



## A Note from the Office of Dean Leonard M. Baynes

Recently, there has been a great deal of discussion regarding the Texas Supreme Court's order regulating the approval of law schools whose graduates are eligible to sit for the Texas Bar Exam. Whenever the rules governing our profession shift even slightly, it is natural for questions to arise.

The Texas Supreme Court has the inherent power to decide who can practice law in the state, which law schools are approved, and what the requirements are for such law school approval. In its January 6, 2026 order, the Texas Supreme Court reasserted its power to make these ultimate determinations. But at the same time, the Court sustained the approval of all ten Texas law schools along with a list of 188 other law schools from other states, all of which are ABA accredited; this means that each of these law school graduates will be able to take the Texas bar exam and are eligible to practice law in Texas upon passing the exam. So at the moment, nothing major has changed. The Texas Supreme Court order changed only one term in its definition section and replaced it with another:

"(4) "Approved law school" means a law school approved by the Supreme Court."

The Court also alluded to minimum requirements that a law school would have to meet for its graduates to qualify to practice law in the state.

On one hand, some may see these changes as an opportunity to reduce the regulatory burden, potentially lowering the cost of legal education. They may further say that this cost reduction may enable more individuals to afford to become lawyers and this would provide more legal representation of our population who live in legal deserts. On the other hand, some may worry about a "race to the bottom." They may argue that there is a risk that focusing solely on minimum inputs and outputs could transform law schools into mere trade schools, undermining the scholarly depth and faculty research that sustain the intellectual foundations of the legal profession. They might also note that the proposed minimum standards also remove other current ABA requirements that ensure the integrity of law schools and that law schools are soundly managed.

Although the Court's order creates a framework for the state to define its own minimum standards, the University of Houston Law Center will also continue to maintain its American Bar Association (ABA) accreditation.

ABA accreditation is the "gold standard." It is currently the only national benchmark that ensures comprehensive quality and degree portability. Because we are an ABA-accredited institution, a JD from the Law Center is a "passport" that allows our graduates to practice law in any jurisdiction in the United States.

At this time, nothing changes. However, the Texas Supreme Court order (and the discourse around it) has caused some confusion among law school applicants. Some are concerned whether enrolling at a Texas law school will allow portability of their degree and opportunity to practice law in other states after they graduate. For this reason, it remains important for UH LAW to clearly communicate that 1) the order does not create any immediate substantive effect, and 2) if an applicant enrolls in any ABA accredited Texas law school, their degree remains fully portable allowing them to practice anywhere in the nation.

Sincerely,

Leonard M. Baynes  
Dean, Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Chair, and Professor of Law  
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