

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

FLORIDA BOARD OF BAR EXAMINERS RE)
AMENDMENT TO RULES OF THE SUPREME) Case No. SC96869
COURT RELATING TO ADMISSIONS TO)
THE BAR)
_____)

RESPONSE TO REQUEST

The Florida Board of Bar Examiners, by and through its undersigned attorney, responds to the request of the Court dated October 25, 2000 and state:

Pursuant to authorization from the Court, the Board began collecting demographic data on bar examinees in Florida beginning with the February 2000 administration of the bar examination. The Board has no objection to the Court's consideration, utilization and reliance upon such data in making a decision on the Board's pending proposal pertaining to the pass/fail line.

If the Court decides to rely upon the recent demographic data, then the Board recommends that all of the data be utilized including data concerning each bar examinee's LSAT score and grade point average during law school. If the Court decides to rely upon the recent demographic data, then the Board submits that fairness requires that such data be made available to all of the interested persons.

To assist the Court in weighing the options of using and publicizing the recently collected demographic data versus not using and maintaining the confidentiality of such data, the Board offers the following observations:

1. As set forth in the Board's original petition filed with the Court, the collection of demographic data beginning with the February 2000 bar examination "will be used initially to identify a baseline passing rate

for each of the different groups." (Appendix to Petition at 42) If the Court approves the Board's recommended increase to the pass/fail line, then "the information will be used to analyze the impact, if any, on the different groups." Id.

Collection of demographic information will serve as a check should the Court adopt the recommended increase to the pass/fail line:

In recommending an increase to the pass/fail line, the Board has full confidence in the opinion of its expert that such increase will have no measurable effect on existing differences among the passing rates on Florida's bar examination for the minority and non-minority groups. The Board concluded, however, that it would be reasonable to confirm such opinion by collecting and analyzing the requested information after each bar examination. The Board will provide the Court with the results of such analysis following each administration of the bar examination. Such results and the underlying data will be confidential pursuant to Rule 1-61 of the Rules of the Supreme Court Relating to Admissions to the Bar and will not be released by the Board except as directed by the Court.

(Id. at 43)

2. The use of demographic data from past bar examinations cannot confidently foretell how bar examinees will perform on a future bar examination with a higher pass/fail line.

[A]s stated by Dr. Klein, "[i]t is difficult to predict the effect of a change in passing scores." The true impact cannot be accurately measured until the standard is actually adopted. As observed by Dr. Klein, law schools and their students can and do rise to the challenge of a higher standard.

For example, Dr. Klein commented on how Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Texas was able to improve its bar passing rate by an average of 30 percent since 1993. Such improvement is even more dramatic in that it occurred during the same time period as when Texas was raising its pass/fail standard.

(Board's Reply to Comments at 45) (Citations omitted)

3. The demographic data from the February 2000 bar examination may not be completely reliable. The Board used fingerprints cards to identify the racial/ethnic group of bar examinees from that bar examination. The Board concluded that the accuracy of this means of identification is questionable. At its June 2000 policy session, the Board approved the addition of a question (requesting identification of an applicant's racial/ethnic group) to the bar examination application to increase the

reliability of the demographic data being collected.

4. The size of certain racial/ethnic groups at some Florida law schools in the demographic data from the February and July 2000 administrations of the bar examination is very small. Some racial/ethnic groups have only several members. Thus, the percentage of those members passing or failing for such group is impacted greatly by the performance of a single bar examinee.

5. Release of the demographic data to the public could result in the identification of a particular bar examinee in that some racial/ethnic groups at particular Florida law schools consisted of only one individual.

WHEREFORE, the Board submits the above-stated comments in response to the Court's request.

DATED this 8th day of November, 2000.

Respectfully submitted,

FLORIDA BOARD OF BAR EXAMINERS
FERNANDO S. ARÁN CHAIR

Kathryn E. Ressel
Executive Director

By: _____
Thomas A. Pobjecky
General Counsel
Florida Board of Bar Examiners
1891 Eider Court
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1750
(850) 487-1292
Florida Bar #211941

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a true and correct copy of the foregoing Response has been served by U.S. Mail this 8th day of November, 2000 to the following individuals:

The Honorable Noel G. Lawrence,
Member
Florida Board of Bar Examiners
P.O. Box 726
Jacksonville, FL 32201

John F. Harkness, Jr.
Executive Director
The Florida Bar
650 Apalachee Parkway
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2300

Dean Joseph Harbaugh
Nova Southeastern University
Shepard Broad Law Center
3305 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Dean John Makdisi
St. Thomas University
School of Law
16400 N.W. 32nd Avenue
Miami, FL 33054

Interim Dean Don Weidner
Florida State University
College of Law
600 W. College Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32306

Dean Dennis Lynch
University of Miami School
of Law
1311 Miller Drive
Room 380B
Coral Gables, FL 33146

Interim Dean Jon Mills
University of Florida
Fredric G. Levin Law Center
Gainesville, FL 32611

Dean W. Gary Vause
Stetson University
College of Law
1401 61st Street, South
St. Petersburg, FL 33707

Dean Donald Lively
Florida Coastal Law School
7555 Beach Blvd.
Jacksonville, FL 32216

Harley Scott Harman, Esq.
Post Office Box 1012
Fruitland Park, FL 34731

Daryl D. Parks, Esq.
President, Florida Chap.
National Bar Association
Parks & Crump, LLC
521 East Tennessee St.
Tallahassee, FL 32308

Mr. Kevin Frein, Esquire
141 S.W. 9th Terrace, #107
Plantation, FL 33324

Mr. Paul Hill
The Florida Bar
650 Apalachee Parkway
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2300

Wildred C. Varn, Esquire
P.O. Box 1170
Tallahassee, FL 32302

Professor Elizabeth M. Iglesias
University of Miami
School of Law
P.O. Box 248087
Coral Gables, FL 33124

Mr. Thomas Swavely
240 LaVilla Drive
Miami Springs, FL 33166

Dean Donald R. Odom
P.O. Box 172535
Tampa, FL 33672

Gail E. Dawson, Esquire
800 South Newport Ave.
Tampa, FL 33606

Associate George Dawson
University of Florida

Sharon J. Calix, Esquire
F. Malcolm Cunningham Sr.

College of Law

B a r A s s o c i a t i o n

SW 2nd Ave. at SW 25th Street
Gainesville, FL 32611

P.O. Box 153
West Palm Beach, FL 33402

David M. White, Director
1308 Peralta
Berkeley, CA 94702

Kimberly M. Reid, Attorney
1031 W. Morse Blvd.
Suite 270
P . O . B o x 2 6 8

Winter Park, FL 32790

David W. Langham, Esquire
13000 Sawgrass Village Cir.
Suite 28
Vedra, FL 32082

Henry T. Sorensen II,
Senior Counsel
St. Joe Real Estate Ponte
Services, Inc.
300 South Park Place
Blvd., #150
Clearwater, FL 33759

