

The Constitution of the National Black Law Students Association

February 6, 2025

Current Language:

ARTICLE I. THE ASSOCIATION

Section C. Corporate Governance Structure and Organization

Subsection 5. There shall be local chapters of the National Black Law Students Association chartered at law schools accredited by the American Bar Associations, upon application to the NBLSA Board of Directors. Such chapters shall constitute the basic voting unit and representative mechanism of the organization, and shall operate under National policies, those of its assigned Region, and those created by the chapter. Such Chapters will be separate legal entities from the organization, in no way dependent on the Association for funding or financial management, but bound to the National organization under the terms of its issued charter.

ARTICLE II. ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

Section B. NBLSA Chapter Membership

Subsection 1. Law School Chapter Membership (“BLSA Chapters” or “Local Chapter”) within the Association shall be understood as a chapter with a charter approved by the NBLSA Board of Directors located at an accredited law school within the United States of America.

Section D. NBLSA Individual Membership

Subsection 1. Individual law student membership in the Association shall be open to any natural person matriculating at an accredited law school within the United States of America and its territories.

Proposed Amendments:

ARTICLE I. THE ASSOCIATION

Section C. Corporate Governance Structure and Organization

Subsection 5. There shall be local chapters of the National Black Law Students Association chartered at law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA), as well as law schools recognized by the State Bar of the jurisdiction in which the school is located, upon application to the NBLSA Board of Directors. Such chapters shall constitute the basic voting unit and representative mechanism of the organization, and shall operate under National policies, those of its assigned Region, and those created by the chapter. Chapters from law schools not accredited by the ABA but recognized by the State Bar may also participate, providing that they meet established criteria as outlined by the NBLSA Board of Directors. Such Chapters will be separate legal entities from the organization, in no way dependent on the Association for funding or financial management, but bound to the National organization under the terms of its issued charter.

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Statement in Support of Proposed Amendment to the NBLSA Bylaws:

The mission of the National Black Law Students Association (NBLSA) is “to increase the number of culturally responsible Black and minority attorneys who excel academically, succeed professionally, and positively impact the community.” This mission has always been centered on inclusivity, opportunity, and support for Black law students. However, the current bylaws, which propose removing non-ABA-accredited law schools like Thomas Jefferson School of Law (TJSL) from NBLSA membership, directly contradict this mission, especially for students at schools that are already facing significant barriers in the legal field.

It’s important to note that while TJSL is not ABA-accredited, it is fully accredited by the State Bar of California’s Committee of Bar Examiners (CBE) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), both of which enforce high academic and institutional standards. TJSL has consistently met and/or exceeded these standards, demonstrating a strong commitment to legal education, student success, and professional development. The law school’s graduates excel in various legal fields, and contribute meaningfully to the profession and their communities.

Denying these students access to NBLSA’s resources and network disregards their qualifications and the academic standards upheld by the institutions that accredit them. Excluding State accredited law schools effectively disenfranchises students who, despite attending schools outside of the ABA’s traditional structure, still have the ability and drive to become attorneys and legal professionals. These students need support more than ever, and denying them access to the NBLSA community limits their opportunities for mentorship, networking, and professional development. The legal profession is already a challenging field for Black students, and we must not create additional obstacles for those who are working tirelessly to overcome them.

We know that access to legal education is a crucial issue, particularly for underrepresented communities that have historically faced systemic barriers to entering the legal profession. Many students at non-ABA-accredited law schools choose these institutions due to financial considerations, family obligations, or the need for more flexible academic structures. Removing them from NBLSA membership sends the message that their pursuit of a legal career is less valid or less worthy of support. Instead of restricting membership, NBLSA should be expanding its reach to ensure that all Black law students have the same opportunities to thrive, excel, and contribute meaningfully to the legal profession.

Additionally, access to justice is deeply intertwined with access to legal education. Many students from non-ABA-accredited law schools go on to serve marginalized communities, work in public interest law, and provide legal assistance in areas that suffer from a lack of representation. The Black community is disproportionately affected by systemic inequities in the legal system, and increasing the number of Black lawyers is essential to addressing these

disparities. By restricting NBLSA membership, we risk further limiting the pipeline of Black attorneys who are committed to serving communities in need.

On a personal note, as the President of the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) at California Western School of Law, I have had the privilege of working closely with TJSL students since my 1L year. We have collaborated on numerous events, and I have seen firsthand the excellence and dedication of the students there. It was truly heartbreaking to learn at the WRBLSA convention that there was a vote on potentially removing schools like TJSL from the NBLSA network due to the current bylaws. Many of these students go on to become great leaders in their communities, and BLSA has been a crucial part of their success. We also work closely with the Earl B. Gilliam Bar Association, where many of the members are TJSL graduates, further illustrating the impact this school has on our legal community.

The proposed amendment ensures that NBLSA remains committed to supporting all Black law students, regardless of their school's accreditation status. It's time for NBLSA to expand its definition of legitimacy to include State accredited law schools like TJSL, where talented and hardworking students deserve the same support and opportunities as those from ABA-accredited institutions. By doing so, we honor the true spirit of NBLSA's mission: increasing access, fostering success, and uplifting the next generation of Black attorneys.

Thank you for considering this important change.

Respectfully,

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