

# Supreme Judicial Court

## Information for Law School Graduates Regarding Measures in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

April 2020

### 1. INFORMATION REGARDING THE BAR EXAMINATION

#### The Uniform Bar Exam

The July 2020 Massachusetts administration of the Uniform Bar Exam has been postponed and will be held on September 30 and October 1, 2020. Unless prohibited by continuing limitations on large gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and unless the Board of Bar Examiners (“BBE”) determines that the exam cannot safely be administered even with the incorporation of social distancing and safety procedures, the exam will be administered at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston and additional venues as needed.

The BBE will expedite Uniform Bar Exam grading and the character and fitness evaluation process with the expectation of providing bar results by mid-December. Bar applicants who achieve a passing total scaled score of 270 or higher on the Uniform Bar Exam and meet the character and fitness standards set out in Board of Bar Examiners Rule V will be formally admitted to the bar during the week of January 11, less than two months later than they would have been admitted had the exam been administered in July. If an applicant has a pressing need to be admitted in late December or earlier in January, the applicant can arrange with the Clerk of the Supreme Judicial Court for the County of Suffolk (Clerk) to be sworn in.

#### Alternative Bar Exam

In the event that limitations on large gatherings or safety concerns prevent the BBE from administering the Massachusetts Uniform Bar Exam on September 30 and October 1, 2020, the BBE will devise an online means to test applicants for Massachusetts bar admission, with the test administered remotely on those same dates. To be clear, the alternative exam will be available only if the BBE cannot administer the Uniform Bar Exam, and will apply only to admission to the Massachusetts bar. If applicants wish to take the Uniform Bar Exam to be admitted to the bars of other states, they may do so at a later date or in a different state. The BBE will also expedite grading and the character and fitness evaluation process if the alternative bar exam is offered, with successful bar applicants to be formally admitted to the bar in late December or early January.

## 2. INFORMATION REGARDING S.J.C. RULE 3:03, STUDENT PRACTICE

### Temporary Expansion of SJC Rule 3:03

Currently, Supreme Judicial Court Rule 3:03 permits graduating law students who meet three criteria to appear with appropriate supervision before various courts and administrative agencies on behalf of the Commonwealth (including all prosecuting offices), indigent defendants assigned counsel by the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS), and indigent clients assigned counsel by a legal service agency. This permission extends until the announcement of the results of the first bar examination following graduation and, for those who passed the exam, until they are admitted to the bar or six months from the date of the examination, whichever is sooner. Nothing in the rule prohibits a recent law graduate under Rule 3:03 from receiving fixed and regular compensation from a government agency or legal assistance program who has employed the recent graduate.

The three criteria for Rule 3:03 certification are: (1) the graduate has successfully completed a course for credit in evidence or trial practice, (2) the graduate's character, legal ability, and training has been approved by the dean of his or her law school, and (3) the dean's approval has been filed with the Clerk at least three months before graduation from law school. Because there may be recent law graduates who have or will accept employment by the Commonwealth, CPCS, or a legal services agency upon graduation, but who are not presently "Rule 3:03 certified," the Supreme Judicial Court has issued a temporary order allowing Massachusetts law school deans to file with the Clerk the student practitioner certification request form for spring 2020 law graduates with the approvals required by Rule 3:03 at any time before graduation. All other provisions of Rule 3:03 remain applicable.