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Strong Entry-Level Legal Employment Persists Despite Sharp Drop in Federal Government and Public Interest Hiring

NALP today released ***Employment for the Class of 2025 — Selected Findings***, a preview of the upcoming annual *Jobs & JDs: Employment and Salaries of New Law School Graduates* report, highlighting key outcomes that reveal a legal market in transition. The Class of 2025 achieved one of the strongest employment outcomes ever, despite graduating into a legal job market shaped by economic uncertainty, federal hiring disruptions, and shifting employer demand. Although the entry-level legal market contracted by approximately 2,700 jobs compared to the year before, the graduating class was also smaller in size, helping to offset the impact.

The employment rate for the Class of 2025 was the second highest in NALP's history, trailing only the Class of 2024, and nearly 85% of graduates secured positions requiring or anticipating bar admission — a record high. However, this year's data also reveals a legal profession undergoing significant change, including sharp declines in federal government and public interest hiring.

But the biggest story this year may be the shifting structure of the entry-level legal market. Over the past few years large law firms have emerged as the dominant employer type, providing the largest share of employment opportunities for new graduates. Executive Director Nikia Gray, said, "Today, firms of more than 500 lawyers have firmly established themselves as the single largest employer of new law graduates, accounting for more than one in five employed graduates of the Class of 2025. When firms of between 251 and 500 lawyers are included, approximately one in every four employed graduates now begins practice in BigLaw." She added, "That transformation has profound implications for legal education and recruiting."

NALP measured employment and salary information for the Class of 2025 as of March 16, 2026 — approximately ten months post-graduation. More than 97% of U.S. law graduates from institutions that were accredited by the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association are included within the dataset.

Key Employment Findings

- The overall employment rate for the Class of 2025 was 92.8%, down 0.6 percentage point from the Class of 2024's record high of 93.4%. However, this year's figure was still the second highest employment rate on record.
- The percentage of graduates securing jobs for which bar admission is required or anticipated (i.e., attorney positions) improved by 0.3 percentage point to 84.6%, the highest level recorded since NALP introduced the current job classifications in 2001.
- Just 6.7% of employed Class of 2025 graduates were seeking a different job than the one in which they were employed, a record low.
- Among employed graduates, 60.9% obtained positions in private practice — a 2.0 percentage point increase and the highest share of graduates working in this sector since the Class of 1990.
- In raw numbers, however, the private practice sector hired approximately 940 fewer Class of 2025 graduates compared with the larger Class of 2024. The largest decrease in hiring occurred in firms of more than 500 lawyers, which hired about 540 fewer graduates this year.
- Firms of 501+ lawyers accounted for 33.2% of all law firm jobs obtained by the Class of 2025, down from 34.2% for the Class of 2024. This is the second year in a row in which the share of law firm jobs found in the largest firms has declined. Meanwhile, the percentage of graduates employed in private practice and working in firms of 1-10 lawyers grew by 0.8 percentage point to 26.4%.
- Public service employers (government, judicial clerkships, and public interest) accounted for 31.0% of all jobs obtained by the Class of 2025, down from 32.7% for the 2024 class. This drop was largely attributable to a decline in federal government and public interest hiring. The share of all jobs found in government fell from 12.9% in 2024 to 12.0% in 2025, while the share of public interest jobs declined from 9.7% to 9.0%. Judicial clerkships remained flat at 10.0% of all jobs.
- The number of graduates employed by the federal government (excluding judicial clerkships) fell by 37.0% from nearly 1,100 Class of 2024 graduates to approximately 690 Class of 2025 graduates.
- Washington, DC saw a steeper decline in hiring (-13.2%) compared with the national market for the Class of 2025 (-7.7%). This decrease was driven primarily by reduced federal government and BigLaw hiring in the nation's capital.
- The national median (50th percentile) salary for the Class of 2025 grew to a new record high of $100,000, up 5.3% compared to the median of $95,000 for the 2024 class.

- Salary growth was not universal across employment sectors. Salaries increased across all three public service sectors, with median salaries growing to $81,000 in government (+1.4%), $75,000 in public interest (+4.2%), and $72,533 in judicial clerkships (+3.6%). In business, the median was flat at $100,000 and in the lowest paying sector, education, the median fell by 1.6% to $63,000.
- The median private practice salary also decreased for the second year in a row, dropping by 3.1% to $155,000. But this trend does not suggest that law firms have broadly reduced starting salaries. Rather, the lower median reflects both changes in the distribution of jobs across firm sizes and elevated merger and acquisition activity, which can affect firm size classifications from year to year.
- By firm size, median salaries ranged from $84,000 in firms of 1-10 lawyers to $225,000 in firms of more than 500 lawyers.
- Nearly two-thirds (65.6%) of employed graduates were working in the same state in which they attended law school.

Read more about *the Selected Findings* and related Class of 2025 resources. The full *Jobs & JDs* report will be released in October 2026.

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NALP is an association of more than 3,000 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. NALP believes in fairness, facts, and the power of a diverse community. We work every day to be the best career services, recruitment, and professional development organization in the world because we want the lawyers and law students, we serve to have an ethical recruiting system, employment data they can trust, and expert advisers to guide and support them in every stage of their careers. Visit NALP online at www.nalp.org, contact NALP at info@nalp.org or call (202) 835-1001.