

IS LAW SCHOOL FOR ME?

A GUIDE FOR REPRODUCTIVE
JUSTICE ADVOCATES

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN IF/WHEN/HOW:
LAWYERING FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND
URGE: UNITE FOR REPRODUCTIVE & GENDER
EQUITY

if
when
how

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WHO WE ARE

This toolkit was co-created by If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice and URGE California to support reproductive justice undergraduate activists and others considering pursuing a legal degree.

IF/WHEN/HOW: LAWYERING FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

[If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice](#) is a national network of law students, lawyers, and legal professionals furthering reproductive justice. We transform the law and policy landscape through advocacy, support, and organizing so all people have the power to determine if, when, and how to define, create, and sustain families with dignity and to actualize sexual and reproductive wellbeing on their own terms.

URGE: UNITE FOR REPRODUCTIVE & GENDER EQUITY

[Unite For Reproductive & Gender Equity](#) (URGE) envisions a world where each of us can live, love, create families, express our gender, and enjoy sexuality with liberation, power, and joy. URGE is a state-based, national reproductive justice organization dedicated to building the power of young people in the South, Midwest and now California. The URGE California staff (formerly [justCARE: Campus Action for Reproductive Equity](#)) successfully organized students to pass legislation now requiring public universities to provide medication abortion on campus by 2023.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Erin Panichkul, J.D. is the Student Organizing Manager at [If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice](#). Erin (she/her) trains and mobilizes law student chapters across the country to bring reproductive justice to their campuses and communities. As a child of Thai immigrants and the first in her family to attend law school, Erin is passionate about opening doors for other under-represented identities in law school and beyond. Erin is a proud Angeleno. She earned her B.A. in Women's Studies at UCLA and her J.D. at Thomas Jefferson School of Law. Erin lives in Oakland, California with her partner and pet rabbit. Erin enjoys cross-stitching and watching "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit."

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Jessy Rosales (she/her/ella) graduated from UC Riverside with a degree in Media and Cultural Studies. She is currently a California State Organizer with URGE: Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity. Jessie thinks that it's important to provide people with as many resources as possible. She knows exactly what it's like to be the first one to go to college without a clue of what to do and how to navigate such institutions. In many ways, first-generation students have to pave their own paths and futures. She hopes this toolkit can provide some guidance and shed some light on this specific career path, and even some insight on the possibility of other careers in the reproductive justice movement.

Kavleen Singh (she/her) is the California State Organizer at URGE. Kavleen graduated from UC Berkeley with a political science degree and is a California State Organizer with URGE. Kavleen organized students in California's Central Coast and Central Valley to pass Senate Bill 24 (Leyva) into law. She thinks it's important for anyone to be involved in reproductive justice if it calls to them, and that often includes those who pursue law. She hopes this toolkit can dispel some myths about what it takes to pursue reproductive justice in any discipline you want to be in.



Sonja Goetsch-Avila (she/her) is the California State Senior Organizer for URGE, and is based out of Oakland. She earned her B.A. in Community Studies and Feminist Studies at UC Santa Cruz, and was lucky to find opportunities as an undergrad to gain experience in direct service and policy advocacy in the realm of reproductive justice - laying the foundation for her own career path exploration. As a "non-lawyer" who works with young people, Sonja is driven to illuminate multiple professional pathways one can take to fulfill their career goals in the repro sphere - and through this toolkit provide accessible resources to support readers in envisioning a place for themselves as future lawyers in the movement.

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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

PURPOSE

The “Is Law School For Me?” toolkit will introduce law school as an option after undergraduate studies, educate student advocates on how to leverage higher education and academia, and help reproductive justice (RJ) advocates determine whether law school or grad school is an avenue for their goals. This toolkit aims to guide students in making informed decisions after graduation and increase awareness on careers in the reproductive justice movement. There is a lot of misinformation about law school requirements. In an effort to help people make the right decision about whether law school is the route for them, we want to create institutional knowledge particularly for first-generation college students, Black, Indigenous, and students of color, immigrants, people from low-income backgrounds, trans and gender non-binary people, parents, and other underrepresented identities in law school. We aim to diversify the identities of the next generation of lawyers, diversify the work legal professionals do, and change the face of lawyering!

TESTIMONIALS

We sent questionnaires to 15 people in the If/When/How network, including staff members, legal fellows, and law students who are members of underrepresented identities in law school. We asked questions about their application processes, what factors played into deciding which law school to attend, their law school experiences, what other life commitments they had (children, jobs, caretaking, etc.), how they prepped for the LSAT EXAM and bar exams, what advice they’d give someone in a similar position, what they regretted, and if given the opportunity what would they have done differently. You’ll see direct quotes in *blue italics* throughout this toolkit.

RJ LAWYERING

We want to change the face of lawyering! If/When/How envisions reproductive justice to be a transformation of the legal systems and institutions that perpetuate oppression into structures that realize justice, and a future when all people can self-determine their reproductive lives free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. We’re currently working to define RJ Lawyering. Still, we want to share that it is broad and includes all the avenues people use to challenge and create new laws and policies to further racial and reproductive justice. That includes grassroots organizing, research, policy, litigation, lobbying, legislative advocacy, and more!

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WHAT IS A LEGAL DEGREE?

JURIS DOCTOR DEGREE (J.D.) AND MASTERS OF LAWS (LL.M.)

Generally, law school graduates earn a *Juris Doctor* degree. A Juris Doctor (J.D.) is a foundational and terminal law degree program that is typically a prerequisite for a Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree program. J.D. degree programs are usually broader in their legal scope, while LL.M. degree programs are highly specialized. J.D. programs are law programs that prepare students to sit for the bar exam and cover a wide range of legal topics. These degree programs are usually 2-4 years that can be offered on campus or online, part-time or full-time, during the day and evenings. Most law students earn their degree full-time, which takes three years. Based on your availability, financial and other life commitments, consider whether part-time classes are better. Some J.D.'s offer interest areas such as criminal law, public law, constitutional law, etc. Others may offer [certificates](#) such as Advocacy Certificate, Elder Law Certificate, Environmental Law, etc. Most graduates of a J.D. Program take their state's bar exam and work as a licensed attorney, but may also work in legal professions. Although J.D.s and LL.M.s are most common, there are [three tiers of degrees offered at law schools](#) including academic masters degrees for non-lawyers, post-J.D. law degrees, and both research- and academic-based doctoral level degrees.

JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMS

Many universities offer joint degree programs which allow students to obtain a J.D. and another graduate degree at the same time. Joint degree programs range from Masters and Ph.D. degrees in Business, Public Administration, Regional Planning, Library and Information Science, Economics, Ethnic Studies, Public and Social Policy, Social Welfare, Developmental Psychology, Public Health, and many more. Law school dual degree programs are popular among students who want to develop specific areas of expertise and earn two degrees. These programs often allow for completion in less time than it would take to earn the two degrees consecutively. Here is [Kaplan's list of top law schools with dual J.D. degree programs](#).

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A LEGAL DEGREE?

You can do so much with a legal degree! J.D.'s are versatile, and earning a J.D. gives you an advantage in the job search regardless of whether you practice law in traditional ways. People with J.D.'s can work in the public or private sphere and careers are not limited to court room litigators. In fact, there are [15 lawyers on If/When/How's staff](#) working in varying roles from fundraising and development, public policy, litigation, research, training, to community organizing.

WHAT CAN I DO IN PUBLIC INTEREST LAW?

Public interest law is very broad and includes a wide variety of careers opportunities. Generally, public interest law refers to ways to utilize the law for social change. Public interest law loosely refers to legal

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practices undertaken to support low-income or marginalized communities and to effect change in social policies broadly to protect the public interest in non-profit sectors. Public interest careers can include litigation, advocacy, lobbying, policy-making, community organizing, training, communications, development, fundraising, and more. There are public interest positions across all social justice movements that work within the legal system, as well as challenge, change, and create new policies and laws.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

If/When/How offers paid reproductive justice fellowships! The [Reproductive Justice Fellowship Program \(RJFP\)](#) is a policy-focused fellowship designed to create entry points into the reproductive health, rights, and justice fields and to enhance legal and advocacy capacity at organizations working to advance reproductive justice for all people.

LAW SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS DEBUNKED

UNDERGRAD MAJOR

You do NOT have to be pre-law in undergrad to go to law school. Law is an interdisciplinary field, and people come to law school from many different areas of undergraduate study. A four-year undergraduate degree in any subject, (BA or BS) is usually required.

“In my law school, most students came from social science majors. My classmates had a wide range of majors from Political Science, Dance, Chicano Studies, Art History, International Relations, Women’s Studies, and some applied sciences too.”

Erin – Thomas Jefferson School of Law alum

GPA

GPA is taken into account during the admissions process for law school. Generally, in addition to your undergrad GPA, your LSAT EXAM score will be a key factor in your applications for law school. A few law schools in the U.S. are starting to consider applicants not based on their LSAT EXAM score, but on their GRE scores as well. Each law school has unique GPA standards that should be taken into account when researching different schools. Do not be discouraged based on your GPA. What is considered a “competitive” GPA is relative to different schools, and although GPA and LSAT EXAM scores are evaluated, it’s important not to discount strategizing for your personal statement and letters of recommendations as well.

“Don’t stress over your GPA. Spend that energy passing your classes, doing exceptional when you can, and focus on gaining professional experience: intern and add that to your resume, join student groups for leadership experience and add that to your resume, build relationships by attending networking

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events (that matter to you) and volunteering. Grades are important, but after law school, no one will ever ask for your GPA. All they'll see is your J.D."

Erin – Thomas Jefferson School of Law alum

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation, experience in some relevant extracurriculars/internship work, and the personal statement in the application are all significant pieces to put energy towards early in the process. Start making good relationships with professors!

LSAT EXAM

WHAT IS IT?

The [Law School Admission Test](#) (LSAT EXAM) is a standardized test required for law school admission. It is required in the United States and Canada, and it's designed to measure critical thinking, reading comprehension, information organization, and argument evaluation. The examination is around 3 hours and 30 minutes long. Results are valid for 5 years. The LSAT EXAM scores are one of many requirements to apply to law school. More details about law school application requirements can be found on page 10.

WHAT DOES THE LSAT EXAM CONSIST OF?

The LSAT EXAM consists of five sections administered in [two parts](#) by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) – multiple choice and essay. The first part consists of five 35-minute sections of multiple-choice questions. The second part of the LSAT EXAM consists of a 35-minute, unscored writing sample. The prompt presents a problem, and you are asked to choose between two decisions or courses of action, and defend your choice. There is no right answer. The purpose is to demonstrate your argumentative writing skills, reasoning, clarity, organization, and language. Four of the five sections contribute to your score. LSAC does not reveal which is the un-graded section until you receive your score report. Copies of your writing sample and scores are sent to all schools to which you apply. For easy visuals and infographics about each LSAT EXAM section, check out the [Go Grad LSAT EXAM Guidebook](#).

LSAT EXAM COSTS AND FEE WAIVERS

The LSAT EXAM itself costs \$200. [Fee waivers](#) are available, but the eligibility criteria are extremely limited. According to LSAC, the basic criteria is *the absolute inability to pay*. United States citizens, nationals, permanent residents, and DACA recipients and DACA applicants can apply for the fee waiver. Federal tax forms and documents are required to submit an application for a [fee waiver](#). Fee waiver applications must be submitted at least 6 weeks before the LSAT EXAM registration deadline.

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“The fees associated with LSAT EXAM and law school applications are WAY too expensive, and are a huge economic barrier for so many applicants. Low-income people don't often get to apply for as many schools as people with wealth privilege who have the means to do so. That being said, don't let the system get you down! Nowadays, many people utilize online mutual aid tools like GoFundMe and other online platforms to gain financial support from their communities. You are not alone!”

Sonja – UC Santa Cruz undergrad alum

WHEN AND WHERE CAN YOU TAKE THE LSAT EXAM?

