

Employment Disparities Persist for Minority Law Graduates Despite Strong Job Market in 2023



A robust job market for new law graduates in 2023 failed to close long-standing racial and ethnic employment disparities, according to data released by the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) on Wednesday. The overall employment rate for law graduates improved, but gaps between different racial groups remain concerning.

Racial Gaps in Legal Employment Continue

While employment rates improved for many minority groups, the disparity between white and Latino law graduates widened compared to the previous year. The most significant gaps were observed in legal jobs requiring bar admission, which are often seen as the most desirable positions for J.D. holders.

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Among white law graduates, 84% secured jobs that required passing the bar within 10 months of graduation. However, only 73% of Black, Native American, or Alaska Native graduates obtained such positions. Latino law graduates fared slightly better with 80% but still trailed their white peers. Asian graduates achieved an 81% employment rate in these jobs, while Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders had the lowest at 67%.

Overall Employment Rates Reflect Persistent Inequities

When considering all employment opportunities, not just those requiring bar passage, the overall employment rate for white graduates stood at 94% in 2023. This was higher than for Black graduates (89%), Latino and Asian graduates (91%), and Native American or Alaska Native graduates (88%).

These figures underscore the persistent disparities in job outcomes for graduates of color, despite an overall improvement in the job market for law professionals.

Systemic Inequities Continue to Hinder Minority Graduates

NALP Executive Director Nikia Gray emphasized that the data highlights the ongoing challenge of dismantling systemic barriers that prevent graduates of color from achieving equitable employment outcomes. In her statement, Gray stressed the importance of continuing efforts to combat discrimination, even as such initiatives face increasing opposition.

Record-High Employment Rates for Law Graduates Overall

The 2023 job market for law graduates was particularly strong, with 92.6% of all graduates securing employment within 10 months of graduation—an increase of half a percentage point from the previous year and the highest figure since NALP began tracking employment statistics in 1974. More than 82% of these graduates obtained positions that require bar passage. Additionally, the unemployment rate for law graduates dropped to 5.8%, the lowest since 2007.

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Disparities in Clerkship Opportunities

The latest report also reveals racial and ethnic disparities in clerkship positions. Despite making up a third of the class of 2023, graduates of color secured just 25% of all clerkships. The disparity was even greater for federal clerkships, where graduates of color filled only 24% of positions.

Looking Ahead

As the legal profession continues to grapple with issues of diversity and inclusion, the latest NALP report underscores the need for ongoing efforts to address the employment disparities faced by minority law graduates. While the overall job market for new attorneys remains strong, significant work remains to achieve true equity in employment outcomes across all racial and ethnic groups.

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