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NJ Supreme Court Allows 2020 Law School Graduates to Temporarily Practice Law Despite Postponement of Bar Exam

New Jersey's July 2020 bar exam will be postponed until the fall because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but law school graduates will have an opportunity to temporarily practice law under the supervision of experienced attorneys, under [an order](#) signed today by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner on behalf of the state Supreme Court.

The order relaxes court rules so that 2020 law school graduates who have not yet taken the bar exam can temporarily practice law under the supervision of attorneys in good standing who have been licensed for a minimum of three years. Graduates must apply to take the first exam scheduled after graduation, or qualify for a single extension, and earn certification from the Supreme Court Committee on Character before they can practice law.

The Court issued the order after consultation with the deans of New Jersey's law schools: Kimberly Mutcherson, Co-Dean of Rutgers Law School; David Lopez, Co-Dean of Rutgers Law School; and Kathleen M. Boozang, Dean of Seton Hall Law School.

“At this challenging time, the public has a continuing and growing need for legal services in many critical areas,” Chief Justice Rabner stated in the order. “Newly admitted lawyers can help meet that need. The Court also recognizes that, without a means to pass the bar and obtain a law license, qualified students who expect to graduate this spring may lose job offers, be unable to find legal work, and otherwise suffer financial hardship.”

Under the order, 2020 graduates of accredited law schools will be able to:

- enter appearances.
- draft legal documents and pleadings.
- provide legal services to clients.
- engage in negotiations and settlement discussions.
- provide other counsel consistent with the practice of law in New Jersey.

Before graduates can be authorized to temporarily practice law, they must be certified by the Committee on Character and submit all necessary fees and materials required for such a review. The Court, in its order, encouraged attorneys to volunteer to help the committee expedite the review process.

The temporary ability to practice law will lapse if the graduate does not sit for the first bar exam scheduled after graduation, unless granted an extension, or if the graduate does not pass the exam. Graduates who cannot sit for the first exam can apply to the [New Jersey Board of Bar Examiners](#) for a single extension if they can establish a specific showing of personal hardship. No further extensions will be granted.

In order to prepare for the exam, 2020 graduates serving as law clerks in the New Jersey Judiciary will be granted one week of additional leave. Individual judges will have discretion to allow a second week of leave. The order encourages supervising attorneys, law firms, and other legal employers to offer 2020 graduates the same accommodation.

“The deans of Rutgers and Seton Hall Law Schools appreciate the careful and expeditious work of the New Jersey Supreme Court to enable the class of 2020 to enter the profession and begin their legal careers. We look forward to working with the Court to facilitate the administration of the bar exam, whenever that becomes possible,” the deans said in a joint statement today.

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