[LSAC](#) administers the LSAT EXAM registration and LSAT EXAMs themselves throughout the United States and Canada. The LSAT EXAM is offered four times per year, typically in February, June, September or October, and December. Most law schools require the LSAT EXAM be taken by December for admission the following fall semester. Here is a [list of testing centers and dates](#).

STUDYING FOR THE LSAT EXAM

LSAT EXAM prep courses costs between \$600-\$1,500 and are available through independent companies like Kaplan, Princeton Review, Alpha Score, and others. It is very possible to study for the LSAT EXAM without a prep course depending on your learning style and preference. Some studiers need live, in-person courses and some prefer to study independently. [Here](#) is a comprehensive list of free LSAT EXAM resources, including a library of video and interactive lessons, full-length practice tests, study guides, initial diagnostic tests, practice quizzes, and more. Some are available on a smartphone app.

“Do a study course. Don't change the way you study based on what people say. Study like you always have. Don't get wrapped up in the score. It has nothing to do with your intelligence.”

– American University Washington Law alum

“Have a solid study plan if you are not planning to use a prep course. Block out time in advance, especially if you are working full time while studying.”

- University of Baltimore Law alum

“I would say it's okay to take a year off in between undergrad and law school to study. There's nothing wrong with going straight through, which I did, but my life was very hectic when I was working, going to school, and studying for the LSAT EXAM.”

– Temple University Law alum

“Believe it or not, many friends highly recommended informal platforms like Reddit, Twitter, and Tumblr for real-talk advice on all things law school-related, including LSAT EXAM prep. There are thousands of people following law school threads on Reddit. I wish I leaned on more crowd-sourced community resources before and during law school.”

– Thomas Jefferson School of Law alum

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RETAKE THE LSAT EXAM

You can take the LSAT EXAM up to three times per calendar year. Studying for any big exam is stressful. Remember that LSAT EXAM scores are not measures of success or ability to thrive in law school. In fact, more than half of the people who responded to our questionnaire retook the LSAT EXAM due to scores they were unhappy with and for most, the repeat scores were very close to the original scores. Regardless of their LSAT EXAM results, they all made it to law school!

“I studied for and took the LSAT during my senior year of college. This was a mistake, because I didn't really devote as much time and attention to studying as I should have. I thought it was a good idea to ‘get it over with’ but I probably should have waited until after college, especially since I wasn't planning to go straight to law school.”

- Harvard Law School alum

“It's important to know that LSAT EXAM scores do not define you and low scores do not reflect your ability to succeed in law school. Once I got to law school, the LSAT EXAM felt like an arbitrary gatekeeper. The skills tested in the LSAT EXAM are not applied the same way in law school classes and LSAT EXAM style exams don't exist in law school. Some of my friends who ranked at the top of our class scored average or below on the LSAT EXAM and they're thriving!”

- Thomas Jefferson School of Law alum

“Do not stress too much. Some people are better at taking the test than others.”

- Boston University Law alum

LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION

All [American Bar Association](#) (ABA)-approved law schools have online applications. LSAC has [all the details](#) for applying to law school and a great infographic [checklist](#) and a breakdown of the [fees](#).

[LSAC](#) is the platform to register for the LSAT EXAM and apply to law schools. You can apply to multiple schools using the LSAC's [Credential Assembly Service](#) (CAS), which costs \$195, and in addition, each law school report costs \$45. CAS is required by most ABA-approved law schools. CAS creates transcript summaries, processes letters of recommendations, stores additional required documents, combines those documents with your LSAT EXAM score, and forwards a full report to all the schools you apply to. All applications can be saved and continued later. Early acceptances will arrive in December and January while regular admissions will start rolling in by mid-May.

Steps to apply to law school:

- Create an LSAC.org account (free)

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- Register for the LSAT EXAM – \$200
- Take the LSAT EXAM
- Obtain transcripts and letters of recommendations
- Write a personal statement
- Purchase a CAS account – \$195
- Purchase law student report(s) with CAS for each law school you're applying to – \$45
- Pay the law school application fee – varies by school from \$50-\$90
- Submit application

FEE WAIVERS

LSAC has a platform to get law school application fee waivers based on LSAT EXAM scores and GPA. It requires applicants to opt-in to [LSAC's candidate referral service](#) (CRS), a database that law schools use to contact potential applicants. Upload your LSAT EXAM score and GPA. Law schools will periodically search the database and email out fee waivers based on their LSAT EXAM score and GPA criteria. Some law students have received application fee waivers directly from law school reps at networking events. The American Bar Association (ABA) has an [extensive list of scholarships](#). Each law school website has information on scholarships too.

LAW SCHOOL COSTS

Law school is expensive. The cost of a law school education could exceed \$150,000. Tuition alone can range from a few thousand dollars to more than \$50,000 a year. Today, a majority of law school students rely on various types of financial aid to help pay for law school, including scholarships, loans, work-study programs, and more. "Cost of attendance" is the estimate used to calculate overall cost of law school. It includes tuition, fees, books, and supplies as well as living expenses like housing, transportation, food, and health insurance. See UC Berkeley School of Law's [Cost of Attendance chart](#) as an example.

TUITION AND COST OF ATTENDANCE

Law school tuition varies from \$12,000 to \$80,000 a year. The 2018-2019 average cost for tuition and fees to attend a private law school was around \$48,869 per year, while public law school tuition and fees averaged out to \$27,591 for state residents and \$40,725 for out-of-state students according to data reported by 187 ranked schools to an [annual U.S. News survey](#).

Joint and dual degrees have varying costs. Some law schools have on-campus or off-campus student housing available. Housing expenses can be included in tuition costs for loan purposes. Other expenses

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include health insurance, books, supplies, transportation, and other living expenses. Cost of attendance refers to the *total* estimated amount per year including all the above expenses.

