

Deans, lawyers commend La. Supreme Court for bar waiver

The ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis demands sensitive, thoughtful, and bold leadership from many sectors, including all branches of government. We saw that kind of leadership this past week from the Louisiana Supreme Court.

After a sudden rise in COVID-19 cases statewide forced the Court to cancel the July bar exam, less than two weeks before hundreds of applicants were to sit for it, the Court faced a dilemma without easy solution. Attempting to administer the exam online raised a host of novel security concerns and would have inevitably meant failing some number of applicants solely because of mishaps with their internet connections. Indeed, just days after the Court's order, Indiana and Nevada had to postpone their online bar exams because of technical problems with the software. Rescheduling the in-person exam, given the uncertainties of the pandemic, might well have meant a succession of delays stretching into next year. Meanwhile, the careers of hundreds of worthy lawyers—and the clients and communities they could ably serve—would be put indefinitely on ice.

Instead, the Court charted an alternative path that demonstrated courage, creativity and compassion in reckoning with the cold realities of the pandemic. It creates a path for emergency admission to the Louisiana Bar for a limited group of qualified candidates, under the unique and limited circumstances of the pandemic, while imposing additional safeguards to help ensure their readiness to practice. In place of what would have been a one-day written exam, it substitutes a year-long regimen of continuing education and rigorous, one-on-one mentoring by experienced lawyers. Within hours of the Court's decision, the President of the Louisiana State Bar Association and the leaders of many of the state's largest law firms declared their readiness to step up and help effectuate the Court's plan with substantial education and mentoring.

The Court's decision sensitively advances both the compelling interests of recent law school graduates entering the profession after years of rigorous preparation and the interest of the public in being served by qualified practicing lawyers. The Court's balanced judgment and the immediate and constructive offer of partnership it inspired are both credits to the unique strength of our state's legal profession.

Sincerely,

Judy Barrasso

Kim M. Boyle (Pres., LSBA, 2009–10)

Mark A. Cunningham (Pres., LSBA, 2015–16)

Robert J. David

Harry S. Hardin III (Pres., LSBA, 1993–94)

Wayne Lee (Pres., LSBA, 2003–04)

Dean Madeleine Landrieu, Loyola University College of Law

Julie D. Livaudais

Interim Dean Lee Ann W. Lockridge, LSU Law Center

Lynn M. Luker

Dean David D. Meyer, Tulane University Law School

Hillar Moore

John H. Musser (Pres., LSBA, 2012–13)

Frank X. Neuner, Jr. (Pres., LSBA, 2005–06)

James R. "Jimmy" Nieset

Chancellor John Pierre, Southern University Law Center
Darrel J. Papillion (Pres., LSBA, 2016–17)
Robert L. Redfearn
Marta-Ann Schnabel (Pres., LSBA, 2006–07)
Phillip A. Wittmann