

January 1, 2026

Daniel R. Thies

Chair, Council of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar
American Bar Association
321 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60654

Request for ABA Review of Accelerating Recruiting Timelines

Dear Mr. Thies and Members of the Council,

We, the undersigned Student Associations and Governments, write jointly to share our observations concerning accelerating recruiting timelines at law schools nationwide. This acceleration demonstrates employers' enthusiasm for—and investment in—the future of the profession. Fortunately, our student bodies have thus far matched this energy, remaining dedicated to their training, commitment, and passion for the law.

Yet the accelerated timelines have also begun to undermine legal education, student and staff well-being, and the recruitment market. The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) reports that first-year students face outreach and employment offers before completing core courses or gaining experience in clinics, labs, or writing classes that may inform career interests.¹ In 2024, seventy-eight percent of large firms extended second-year employment offers by July, representing the most accelerated recruitment cycle NALP has recorded.²

This year, first- and second-year employment applications and offers are arriving even sooner. Employers increasingly begin outreach, host informational meetings, and invite applications during the first semester of law school. Some even recruit for second-year summer positions as early as October 1 of a student's first year, with at least four consequences.³

First, accelerating recruitment timelines compromise the quality of students' legal education, as students increasingly focus on activities that support recruitment and placement during their first, foundational year in law school. This attention to recruitment risks undermining the efficacy of the first-year curriculum, which the ABA characterizes as central to building analytical and professional competencies.⁴ Under heightened early-career and academic pressure, students are deprived of the time necessary to study diligently and may experience worsening mental health.⁵

¹ See generally *Perspectives on 2024 Law Student Recruiting*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR L. PLACEMENT (Mar. 11, 2025), https://www.nalp.org/uploads/Perspectives_on_2024_Recruiting_Activity_Final.pdf [<https://perma.cc/8NL6-Z5ZV>].

² *Id.* at 6.

³ *Id.* at 89 tbl. 44, 99 tbl. 53 (documenting increasing pre-OCI activity and decreasing decision-making time for students over the past few recruiting cycles).

⁴ *Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools* 21–24, A.B.A., https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2025-2026/2025-2026-standards-and-rules-of-procedure-for-approval-of-law-schools.pdf [<https://perma.cc/97S9-M8LD>] (supporting this point under ABA Standards 301–303) (last visited Dec. 1, 2025).

⁵ While a study has not been conducted since 2021, the *National Survey of Law Student Well-Being* has documented rising levels of mental-health challenges among law students. See generally David Jaffe, Katherine & Jerome Organ, "It's Okay to Not Be Okay": *The 2021 Survey of Law Student Well-Being*, 60 U. LOUISVILLE L. REV. 441, 463 (2022).

Second, first-year students across the undersigned institutions have reported increased pressure to apply for associate positions before their professional and academic interests can meaningfully develop. Traditionally, law-school summers enable students to explore subject areas and work sectors they may not plan to enter immediately; however, accelerated recruiting timelines disproportionately disadvantage smaller, often public-interest employers. The result is a candidate pool that feels increasingly underprepared and underinformed about whether they have selected a career path, geography, firm, or practice group that aligns with their interests and values.

Third, early legal career outcomes closely track socioeconomic background and access to networks.⁶ The class of 2027 was composed of approximately 75% first-generation law students, 23% first-generation college graduates, and 42% students from historically underrepresented minority backgrounds.⁷ Students with familial connections or prior experience in legal workplaces are often better equipped to navigate informal recruiting and accelerated decision-making processes. In contrast, those without these networks often experience greater stress, less access to information, and heightened pressure to accept early offers.

Fourth, accelerating recruitment impacts law-school staff and employer recruitment teams. While we may not be best situated to know their exact challenges, less information may lead to greater stress in obtaining early positions, as well as higher mismatch and attrition rates. Further, employers likely miss out on exceptional students who take more than one semester to acclimate to—and even thrive in—law school.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the firms that devote significant time and resources to recruiting and securing employment opportunities for law students. Our concerns arise from a shared interest in ensuring that the recruitment process supports the long-term academic and professional success of our law students. Accordingly, we respectfully request a dialogue and opportunities to engage with the ABA on this issue of accelerating recruitment. Paths forward seem varied and numerous, and we hope that collaboration can identify solutions that are lawful and consistent with the ABA's mission⁸ and resources.⁹

Potential options include (1) soliciting input and opinions from students, schools, and employers in various sectors to build a platform for informed and reasoned discussion between and among stakeholders; (2) developing policies for recruitment programs, consistent with applicable law, that provide students time to acclimate to law school and learn about their options; and (3) evaluating whether accreditation standards might better support the educational focus of the first year of law school.¹⁰

Thank you for your time and consideration. We aim to help shape a recruiting system that prioritizes legal education, professional development, and informed career decision-making.

⁶ See *After the JD: A National Study of Lawyer Careers*, AM. BAR. FOUND., <https://www.americanbarfoundation.org/projects/after-the-jd-a-national-study-of-lawyer-careers/> [<https://perma.cc/HJ7R-2673>] (last visited Nov. 26, 2025).

⁷ LSAC's *Knowledge Report: The 2024 IL Profile*, L. SCH. ADMISSIONS COUNCIL 3 (2025), <https://www.lsac.org/sites/default/files/research/2024ILProfileReportFinal.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/V8SJ-J83E>].

⁸ As future legal professionals, we are proud to align ourselves with the ABA's goals and objectives, including providing benefits, programs, and services that support members' professional growth and quality of life; promoting the highest quality legal education; and fostering full and equal participation in the association and our profession. We believe that the ABA can assist all relevant stakeholders in resolving this collective-action problem in service of its mission, goals, and objectives.

⁹ Julianne Hill, *ABA Legal Ed Council Will Stand Up New Committee Examining Accreditation Standards*, A.B.A. J. (Nov. 17, 2025), <https://www.abajournal.com/web/article/legal-ed-council-stands-up-new-committee-to-examine-accreditation-standards> [<https://perma.cc/JYF3-XZPE>].

¹⁰ Over the longer term, we recognize that creating a recruitment process that respects the student interests identified in this letter may invite legal challenges. We therefore look to the American Association of Medical Colleges' successful effort to secure a statutory exemption to antitrust liability for the National Resident Matching Program (*see* 15 U.S.C. § 37(b) (2024)) and encourage the ABA to pursue comparable protections for reforms developed through the collaborative dialogue we request.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Student Associations and Governments

Columbia Law School Student
Senate

Cornell Law Students'
Association

Duke University School of Law,
Duke Bar Association

** Citing Duke Law School Poll
(93% support; 237 respondents)*

Georgetown University Law
Center, Student Bar Association

Harvard Law Student
Government

New York University School of
Law, Student Bar Association

Northwestern Pritzker School of
Law, Student Bar Association

Penn Carey Law Council of
Student Representatives

Stanford Law Association

University of California,
Berkeley, Student Association at
Berkeley Law

University of California, Los
Angeles, Student Bar Association
at UCLA Law

University of Chicago Student
Body Poll

** Student Body Poll (78% support;
148 respondents)*

University of Michigan, Law
School Student Senate

University of Texas at Austin,
Student Bar Association

University of Virginia School of
Law, Student Bar Association

** Citing Student Body Advisory
Referendum (94% support; 488
respondents)*

Vanderbilt Bar Association

WashU Law Student Bar
Association

Yale Graduate and Professional
Student Senate

** Citing Yale Law School Poll (98%
support; 147 respondents)*