State schools have two rates for tuition: an in-state resident rate and an out-of-state (non-resident) tuition rate. Some state schools who offer non-resident tuition will consider students as residents in their second year for the purpose of lowering tuition. Below is a list of four law school examples identifying costs for tuition and fees, other estimated expenses at that school, and total cost of attendance per year.

- [Columbia Law School](#) (New York City, NY)
 - Tuition and fees – \$75,898
 - Other expenses – \$25,447
 - Total cost of attendance – \$101,345/year

- [Emory Law School](#) (Atlanta, Georgia)
 - Tuition and fees – \$59,062
 - Other expenses – \$21,044
 - Total cost of attendance – \$80,106/year

- [Ohio State University, Moritz College of Law](#) (Columbus, OH)
 - Tuition and fees
 - Ohio resident – \$31,450
 - Non-Ohio resident – \$46,402
 - Other expenses – \$27,734
 - Total cost of attendance
 - Ohio resident – \$55,184/year
 - Non-Ohio resident – \$74,136/year

- [UC Berkeley Law School](#) (Berkeley, CA)
 - Tuition and fees
 - California residents – \$54,858
 - Non-California residents – \$57,516
 - Other expenses
 - California residents – \$46,861
 - Non-California residents – \$48,191
 - Total cost of attendance
 - California residents – \$93,722/year
 - Non-California residents – 96,382/year

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FINANCIAL AID

Once you've been admitted to a law school, the financial aid office will notify you of financial aid eligibility, including scholarships, loans, and work-study opportunities. Many law schools offer scholarships with a wide range of amounts - there are some scholarships that cover the cost of your tuition in full. Law school scholarships will be offered to you along with your acceptance letter. Scholarships can be based on GPA, LSAT EXAM score, need, identities, public interest, and sometimes even plans to serve low-income individuals or specific communities following graduation. The amount of aid you receive in each category will depend on your own resources, current federal regulations, and the financial aid policies and resources of each law school. For most people, funding opportunities (in the form of grants and loans) will be available to attend whatever school you choose regardless of your current financial circumstances. You can find out more about financial aid eligibility [here](#).

FAFSA

The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA) is the starting point to applying for financial aid for both undergrad and law school. First, you should check your [eligibility for loans and grants](#) from the federal government. The Federal Direct Graduate PLUS and private loans are approved on the basis of your credit. **Law school applicants are considered financially independent of their parents for purposes of determining federal aid eligibility, which means submission of parental or caregiver information is not required.** It will likely result in a greater financial aid package offer than what you received in undergrad. Law schools, however, may require parental financial information for institutional grants and scholarships. Those policies and procedures are specific to individual law schools.

We recommend you look into fellowship and stipend programs as well. Not all financial aid programs are listed as *scholarships*. **The American Bar Association provides an overview of all [financial aid opportunities provided by each law school](#).** Beyond each university's range of offered scholarships, we also recommend looking into external scholarships. [External scholarships](#) are funded by private law firms, organizations, and local clubs in your area. External scholarships that aren't funded by law schools will be in smaller amounts and will not fully cover tuition but they can be helpful in offsetting the cost.

For an example from [U.S. News](#),

- New York University School of Law has the Furman Academic Scholars Program that awards scholarships to promising law students who wish to teach and the Root-Tilden-Kern Public Interest Scholarships for those who plan to pursue public service.
- University of Texas—Austin School of Law offers a full range of need- and merit-based scholarships, such as the Equal Justice Scholarship, intended for students who plan to serve low-income individuals or groups following graduation.
- Duke Law School has the Mordecai Scholarship, which is a full-tuition award typically given to four to eight students each year.

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LOAN FORGIVENESS

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program forgives the remaining balance on your direct student loans after you've made 120 payments (10 years) under a qualifying repayment plan as a public service employee. The forgiveness program *only* applies to full-time employees of non-profit organization or the federal, state, local, or tribal government entities – and it requires annual employment certification form. You can find details about qualifications, eligible loans, qualifying payment plans, tax forgiveness, and how to apply for PSLF [here](#).

TYPES OF LAW SCHOOLS

When applying to law school, consider the types of schools and what each has to offer. LSAC has an interactive resource to help you find the [law program that best fits your interest and needs](#).

“Overall, I would choose a law school based on what kind of career you envision for yourself and where you want to end up working. Different schools will provide a smoother path and/or make it easier for you to achieve those goals. Consider where most of the graduates of the law school end up - is the law school producing mostly corporate lawyers who go work at white shoe firms in NYC? Or are people graduating and doing more innovative work, whether in public interest or in non-law careers? I would also think about where you want to end up living and working. Some law schools may not have a national reputation but have excellent local/regional name recognition and strong ties to local communities through alums.”

- Harvard Law School alum

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LAW SCHOOLS

The main difference between public and private law schools (much like any university) is that public universities receive significant funding from government programs, and private schools receive limited government funds. For that reason, tuition is usually much more expensive at private universities, because they depend on funding from alumni, private/individual donors, and higher tuition/rates of student fees. Though tuition and other costs are an important factor in deciding between public and private universities, it's not the only factor. When applying to law school, consider also class sizes, types of classes and programming available, clinic and externship opportunities on campus, professors, and acceptance rates.

WHAT IS A T14 LAW SCHOOL?

A “T14 Law School” is a law school that is considered in the top, highest ranking 14 law schools in the U.S. T14 law schools are elite, *brand name* schools that are associated with prestige and are extremely competitive. It's important to not rely solely on the rankings of top tier law schools and guide your decision-

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making process with how your lifestyle, career, and educational goals will align with what that university has to offer you. By no means does one need to attend a T14 university to have a successful career with their J.D. Base your applications also on the quality of education and programming you will receive regardless of what the school ranking is. If you're passionate about reproductive justice and want to pursue a career in it, law school — and its status, for that matter — is the *avenue*, not the destination.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL LAW SCHOOLS

The differences between these terms draw primarily on the location of the applicant pool, and also where graduates are likely to get jobs. According to the LSAC, national schools will generally attract applicants from all over the country or world - including a significant portion of international students. Many people associate top-tier universities as *national* schools, which also has to do with the number of employers or firms across the country looking for graduates from those schools. Regional schools have more of a student population from the wider geographic region of the country, and local schools are known to draw on applicants either from the surrounding area, or who are interested in practicing in that area upon graduation. An upside to staying local is that state schools offer lower tuition rates for residents. Regional schools are more likely to cater law school programming towards passing the bar in that particular state with a focus on unique subjects on their state bar exam. For example, the Texas bar exam uniquely includes oil and gas law, while the Delaware bar exam uniquely covers corporations. Some factors to consider when weighing out national, regional, or local law schools are; the location of that university's alumni network, in what state(s) you want to go to school, in what state(s) you might want to practice afterwards.

