April 2, 2018

Maureen O’Rourke, Chair
Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar
American Bar Association
321 N. Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60654

RE: Proposed Elimination of Standard 503

Dear Chair O’Rourke:

On behalf of the Council on Legal Education Opportunity, Inc. (CLEO), I write to urge the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar not to eliminate the Standard 503 requirement of a test and to acknowledge the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) as the most valid and reliable test to assist in assessing an applicant’s capability to complete law school. While other major professional programs, e.g. medicine, pharmacy, or business, may no longer mandate a standardized test, the undergraduate curriculum requirements associated with each of these programs, to a large extent, provide a comparative framework for analyzing applicants’ likelihood of success. No such mechanism exists for prospective law school students whose undergraduate majors range from “art to zoology”. Thus, the LSAT serves to level the playing field for law school aspirants, giving all the same basic from which to operate.

Since its inception in 1968, CLEO has been committed to helping students of color and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds become successful legal practitioners. As you know, the LSAT is designed specifically for the purpose of predicting the test-taker’s first-year law school performance by testing logic, reasoning, and critical thinking skills. And although African American and Latino test takers, in general, score lower than Asian American and Caucasian students, the applicant information provided by the Law School Admission Council has been invaluable in enabling CLEO to look beyond the test score to gauge an applicant’s potential to succeed, and what support, if any, is needed.

Standard 501 (b) requires that “law schools only admit applicants who appear capable of satisfactorily completing its program of legal education and being admitted to the bar.” To that end, we support an admission process that includes a variety of indicators to assess a student’s likelihood of succeeding in law school, but also believe that having one predictive tool common to every applicant promotes equal treatment for all. We understand and support the desire of law schools to open their doors even wider to candidates from science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and other disciplines. However, we urge the Council to retain Standard 503 and the use of the LSAT as the primary admission test and require law schools to implement a more holistic admission process that surpasses grade point average and LSAT scores to genuinely consider other predictors for success in the practice of law, e.g. 26 Lawyer Effectiveness Factors¹, student motivation, and achievements prior, during, and since undergraduate school.

Unfortunately, many of our students come to the law school application process uninformed. They have no idea of the rigorous, intense requirements associated with pursuing a legal education. Too often, the LSAT serves as an introduction to the effort required to competently navigate a legal career. At CLEO, we appreciate having this information available as a tool to help counsel our students in moving forward.

CLEO, Inc.
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Washington DC 20001

CLEO, INC.

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When CLEO was founded 50 years ago, the legal profession was more than 98% white. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, law remains one of the least diverse professions despite the efforts of leading national organizations like the American Bar Association, the Law School Admission Council, the Association of American Law Schools, and others. As the longest serving national organization working to increase opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds to attend law school, CLEO’s work is as important today as it was when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968. Our country is in the midst of a great transition; individuals’ freedoms have been threatened; our global image has been diminished; the rule of law and constitutional protections are being eroded. A strong, healthy, diverse legal profession can serve as a critical buffer.

We are committed to giving our students the best chance to succeed. Removing Standard 503 will not guarantee students a quality legal education. Unless consistent, undergraduate prelaw requirements are established and implemented, legal education should not expect to mirror other professional programs that require years of specific training. The LSAT remains the most suitable benchmark and best comparative framework available. Again, I urge you not to eliminate Standard 503.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Sneed Ogden
Chief Executive Officer