



Comments RE: ADM2022-00522 / Petition for the Adoption of Amended Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 7, Section 5.01(c)(1)

To Whom it May Concern—

This letter is intended to express my support for amending Rule 7, Section 5.01(c)(1). This amendment would allow lawyers with part-time experience to be admitted to practice law in Tennessee without examination.

At first glance, Rule 7 may seem innocuous, but the requirement effectively makes it harder for lawyers with part-time hours to practice in Tennessee. Preparing and sitting for the bar exam is a significant burden for existing lawyers: as you know, students regularly spend months preparing for the exam and even take out loans to cover the thousands of dollars in forgone income, bar prep courses, [exam fees](#), travel, and lodging necessary to successfully complete the exam.

The existing rule hits working mothers especially hard: of the 21.4 million voluntary part-time workers in 2016, [67 percent were women](#). Among these women, the most common reason for part-time work was family or personal obligations. LexisNexis previously found that most part-time lawyers were women, specifically mothers with children.

Tennessee's licensing rule holds some of these women back and contributes to the fear that many women have that they will be penalized for going part time or taking leave from work while their children are young. This is truly unfortunate and ensures that the legal profession misses out on legal talent.

Lisa Blatt, described as a "legendary high court litigator" with "an unmatched win record" and one of the most successful lawyers today, relates the following story about how part-time work made her career possible in [Reflections of a Lady Lawyer](#):

*"...I was ready to quit practicing law entirely to spend more time at home. I also was mentally exhausted. Paul [Clement] suggested that, instead of quitting, I take a leave of absence. And he said something I will never forget: he told me I was good at my job. I took Paul up on his offer, **took a half-year off, and returned to the office six months later, still on a part-time basis.** Paul's flexibility and understanding of the challenges facing working mothers **saved my career.** For the last eighteen years, **I have remained part-time.**"*

As Ms. Blatt tells it, maintaining a part-time schedule was vital to her professional and personal success for many years. Indeed, part-time work allows working parents to balance work and family obligations, as parents have continued to prioritize flexible work. Part-time work also keeps the door open to women in a profession that still [skews male](#).

In summary, the current requirement produces an unnecessary obstacle to work for otherwise qualified and experienced lawyers, and, as written, the rule discourages competent legal talent from relocating to Tennessee.

However, removing the full-time work requirement will allow for greater flexibility for mothers, parents, and any other lawyer working part time in the years to come, while ensuring that the state remains competitive, and that Tennessee's legal community has access to a wide pool of talent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vanessa".

Vanessa Brown Calder

Director of Opportunity and Family Policy Studies