NON-ACCREDITED LAW SCHOOLS

Law schools in the U.S. are either ABA (American Bar Association) accredited or not. Here is a list of [non-ABA-accredited law schools](#). According to the ABA, some states allow graduates from these schools to take the bar exam, though most states do not. This is relevant if you plan to ever practice law and need to be barred. If you're certain you do not plan to practice law in any capacity, the status of the school is not relevant. If you're unsure, we recommend you enrolling in an ABA-accredited school so you have the flexibility to opt in or out. Before enrolling in a non-ABA-accredited school, do your research and please weigh that consideration. A law degree from a non-ABA-accredited school will likely limit your ability to get recognized at any point in the future by the ABA. California has the most non-accredited law schools, because of the bar requirement. The California bar exam does not require that students to graduate from an ABA-accredited law school like most other states. Even if you pass the bar exam and get admitted to a state bar association, there are options to go inactive if you don't plan to practice in any given year. It is recommended that you research the bar admission limitations of obtaining a degree at that school.

Thinking about law school?

Here are common concerns and considerations

BALANCING LIFE COMMITMENTS?

- **Pregnant, parenting, and/or working full-time during law school is possible!**
- If possible, manage expectations and try to secure a support system: family, friends, partner, work, or others to help balance and be flexible with the demands of law school.
- Part-time, night classes, and online options are available.

WHEN TO GO?

- "Do I have to go immediately after undergrad?"
- Some people go directly and some don't. It's a personal decision. There's advantages to both and there's no an ideal window of time.
- **Going to law school a year (or more) after graduation allows time to study for and take the LSAT exam and file law school applications without the pressure of doing it in your senior year.**
- Law school is a big commitment. It's okay to need time to decide whether that means taking a year or years. Law school is comprised of folks of all ages

HOW TO PAY?

- Law school is expensive.
- **We highly recommend weighing long term cost-benefits of attending law school as well as tuition coverage when picking a school. Many graduates underestimate the impact of high student loan debt after graduation.**
- There are scholarships and grants to defray your expenses.
- In addition to tuition and fees, weigh in rent and living expenses.
- Check out the toolkit for additional options to decrease costs.

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EXPERIENCE IS VITAL

- **"What kind of law are you going to practice?"**
- It's okay to be discovering your passion and developing your career path as you go.
- When submitting job and internship applications, most will be looking at your professional and extra-curricular experiences rather than grades.
- **Unlike undergrad, there's an expectation of gaining professional experience during law school. This applies to all career options.** Examples include summer or semester-long internships, legal clinics, clerkships, direct services, and volunteering.
- Try out different internships and avenues. Everything is valuable especially those you later learn aren't for you. Instead of viewing them as mistakes, that experience will help you narrow down your scope and build up your resume regardless.
- Check out upper division elective courses like reproductive health and rights law

THINKING ABOUT RJ CAREERS

Do you plan to use your degree in pursuing law in a different capacity or non-legal public interest career? Excellent!

Usually any JD will do. Don't get hung up on an elite or top-tier school status for the brand name, instead consider schools that have specific programs or concentrations you're interested in like public interest externship programs and partnerships to get experience and make connections.

THINKING ABOUT RJ CAREERS

Do you plan to go into litigation? Excellent!

- Focus your extracurricular time on gaining legal research and legal writing experience whether that is with a professor, law firm, law clinic, clerking with a judge, or other avenues.
- Pick a school that offers concentrations in your field

THINKING ABOUT RJ CAREERS

Passionate about RJ and still considering your future career focus? Excellent!

- "What kind of law are you going to practice?"
- With all the pressure in law school, remember that "I'm not sure yet" is a perfectly great answer.
- Focus on building your resume. Attend mixers/networking events in all the fields you have an interest in. You'll learn about unique careers and areas of law

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FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS & STUDENTS OF COLOR

Law school has historically been made up of white male students, with white women ranking the second largest identity represented in law schools. This translates to a smaller percentage of people of color not only in law schools, but in the legal field. That also translates to fewer people of color in leadership and positions of decision-making power in the legal field. According to [Bloomberg Law](#), 40 percent of the U.S. population identifies as a person of color, but only about 15 percent of lawyers, or about 1.2 million, fit that category, based on a new report by the [AccessLex Institute](#), a legal education and research group. There needs to be more diversity in law school and the legal profession. There isn't a lack of interest from students of color, rather there are many gatekeepers and obstacles like the arbitrary LSAT exam, not knowing anyone who can share institutional knowledge about navigating law school, the classes and exams, or getting a career. There is an expensive and complex application process, and of course, there's lack of representation, and that matters. Seeing people you identify with can affect a person's sense of belonging in law school. The bottom line is that immigrants, first-generation Americans, first-generation college students, Black and Indigenous students, students of color, trans and gender non-binary students are all underrepresented identities in law school. Let's change that!

Check out a blog by Erin Panichkul, If/When/How's Student Organizing Manager, called "[Doctor, Lawyer, Advocate: Working Through the Pressure to Succeed As An Immigrant.](#)"

LAW STUDENT ACTIVISM

Student activism is limitless. It can include joining student groups as members or board members, volunteering on or off campus, attending rallies, starting and signing petitions to change school policies, and more. Student activism is a way to discover your interests, and learn about yourself and your passions outside the classroom. In fact, If/When/How has a national network of law school chapters at over 100 law schools. Below are alumni responses about what they became passionate about during law school.

