

NAPABA Organizational Statement

New Study Explores Decline in Asian American Law Student Enrollment

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 29, 2020 – A forthcoming study demonstrates that law school enrollment has declined by 25% over the past decade and that Asian American first-year law students declined by 28% according to ABA data—the greatest decline since the Great Recession of 2008. *Who’s Going to Law School? Trends in Law School Enrollment Since the Great Recession* (forthcoming in the *U.C. Davis Law Review*) is a follow up to NAPABA’s groundbreaking 2017 report, *A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law*, led by California Supreme Court Justice Goodwin Liu. The findings of the study will inform NAPABA’s work on diversity in the profession as part of its continued investment in the next phase of the Portrait Project.

“The study provides a fresh and thorough empirical foundation for discussions of diversity in the legal profession,” said Justice Liu, “and it lays the groundwork for examining future trends in enrollment and diversity in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The demographics of law students have changed significantly over the past decade, and understanding these changes is essential to building a more diverse and inclusive legal profession. We may see more big changes over the next decade, depending on the depth and duration of the economic slowdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.”

The study examines enrollment data by gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality from 1999 to 2019 and focuses on the change in enrollment of Asian Americans. Major findings include:

- Total enrollment in law school has declined by almost 25% since the recession. Despite a recent increase, enrollment seems unlikely to rebound to the pre-recession levels.
- Women have outnumbered men in law school since 2016, and the recent uptick in total enrollment is entirely attributable to more women pursuing law.
- Asian American enrollment has declined more steeply than any other group since the recession. As a result, the number of Asian American lawyers, after rising for four decades, will begin to stagnate in the year 2030.
- Since the Great Recession, Asian Americans have comprised a smaller share of enrollment in law
- Asian Americans are less likely to express an interest in attending law school in high school or as undergraduates than their peers.
- The number of law students who identify as members of two or more racial groups are growing. The number will continue to grow, consistent with broader demographic trends and present significant challenges for data collection and reporting.

“The results of this follow up study to the 2017 Portrait Project present a challenging picture for Asian Americans in the law,” said NAPABA Executive Director Priya Purandare. “We see some positive movement in the profession, reflected by the increasing number of women entering law school. However, it raises other concerns, including diverse enrollment at the nation’s higher-ranked law schools. NAPABA is committed to addressing these pipeline challenges and developing sustainable programs to increase, sustain, and grow diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession.”

NAPABA thanks Justice Liu and his coauthors for their continued partnership in addressing diversity in the legal profession and for shedding a light on Asian American law school enrollment and the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality.

A full draft of the study is available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3559213>.

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The [National Asian Pacific American Bar Association](#) (NAPABA) represents the interests of approximately 50,000 legal professionals and nearly 90 national, state, and local Asian Pacific American bar associations. NAPABA is a leader in addressing civil rights issues confronting Asian Pacific American communities. Through its national network, NAPABA provides a strong voice for increased diversity of the federal and state judiciaries, advocates for equal opportunity in the workplace, works to eliminate hate crimes and anti-immigrant sentiment, and promotes the professional development of people of color in the legal profession.