

Advocates for Justice and Education

The Amara Legal Center

The American Civil Liberties Union  
of the District of Columbia

The Asian Pacific American Legal  
Resource Center

Ayuda, Inc.

Bread for the City

Break the Cycle

Catholic Charities Legal Network of the  
Archdiocese of Washington

Central American Resource Center  
(CARECEN)

Catholic University Columbus  
Community Legal Services

The Children's Law Center

Christian Legal Aid of DC

The DC Affordable Law Firm

DC Bar Pro Bono Center

DC KinCare Alliance

The DC Volunteer Lawyers' Project

Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment  
and Appeals Project (DV LEAP)

First Shift Justice Project

George Washington Law School Jacob  
Burns Community Legal Clinics

The Legal Aid Society of the District of  
Columbia

Legal Counsel for the Elderly

Mil Mujeres

Neighborhood Legal Services Program

Network for Victim Recovery of DC

The Public Defender Service of DC

The Quality Trust for Individuals with  
Disabilities

Rising for Justice

School Justice Project

Tzedek DC

University of the District of Columbia  
David A. Clarke School of Law  
University Legal Services

Washington Area Lawyers for the Arts

The Washington Lawyers' Committee  
for Civil Rights

The Washington Legal Clinic for the  
Homeless

Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services  
Program

# DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers

Gwendolyn M. Washington  
*Co-Chair*

Karen Newton Cole  
*Co-Chair*

August 12, 2020

The Honorable Anna Blackburne-Rigsby  
Chief Judge, District of Columbia Court of Appeals  
Historic Courthouse  
430 E Street, NW, Room 115  
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Diploma Privilege in the District of Columbia for 2020 Law Graduates

Dear Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby,

The DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers is a coalition of thirty-five (35) non-profit organizations that provide direct legal services to low income and vulnerable residents of the District of Columbia. The COVID-19 public health crisis has caused tremendous disruption to every aspect of our lives, our work, our ability to serve the needs of our clients. We write to strongly encourage this court to adopt a diploma privilege or expand the scope of temporary practice for graduates of ABA-accredited law schools to help us respond to the overwhelming need for legal services caused by this public health crisis.

Recent law graduates are ready to serve the legal needs of prospective clients. Unfortunately, there are significant barriers to these graduates as they attempt to gain admission to the bar as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Diploma privilege will enable these graduates to begin their careers. Further, many graduates will face insurmountable economic hardships as they stand to lose their job offers without the prospect of a license to practice law. Students without family resources will be forced to find any work to make ends meet thereby derailing the start to their legal careers. Further, many students will face repayment of sizable student loans without significant employment by which to begin repayment. The disparity in impact will be felt most keenly by those from low income backgrounds including many people of color.

The DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers is particularly concerned about the prospects for law school graduates who have chosen to serve the needs of the underserved. There is no substitute for the hands-on experience they would gain as practicing lawyers if they were granted the

diploma privilege. Without it, these graduates would be significantly limited in the type of legal services that they would be permitted to provide.

We are witnessing an extraordinary time. The DC Council has enacted legislation that provides moratoria to assist persons who are experiencing economic hardship as a direct result of the public health crisis. However, when the moratoria are concluded, it is anticipated that the court dockets will swell with a deluge of cases in the areas of foreclosure, evictions, debt collection and family law. With the predicted economic crisis looming, there will be a widening of the access to justice gap, an increase in unmet legal needs, and thus enlarged numbers of persons who are unable to access justice due to financial constraints. The implementation of diploma privilege for our recent law graduates will help to close the access to justice gap.

Legal services providers will benefit significantly from allowing recent graduates to practice law. Further, the expected increase in unrepresented litigants coupled with the predicted downturn in traditional law firm work presents a unique opportunity for private sector employers to train their recent law school graduates through pro bono representation and partnerships with legal services providers. In short, the people of the District of Columbia stand to gain significantly with the implementation of the diploma privilege.

Legal services providers are in the unique position to provide mentorship to these recent graduates. Further, these non-profit legal services providers would gain an invaluable benefit of increased manpower as they face an ever-growing need that could not possibly be addressed without practice ready attorneys to help them meet the demand. Allowing recent law graduates to practice will facilitate greater service to the community in the face of the impending economic crisis.

We propose a time-limited privilege open to graduates of ABA-accredited law schools under the supervision of DC-licensed attorneys, permitting them the opportunity to practice law until the results have been released following a safely administered bar examination. The following DC Consortium member organizations support this proposal.

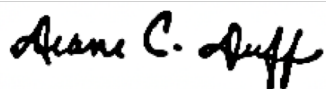
Sincerely,



Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas  
Advocates for Justice and Education



Naznin Saifi  
The Asian Pacific American Legal Resource  
Center



Diane C. Duff  
The Amara Legal Center



David Stein  
Ayuda, Inc.



Su Sie Ju  
Bread for the City



Gabrielle M. Majewski  
The DC Affordable Law Firm



Kirisha M. Marshall  
Break the Cycle



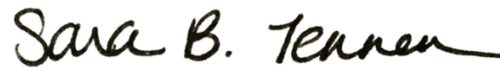
Lise B. Adams  
DC Bar Pro Bono Center



James D. Bishop  
Catholic Charities Legal Network of the  
Archdiocese of Washington & Immigration  
Legal Services



Marla Spindel  
DC KinCare Alliance



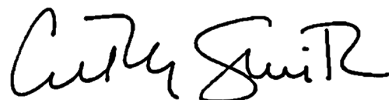
Sara B. Tennen  
The DC Volunteer Lawyers' Project



Paul Kurth  
Catholic University Columbus Community  
Legal Services



Lee Ann De Reus  
Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment  
and Appeals Project (DV LEAP)



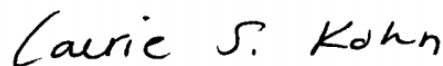
Christine M. Smith  
The Children's Law Center



Laura J. Brown  
First Shift Justice Project



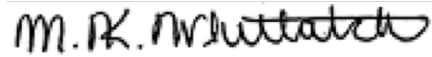
Whitney L. King  
Christian Legal Aid of DC



Lori S. Kohn  
George Washington Law Jacob Burns  
Community Legal Clinics



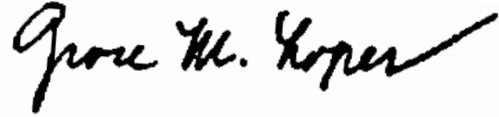
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