Q: What got you involved on campus?

"It was important to see people who look like me and/or come from my background represented."

– UDC Law alum

"RJ issues especially related to parenting."

– City University of New York Law alum

"Title IX work in response to sexual violence issues I experienced personally."

– Temple Law alum

"Being passionate about social justice issues."

– American University Law alum

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“I became friends with student activists and worked on campus at places where student activists met, and I learned a lot from those people and it made me want to be more active on campus as well.”
– University of Iowa School of Law alum

“Model UN in high school, my abortion experience, the civic engagement program at my university.”
– University of Baltimore Law alum

THE LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The law student experience is not monolithic. People have different needs, different goals, and different overall law school experiences.

LAW SCHOOL CULTURE

Q: What was the culture like at your law school? What advice would you share?

“[The culture at my law school was] very white and upper middle class. Be okay with doing public interest. It does not make you any less of a lawyer. Also, grades do not define you.”
– Boston University School of Law alum

“My law school's culture is homogenous — it is almost entirely white. So, although I feel very well represented here, that is only because I am a middle-class white woman. Our school really struggles with diversity. Being a good person is as important as being ‘smart’— if you can be successful and be someone that others enjoy working with, you will be successful.”
– University of Maine School of Law alum

“The culture was not outwardly hostile, but it was more conservative and apathetic than I anticipated.”
– University of Baltimore School of Law alum

“I found a core group of friends who were also misfits; found community with other activist students. The overwhelming culture was one of conformity — law school herds student toward clerkships and law firms, that's it. I would tell someone to hold tight to their interests, passions, and values, because it's hard not to get swept up in the current that pushes along to become a fancy corporate lawyer.”
– Harvard Law School alum

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THE BAR EXAM

The [bar exam](#) is a standardized test required for certification to practice law in a specific jurisdiction (state or region). There are three sections to the multistate bar exam. The first section includes 200 multiple-choice questions administered over two days for six hours each day; it's graded at 50% of the entire bar exam score. The second section includes six 30-minute essay or short answer questions; it's graded at 30% of the entire bar exam score. The third section is the performance test, which consists of two 90-minute essays; it's graded at 20% of the entire bar exam score. Typically, bar exams are held in February and July. Most people take the July bar exam after graduation, and some wait until the following year. Reminder: legal positions do not all require being an active member of the bar.

Different states and jurisdictions have additional, specialized subjects for their state. For example, the Delaware bar exam also includes corporation law, while the Texas bar exam also includes oil and gas law.

The core bar exam subjects are:

- Business Associations
- Conflict of Laws
- Contracts
- Criminal Law and Procedure
- Evidence
- Family Law
- Federal Civil Procedure
- Real Property
- Torts
- Trusts and Estates
- Uniform Commercial Code

BAR ASSOCIATIONS

Admission to a state(s) bar association grants you a license to practice law in that jurisdiction. Admission to a bar association requires three things:

- A [character and fitness determination](#)
- A passing score on the [Multi-State Professional Responsibility exam](#) (MPRE)
- A passing score on the [Bar exam](#) in that jurisdiction or state.

Stay tuned for a resource on bar exam prep, scoring, practicing and going inactive, and what passing an exam means for your career. If you know which state you want to practice, consider an in-state/regional school that may provide instruction and build in more prep for that state's bar exam. This is something you should consider. More details on bar admission [here](#).

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ALTERNATIVES TO LAW SCHOOL

MASTER'S PROGRAMS

Master's programs in Social Work, Public Health, Business Administration, Non-profit Management, Public Policy, Legal Studies, Political Theory, Education (and more!) are other options that can lead you to impactful careers in legal and policy work. There are multiple types of master's degrees based on subject and coursework. There are Masters of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MS, MSc), Master of Research (MRes, MPhil), and more.

PH.D. PROGRAMS

A Ph. D. is the highest academic degree that a student can earn in the United States. These doctoral programs generally support careers in academics and research and can significantly impact and pave the way for policy work in reproductive health, rights, and justice.

DRPH PROGRAMS

DrPH further develops program management, leadership, policy and communications in the field of public health. Having this professional degree and being able to claim the "Dr." title (along with Ph.D. programs) can significantly advance your career and the spaces you're able to work in. DrPH programs are designed to be completed in three or four years for those applicants with an MPH from a CEPH-accredited institution and at least two years of postgraduate professional public health leadership experience.

CAREERS IN REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

There are many ways to work in the reproductive justice movement with and without a law degree. You can further reproductive justice in a career that is not necessarily reproto-affiliated as well. As reproductive justice advocates, your racial justice and reproductive justice framework can be applied to any workplace and any career. You can bring an intersectional analysis and inclusive practices to diversify any workplace. In fact, as the movement grows, it's important to have reproductive justice advocates in varying careers.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE CAREERS WITH A LAW DEGREE

In addition to litigation, many people with law degrees go into public policy, lobbying, academia, organizing, and more. Having a J.D. is an automatic resumé boost and likely translates to a higher salary than without a J.D.

Q: Would you recommend law school to someone interested in working in reproductive justice?

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"I would, if they knew what they wanted to do and a law school education was central to that. But generally, I think if folks can do the RJ work they want to do without going to law school, then they should probably not go to law school."

- University of Iowa College of Law alum

"Yes and no. I think there are lots of ways to do RJ work, and if you want to be an organizer or policy advocate, law school is probably not necessary. In fact, it might be a detour. Make sure you want to actually utilize your law degree in some way. Whatever job you envision for yourself post-law school should require a J.D. Otherwise, it's not worth the time, expense, and stress."

- Harvard Law School alum

"Maybe. I recommend law school to people who have an aspiration that requires admission to the bar. The idea of 'thinking like a lawyer' is a notion devised by people with a vested interest in people going to law school to do so (that is, it's BS). Thinkin' 'like a lawyer' is often counter to 'thinking like an activist/advocate,' and a law degree isn't necessarily the right tool for a lot of work folks want to do around policy, organizing, etc. You can learn as much or more relevant information in an MPA, MPP, LL.M., or even MPH program, depending on what exactly you want to do."

