

# Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc.

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Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc. (FLA) offers help to law students, judges, and attorneys troubled by substance abuse, psychological conditions, other addictive disorders, and similar impairments which may affect an individual's ability to practice in a competent and professional manner. FLA was created in 1986 by recovering attorneys and health care professionals in order to help others deal with their impairments. The staff and volunteers of FLA *know* the problems faced by law students and how to help overcome these problems.

Because of the sensitive nature of substance abuse and psychological problems, and fears regarding the admissions process, applicants who may be in need of help are often very reluctant to seek that assistance. Recognizing this concern and in order to foster early and confidential contact with FLA, the Florida Board of Bar Examiners has acknowledged that any contact with or information provided to FLA shall be strictly confidential unless a request for disclosure is made **by the applicant**. Protection is also provided by §397.482, F.S., which insures the confidentiality of voluntary communications with FLA.

**For Additional Information  
Call the FLA Hotline at:  
(800) 282-8981**



## FLA Can Help

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**A**mong the services which FLA can offer to a law student or applicant:

- ◆ **Assessment and Referral:** A trained member of the FLA staff will meet with the applicant to evaluate the problem and recommend available treatment and rehabilitation options.
- ◆ **Peer Support Network:** The affected student will be paired with a recovering lawyer in their area to help them deal with the admissions process, their rehabilitation, and as a way to network and gain practice experience.
- ◆ **Support Meetings:** FLA sponsors over 20 weekly meetings around the state where recovering students, attorneys, and judges help each other deal with the stresses of law school and the admission process.
- ◆ **Education and Prevention:** FLA works with The Board of Bar Examiners concerning impairment and recovery issues. In addition, FLA makes regular presentations at law schools in Florida regarding impairments and how they may relate to the admission process.
- ◆ **Annual Workshop:** FLA presents an annual seminar every July dealing with such issues as Board of Bar Examiner decisions and procedures concerning admission of applicants with histories of chemical dependency or psychological problems.
- ◆ **Conditional Admission Monitoring:** In cases involving admissions problems, FLA will implement a structured rehabilitation program which can document an applicant's recovery. Such evidence of recovery will often be taken into consideration by The Board of Bar Examiners when determining recommendations for admission.



## Board of Bar Examiners

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While not an agency of The Florida Board of Bar Examiners, FLA has developed a cooperative relationship with the Board's staff and members, including education regarding impairments and treatment, development of monitoring protocols which permit admission of applicants with a history of impairment, seminars at law schools, and a presentation by Board members at the annual FLA Workshop in July.

As a result of its acceptance of chemical and psychological impairments as treatable illnesses, the Board was one of the first in the U.S. to permit conditional admissions of applicants with a history of chemical dependency, psychiatric diagnoses, or criminal justice issues resulting from such conditions. The term "conditional admission" has no effect on an attorney's scope of practice, but only on the probationary terms with which the lawyer must comply for the period set by the Board. The order of conditional admission is confidential, and conditional admittees are listed as "members in good standing" by the Bar.

In cases where a history of impairment, arrest, or treatment exists, the keys to obtaining a recommendation for admission are: 1) **absolute honesty and candor** when preparing and filing the application for admission; 2) acknowledgment of the impairment; 3) evidence of a rehabilitation program; and 4) willingness to demonstrate continued rehabilitation for a specified period after admission. FLA can assist in all these areas by reviewing relevant portions of the application prior to filing, recommending a program of recovery, and acting as the monitoring agency during conditional admission.



Demonstrating your present candor and honesty by providing **everything** on your application, including incidents which you believe may jeopardize your chance of admission, provides you with the best chance that a recommendation for conditional admission will be authorized by the Board. Conversely, leaving something off the application in the hope the Board will not discover it (which **they will**) almost certainly will result in a recommendation against admission.

Florida Lawyers Assistance is available to answer your questions regarding the bar application, the admissions process, or the conditional admission procedure. FLA also maintains a referral listing of attorneys who specialize in representing applicants before the Board, and who understand and work cooperatively with FLA.

### Ask Yourself These Questions:

- Have your professors, fellow students, family, or friends suggested that your work is being affected by your addictive behavior (alcohol, drugs, gambling) or your moods?
- Do you ever feel that you just can't face certain situations or that you need a drink or drug to do so?
- Do you drink, use drugs, or gamble alone, or isolate and avoid contact with others?
- Have you ever had a loss of memory while using alcohol or drugs, although apparently functioning (e.g., a blackout)?
- Do you ever use alcohol or drugs before a class, exam, or social function to calm your nerves, or improve your performance?
- Have you missed or rescheduled a class, exam, or other appointment because of substances, or just because you felt unable to function?



- Is your addictive behavior or your mental state making you careless of your scholastic responsibilities, your family's welfare, or other personal obligations?
- Do you minimize the amount of substances you are actually using, the size of bets you are placing, or the way you really feel?
- Have you ever been hospitalized directly or indirectly as a result of your drinking or drug use, gambling, or psychological problems?
- Do you find you are sleeping or eating substantially less/more?
- Have you found yourself thinking about harming yourself?

**If you answered YES to one or more of the above questions, you owe it to yourself and your family to contact Florida Lawyers Assistance.**

### A Treatable Illness

Addiction and mental health disorders are **not** moral issues, but rather are treatable illnesses whose effects result in a deterioration of moral and ethical values. The stigma is not in having the illness, but in **failing to seek treatment once its presence is recognized**. Seeking treatment is acceptable social behavior; it is continuance of the denial that is anti-social.

Free, confidential help is available to you or a student you know who may be having problems with drugs, alcohol, gambling, or a psychological condition which is affecting their life. If you or someone you care about is suffering from such a problem, professional and peer assistance is available to help bring about a positive change.

**FLORIDA LAWYERS ASSISTANCE CAN HELP. PLEASE CALL (800) 282-8981**



# Florida Lawyers Assistance and Law Students

[www.fla-lap.org/students](http://www.fla-lap.org/students)



*Confidential Assistance for the Legal  
Community*