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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

Dear Your Honors:

The purpose of this letter is to express my support for the above-referenced petition proposing amendments to Rules 2-11.1 and 4-13.2 of the Rules of the Supreme Court Relating to Admissions to the Bar. I have been a member of the Florida Bar since 1995, and my bar number is 0073504.

I am the Immediate Past President of the Hispanic Bar Association of Central Florida and the President-Elect of the Young Lawyers Section of the Orange County Bar Association. In addition, I serve as the Diversity Director for the American Bar Association's Young Lawyers' Division. I am intimately familiar with the accreditation process and hope that this court will reconsider its current policy.

The current rule of 12 months does not adequately protect the interests of the students attending a new college of law. Those students who seek to become the first graduating class will be holding their breath as the ABA ponders, considers, reviews and reconsiders its decision on whether to accredit a law school. Furthermore, the accrediting process is reviewed by Council meetings that only occur two times a year during the ABA's midyear and annual meetings but with no assurances that the school will actually get two hearings per year. The ABA's timetable for accrediting law schools simply does not take into account the schedules imposed by each individual state. The fact that the review process does not even begin until after the first year is indicative of the inherent problems with this rule.

The issues that negatively impacted the accreditation process at Barry will persist and resurface in future years as the two newest law schools, Florida International University and Florida A&M, undergo the same process. Both of these schools will contain a large number of minority students that would not be able to sit for the bar after attending a law school for three years. As you are aware, the importance of these schools is paramount in the efforts to increase the percentage of minorities in our profession. The

rule, as it currently reads, needlessly jeopardizes the careers of those students in the first graduating class. The 12 months is an arbitrary number with no greater significance than the 36 months being requested. I do feel both of these schools will eventually be accredited but to risk the first or even the second class is unwarranted and does not serve any greater public purpose.

The reality is that the students that gained an education in the first graduating class are as capable as those in the successive classes. However, without the three year window, you will foster a more dangerous practice. A handful of students at Barry were able to “postpone” their graduation rates in order to qualify under the now existing rule. Those students benefitted at the expense of their peers, who obeyed the rules and graduated on time. Should either law school experience problems in the process, rest assured that this seemingly unethical practice will be instituted.

My personal experience with three Barry students that are now being asked to attend law school again is that they obtained the necessary skills to practice law the first time around and should be entitled to sit for the bar or to discover if they in fact passed the bar which some of them were “allowed” to do by this very court.

I strongly support changing the Bar Admission rules so they are congruent with the current ABA accreditation process, which can now take up to three years. In addition, the Hispanic Bar Association of Central Florida supports this measure. At a gathering of our members in November 2002, the HBA unanimously approved a motion to support the proposed changes to the rules.

The current 12-month rule does not comport with an individual's ability to sit for and possibly pass the Florida bar exam. The educational qualification rule should insure that students receive a quality education, one which gives them the analytical and advocacy skills such that when they pass the Florida Bar exam, they will be responsible and ethical practitioners. I respectfully request a change the in Rules in accordance with either of the two proposals.

Respectfully submitted,

Diego “Woody” Rodriguez
Immediate Past President,
Hispanic Bar Association of Central Florida

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, Esquire, 210 Palmetto Avenue, Longwood, Florida 32750 on this 15th day of July, 2003.

Woody Rodriguez

Florida Bar No. 0073504