- City University of New York School of Law alum

"Maybe, it is a very small and specific field of practice. Law school is by no means the only way to plug into the RJ movement."

- University of Baltimore School of Law alum

Q: Since you've graduated, did you feel like law school was worth the time, money, energy, and/or the sacrifices it took?

"Yes, absolutely. The law was my calling, and law school is the only path to practice (qua admission to a bar and the courts) in my state."

- City University of New York School of Law alum

"It's never worth the money. Education is expensive because it can be, not because it accurately reflects the inherent worth of the experience. The cost of postgraduate education is a tool meant to keep poor folks out of these spaces, and when we get there, it's intended to overburden us, so that we can't thrive. But I'm generally glad that I went to law school, and I hope to continue to be proud of the career path I'm forging."

- UDC: David A. Clarke School of Law alum

"It's mixed for me. I did need a law degree and license to get to my current position, which I love. So in that sense, as a means to an end, law school was very worth it. I did have good experiences. I did learn

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and grow a lot, and I met some great people along the way. But outside of that, I can't really justify the expense, which will follow me for many, many years. I can't justify the culture of the law school I had so much difficulty navigating, and I don't think I can justify having been away from my home and loved ones for so long while they needed me."

– University of Iowa School of Law alum

"I recommend law school because a J.D. is very versatile and will give you a boost in any career you embark on. Law school taught me to be more analytical and critical; that is practical in any career. However, it is wildly expensive and may not be worth it for everyone, so please realistically weigh cost and repayment. For me, it was worth it. I didn't know what to do after undergrad, so I looked into law school. Some people had clear, grand visions of why they went to law school, and I was taking it step by step. While a student, I learned that law school is an avenue and not the destination. I would have attended more confidently and prepared if I had the resources and connections I have now. I wouldn't recommend it to everyone, but it was the right choice for me, and I didn't feel like I took a gamble. As a first-generation American and definitely the first in my family to attend law school, I started when I was 24, and I believe going to law school led me directly to the career I love."

Erin - Thomas Jefferson School of Law Alum

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE CAREERS WITHOUT A LAW DEGREE

Here's insight from our toolkit co-authors at URGE.

Q: Can you expand on your experience building your career in reproductive justice with varying degrees and professional pathways?

"Repro careers are in need of so many skills – organizing, graphic design, policy knowledge, information technology, writing, and more. Interpersonal skills, and skill of discernment, are arguably most important to use in these careers — because the varied experiences one encounters when working in repro often need to be handled with sensitivity, empathy, and care. Moreover, one can utilize the skills they've accumulated throughout undergraduate or up until the point they apply for the job they're seeking. Projects tend to require different methods and ideas to reach what the team is envisioning. Whether someone pursues law or not, they will be a valuable contributor to the repro world."

Kavleen – UC Berkeley alum and co-author of the "Is Law School for Me? Toolkit"

"As I got more and more into the reproductive justice movement, the more I learned that you really CAN have a career in activism. In learning so, I began to explore the different fields I could go into. There's organizing, communications, data, policy. All of these roles and positions are integral to pushing for the movement successfully. But of course, I can only be in one field at a time, and so I thought to myself, what is it that I really want to do? Then, I remembered the moments in which I felt

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most powerful was when I was advocating for progressive policy and lobbying at my state capitol. Since then, I've been so curious about what it would be like to work in policy. So, along my journey in trying to find the best career path for me, I would ask folks who were in policy how they got there. They all said the same thing to me: 'It's really not that hard. I started as an organizer and moved my way to policy.' And when I would ask, 'Did you need a master's degree or a law degree to get into policy?' Almost always they said, 'No... it helps, I guess. But I have so many colleagues who don't have secondary degrees who also work in policy.' So now, here I am, a state organizer who hopes to someday make it into the policy world."

Jessy – UC Riverside alum and co-author of the "Is Law School for Me? Toolkit"

"I am so grateful to work alongside my colleagues who are lawyers. I learn so much from them! I considered law school when I was an undergrad, and I even conducted a series of informational interviews with people who had gone to law school and were then working in repro health, rights, and justice spaces. I learned from those discussions that there is no universal experience of law school, and opinions on whether it was "worth it" varied greatly — some folks had strong opinions about it being essential for their career goals, and others highlighted alternative paths. As it wasn't a decision I was ready to make for myself then, I focused on gaining direct service experience through an undergraduate internship at a reproductive justice organization in Oakland. After graduation, I worked at an independent clinic in San Francisco, which opened my eyes to many different aspects of clinical direct service work, community healthcare models, access, inequities, abortion stigma, insurance systems, and much more. I've taken opportunities to participate in policy advocacy efforts, connect to volunteer and organizing opportunities, and maintain relationships with colleagues outside of my workplace — all of which have supported my growth in this work. So far, my experiences and relationships built while working outside of academia have allowed me to learn a lot about my strengths, areas for improvement, and directions I want to further explore in the realm of reproductive justice work."

Sonja – UC Santa Cruz alum and co-author of the "Is Law School for Me? Toolkit"

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS, LAW, AND JUSTICE JOBS

Check out these websites for reproductive justice career opportunities:

- [ReproJobs.com](https://reprojobs.com) also active on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- [If/When/How Job Board](https://ifwhenhow.org/job-board)
- [Indeed.com](https://indeed.com)

IF/WHEN/HOW: LAWYERING FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice is a national network of law students, lawyers, and legal professionals furthering the reproductive justice movement through law, policy, and organizing.

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If/When/How transforms the law and policy landscape through advocacy, support, and organizing so all people have the power to determine if, when, and how to define, create, and sustain families with dignity and to actualize sexual and reproductive wellbeing on their own terms. Our vision is a transformation of the legal systems and institutions that perpetuate oppression into structures that realize justice, and a future when all people can self-determine their reproductive lives free from discrimination, coercion, or violence.

