

**“Returning Graduate”**  
**Loretta L. Stevenson, J.D.**  
**226 82<sup>nd</sup> Ave. North**  
**St. Petersburg, Florida 33702**

July 12, 2003

Supreme Court of Florida  
500 South Duval Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1927

Re: Petition to Amend Rules 2-11.1 and 4-13.2 of the Rules of the Supreme Court  
Relating to Admissions to the Bar

Petitioners: The Orange County Bar Association & Thomas B. Drage, Jr., Esq.  
Case No: SC02-2354

Your Honors:

My name is Loretta Lyn Stevenson. I am a returning graduate. I earned my J.D. from Barry University School of Law in June of 2000. Since graduation, I have married and become a mother of two, Jolie (age 2) and Michael (7 months). I am writing to you to express my strong will for the above-referenced petition.

I understand that the intent behind the current rules relating to bar admissions are in place to ensure that law school graduates taking the bar exam have graduated from an academically proven law school. Although I think it's important to set high standards of education for law schools, I think it's important to modify the rules when the process changes. Florida has recently gained two new law schools, FAMU and FIU. I am hopeful that this Court will modify the 12-month rule to protect students currently embarking on a legal education at new schools. Students who seek to enter this profession should not be categorically excluded because archaic rules do not comport with the current ABA accreditation process.

In my personal opinion, I do not believe the rules are being used to achieve what they were designed to achieve. Barry University School of Law is a private catholic university headed by women. I think there are fears of competition among state law schools, religious tensions, and patriarchy circulating that may be underlying reasons for our position (109 graduates) in the Barry accreditation. I strongly believe this because - we've proven ourselves worthy, yet we continuously get denied access to the Florida Bar.

I don't believe my personal situation is any better or worse than the other 108 graduates. I think it's important that you know we are hardworking and determined students. To illustrate this point, I have recreated segments of three letters that I received from attorneys with whom I have worked. These letters were forwarded to John A. Sebert, Consultant on Legal Education in February and March of 2001 expressing their opinions about my work. These letters are similar to or reflective of the many letters

received by the ABA on our behalf. I have attached copies of the original letters for your review.

The first letter written by Earl M. Barker, Jr. of Slott & Barker contains the following:

“For your information and for the information of the ABA committees having jurisdiction over Barry University’s accreditation, I find Ms. Stevenson’s preparation to practice law extraordinary. She has conducted the matter that we have handled under the general supervision of Tom Dill and, simply put, she has done an outstanding job. She has conducted herself with the highest degree of professionalism and she has earned my utmost respect. Based upon my experience with Ms. Stevenson, I believe she should be admitted to practice law immediately and in whatever jurisdictions she chooses for that purpose.

As a matter of further interest, I believe that she is better prepared to practice law than most associate lawyers with whom I have worked during my thirty years of practice. If Ms. Stevenson is a typical example of a Barry University law college graduate, neither the ABA nor the Florida Bar should have any reservation in accrediting Barry University. Ms. Stevenson will be a great credit to our profession and she clearly demonstrates an outstanding legal education.”

The second letter written by Stephen D. Hurm while employed at Echevarria & Associates, P.A. contains the following:

“The graduate to whom I refer, Loretta Teeling Stevenson, is going to be a top notch lawyer and a credit to our profession. She has worked in the litigation department at our firm, and assisted me in litigating complex real property and foreclosure matters. Her knowledge of the law and ability to research and quickly analyze legal issues, have been a tremendous benefit the department and firm in general and to me in particular. Her rapport with clients, opposing counsel and other parties is exemplary. She is confident without being arrogant, and is burdened by none of the limitations of other new lawyers with whom I have been acquainted in my fifteen years of practice. In part, of course, that is due to Ms. Stevenson’s core character that was shaped long before her enrollment at Barry. However, Barr’s appeal to non-traditional and second career students will see many lawyers like Ms. Stevenson: men and women who are serious, and dedicated to the ethical practice of law.

Loretta Stevenson worked full time while attending Barry School of Law, and sacrificed a great deal to earn her juris doctor degree. Many other Barry graduates have similar backgrounds and a gritty determination to press on in the face of adversity. That kind of character, not seen often in the “frat boy” graduates of other law schools that appeal to more conventional students, is what our profession needs.”

The third letter written by Deborah S. Hensley while employed at Echevarria & Associates, P.A. contains the following:

“Since I joined the Echevarria law firm in August, 2000, I have had the opportunity to work closely with Ms. Stevenson and observe her training and

preparedness as she readies herself to enter the practice of law. During this time, I have never found her without the necessary skills and enthusiasm to take on any task assigned to her. Perhaps more importantly, she seeks assignments that will enhance both her personal and professional development as she continues to grow from a law school graduate, using the basic tools given to her at Barry University, into the role of advocate for her client.

I have also had the pleasure of “mentoring” Ms. Stevenson – taking her with me to a variety of legal activities. Her preparedness and enthusiasm is always at the highest level. She often provides keen insights into situations and always conducts herself in the highest professional manner. I certainly believe that Ms. Stevenson – and I am sure many other Barry students like her – will be an asset to the legal community and it would be not only their loss – but that of our profession’s – if such individuals are adversely affected by a negative decision regarding Barry University School of Law’s accreditation”

It’s important to me that I express the financial, physical, and emotional strain that my family, like so many others, has endured by not being able to obtain a bar license. I worked for a large law firm in Tampa with whom I had a job lined up as soon as I received my bar number - that fell through as a result of my position in accreditation. That cost my family at least \$45,000 each year. Now, I’m looking at graduating for the second time in June of 2004 – that’s a loss of \$180,000 for my family. Not to mention, the physical, mental and emotional strain it has put on our families. Simply stated, I’m exhausted!

As I’m sure you can imagine, having to endure sitting through the same classes with the same professors learning the same material seems almost unbearable at times, yet we march on. Please don’t misunderstand me – I enjoy my professors. They have all been exceptional. However, I struggle daily with leaving my two young children who need me to commute 2 hours each way (St. Petersburg to Orlando) to attend classes, I’ve already taken and past. It all seems surreal – just a bad dream. We go through the motions because there is nothing else we can do - we’re at the end. I think we all understand now that we have no power to affect change in the minds of the Florida Bar or ABA. The consequence for us, however, is that we will never get back our precious time and opportunities lost – precious time with our children, spouses, mothers and fathers. There are many of us that have suffered divorce, death, bankruptcy, emotional detachment and the list goes on and on.

I sincerely request that this Court adopt and implement one of the proposals so that archaic rules, like the 12 month rule, are modified to reflect the current ABA accreditation process. The Florida Supreme Court has the power to affect change. Thank you for your sincere consideration of this request.

Respectfully Submitted,

Loretta L. Stevenson

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing has been furnished by U.S. Mail to Attorney for Petitioners, Mathew D. Staver, Esq., Palmetto Avenue, Longwood, Florida 32750 on this 12<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2003.

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Loretta L. Stevenson