profession,” said **Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law**. “The only equitable way to regulate the admission of new attorneys under these conditions will be through the widespread implementation of temporary diploma privilege.”

“Adopting a diploma privilege system during the pandemic will help avoid a discriminatory bar admission process and will be an important step in addressing the underrepresentation of people of color and people with disabilities in the legal profession,” **said Jennifer Mathis, director of Policy and Legal Advocacy at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and a co-chair of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Rights Task Force.**

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to enlist the private bar’s leadership and resources in combating racial discrimination and the resulting inequality of opportunity – work that continues to be vital today.

Read the letter [here](#).

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