LAW STUDENT NETWORK

If/When/How's [law student network](#) is currently comprised of over 100 active chapters from across the country, bringing reproductive justice with a racial justice lens to their law school campuses. The majority of our chapters are in southern states, and we are still growing. We have chapters on public and private campuses, religiously affiliated or conservative campuses, majority minority law schools, rural campuses, and HBCUs.

The national office provides funding, resources, trainings, and individual support to each of our chapters for on-campus and off-campus reproductive justice activism. For some chapters, that looks like presentations, panels, tabling, fundraisers, lobbying, testifying in front of their city councils or state representatives, comment writing on new proposed administrative laws, community events, and even rallying in front of the Supreme Court of the United States. The national office offers an online database full of recorded trainings, webinars, and presentations to cast at chapter events, internship and fellowship guides, mini grants to bring an abortion provider to a campus event, and more.

If/When/How hosts the [Leadership Institute](#), an annual racial justice and reproductive justice conference for law student leaders where representatives of each chapter get together to learn substantive, intersectional reproductive justice issues, build relationships, and strategize how to change the face of lawyering one campus at a time. For more information, reach out to Erin Panichkul, Student Organizing Manager at erin@ifwhenhow.org

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM – ALUMNI

The If/When/How [Reproductive Justice Fellowship Program \(RJFP\)](#) is a policy-focused fellowship designed to create entry points into the reproductive health, rights, and justice fields and enhance legal and advocacy capacity at organizations advancing reproductive justice for all people. If/When/How is committed to helping transition the RJ Fellows into reproductive justice legal advocacy beyond their fellowship terms and in sustaining the long-term capacity of legal staff at organizations working to advance reproductive justice. The RJFP's programming teaches RJ Fellows not only how to be advocates, but how to be thoughtful collaborators in the movement. By training and preparing a diverse cohort of young reproductive justice lawyers, If/When/How is doing our part to supply the next generation of advocates ready to fight for reproductive justice within the legal system and beyond. Learn more about the fellowship alumni network [here](#).

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For more reflections, check out a blog by Cammie Dodson, Professional Development Manager at If/When/How, as she shares her [experiences](#) with being a former Fellow and how If/When/How's Reproductive Justice Fellowship Program carves out a non-traditional lawyering path.

To hear from each member of the 2020-2021 class of RJFP fellows, click the names below to read about how they are using their skills as a lawyer to further the reproductive justice movement:

- [Aimee Registe](#)
- [Allie Watson](#)
- [Alex Moody](#)
- [Carles' Anderson](#)
- [Elena Ferguson](#)
- [Jasmine Yunus](#)
- [Limayli Huguet](#)
- [Lauren North](#)

RJ LAWYERS NETWORK

If/When/How's [RJ Lawyers Network](#) is a powerful nationwide group of pro bono legal professionals who are mobilizing against attacks on reproductive freedom, growing with each other as reproductive justice advocates, and bringing reproductive justice values to their everyday work.

TRAININGS

If/When/How's [professional trainings](#) are centered around our five [strategic initiatives](#):

- [Decriminalizing self-managed abortion](#)
- [Eliminating barriers of parental involvement laws and judicial bypass](#)
- [Overturning *Harris v. McRae*](#)
- [Enhancing birth options and experiences](#)
- [Eliminating welfare family caps](#)

ADVICE FOR LAW STUDENTS

If/When/How staff members wrote a blog with [advice](#) on what we wish we knew before going to law school.

Q: What advice would you give your younger self or someone with a similar background in law school?

"You are going to have to re-learn how to study. If you are used to being a big fish in a small pond, you need to adjust your lens and learn how to ask for help."

- UDC: David A. Clarke School of Law alum

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“My feeling that my identity was represented and that I belonged is entirely related to the specific law school I went to, which is extremely diverse in terms of race, socioeconomic background, work experience, etc., and has a deep culture of solidarity. Developing relationships with the professors is just as important as doing the work. Folks from other backgrounds (i.e. white cis men) get by on the basis of their familial, professional, and business connections, you are just as deserving of the benefit of connections too, and professors are interested in helping you.”

- City University of New York Law School alum

“Things I wish I knew before I went to law school: One, time and money management is incredibly important. I was a first-gen college student and then a first-gen grad school/law school student. I didn't have a fallback plan or a safety net. It really was on me to figure out how to make the best use of my time and money to get me through law school. I wish I asked for more help/guidance on how to be better on both counts. Two, I felt like I couldn't afford to fail, and in that sense, I was not as kind to myself as I wish I had been during law school. The truth was law school is just a brief blip in my life, a lot went before it, and a lot will come after it. It is very easy to let law school consume you, and I wish I knew more about how to balance school and life better at the time, and I also wish I cut myself some more slack and that this one endeavor didn't and couldn't define my worth as a person. Three, find your people in law school or out of it; either way, build a community of support around yourself that's not just study groups. Be around people that ground you and make you feel good and that you can be honest with. Four, sign up to be a bar prep rep. It helped me earn a free bar course, saving me \$3000 I could not otherwise have afforded (but also bar associations do sometimes offer bar scholarships, and so do firms) don't pay for stuff you don't have to pay for! Five, go to office hours and get to know your professors (at least the ones you like). Six, do activities and join things that make you happy, not things that you think will look good for your resume.”

– University of Iowa School of Law alum

“It's okay to go into the private sector. Public interest is great because you can have more of a direct impact but being a repro advocate in a non-repro space is equally if not more valuable. You are not selling out if you work for a for-profit company to pay down your loans or care for your family. You can be a reproductive justice advocate regardless of what your career focuses on. It's about practicing reproductive justice core values. Consider self-evaluating the value of your work and whether it is against everything you believe in or simply issues not related to repro. You can create change in any role, especially if you have access to decision-making power on who gets hired. You can create change where you access spaces that have been traditionally all-white or all-male by challenging those power dynamics, outdated policies and practices, and bring more inclusivity and diversity to the workplace. That's reproductive justice in action.”

*Erin – Thomas Jefferson School of Law alum,
co-author of the “Is Law School for Me? Toolkit*

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