

IN THE HONORABLE SUPREME COURT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA  
SITTING IN ITS MARCH TERM, A. D. 2024

BEFORE HER HONOR: SIE-A-NYENE G. YUOH.....CHIEF JUSTICE  
BEFORE HER HONOR: JAMESETTA H. WOLOKOLIE.....ASSOCIATE JUSTICE  
BEFORE HIS HONOR : YUSSIF D, KABA.....ASSOCIATE JUSTICE  
BEFORE HIS HONOR : YAMIE QUIQUI GBEISAY, SR.....ASSOCIATE JUSTICE

In Re: The Petitions of Attorneys-at-Law for Admission into the Supreme Court Bar as  
Counsellors-at-Law

Reviewed: March 21, 2024

Decided: June 14, 2024

MADAM JUSTICE WOLOKOLIE DELIVERED THE OPINION OF THE COURT

The New Judiciary Law, Section 17.6, states:

“Any attorney who has been actively engaged in the practice of law for five years may submit a petition to the Supreme Court showing his moral and professional qualifications for membership in the Bar of the Supreme Court and praying admission as a counsellor of that Court. The petition shall be supported by the affidavit of at least two practicing counsellors of the Supreme Court *en banc* in open court. If the Supreme Court accepts the petition, the Chief Justice shall appoint a committee of at least three counsellors of the Supreme Court who, as soon as convenient, shall examine the petitioner and report in writing upon his moral and professional qualifications to the Chief Justice. In addition, the petitioner shall take and satisfactorily pass a written examination on questions which a lawyer in practice before the Supreme Court may reasonably expect to meet, which shall be prepared and conducted by the National Board of Bar Examiners. If the petitioner has satisfactorily passed the examination and if the report is favorable, the report shall be voted upon by the members of the Bar of the Supreme Court present at the sitting of the Court and, if a majority vote for admission, the petitioner shall be admitted as a counsellor at law before the Supreme Court.”

The Supreme Court, in consonance with the above stated law, has over the years reviewed petitions filed to the Court by attorneys seeking admission to the Supreme Court Bar. The Court having reviewed the petitions submitted, praying for admission of attorneys to the Supreme Court Bar, and the Court being satisfied that the petitioners had met with the requirements set, has the names of the approved petitioners forwarded to two committees: The Ethics Committee and the National Board of Examination. These Committees are clothed with the authority to test the attorneys’ legal writing skills, analytical ability and knowledge of the legal practice, procedures, and ethics of our jurisdiction. After the Committees’ examinations, a report is sent to the Chief Justice, and in said report, recommendations are

often made for consideration by the Supreme Court regarding observations made in the handling of the examinations.

The Court recently met to consider reconstituting the members of the two committees, considering that Counsellor Gloria Musu Scott who served on the Ethics Committee is indisposed at this time to serve on the Board, along with Counsellor Elliot who now serves in the Judiciary as a judge. Counsellor Oswald Tweh, who served as Chairman of the Board of Examiners, now serves as the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice; therefore, he also is indisposed to continue his service as Chairman of the Board of Examiners.

After deliberation, the Court named three counsellors of the Supreme Court Bar to fill in the vacancies. Counsellors Ruth M. Jappah and Janniedel M. Haider-Tandjiekpon were selected to serve on the Ethics Committee, and Counsellor J. Johnny Momo was brought in to serve on the Examination Committee. The Court appointed Counsellor G. Moses Paegar to replace Counsellor N. Oswald Tweh as the Chairman of the Board of Examiners.

Members of the two committees set up to conduct the examinations, are as follows:

I. An eight-member Examination Committee –

1. Cllr. G. Moses Paegar ..... Chairman
2. Cllr. Philip A. Z. Banks, III ..... Member
3. Cllr. Stephen B. Dunbar ..... “
4. Cllr. Snosio E. Nigba ..... “
5. Cllr. Jallah A. Barbu..... “
6. Cllr. Deweh S. Gray..... “
7. Cllr. J. Johnny Momo..... “
8. Cllr. Jamal Dehto, Jr. .... “

II. A five-member Moral and Ethics Committee (MEC) –

1. Cllr. T. Negbalee Warner .....Chairman
2. Cllr. Cyril Jones ..... Member
3. Cllr. F. Juah Lawson ..... “
4. Cllr. Ruth M. Jappah..... “
5. Cllr. Janniedel M. Haider-Tandjiekpon ... “

Unlike the past practice of each petitioner being called up to be examined in open Court, the Court, this time, convened in its judicial forum and reviewed each petitioner’s file, and upon being satisfied that sixty-three (63) of the attorneys met the eligibility requirement of the first phase of the process leading to their admission to the Supreme Court Bar, had their names

forwarded to the Examination Committee and the Moral and Ethics Committee for further examination, primarily focusing on the attorneys' legal skills, analytical ability and knowledge of the legal practice, procedures and ethics. Five (5) of the candidates sent were given dispensation from sitting the written exams in line with the Court's authority.

The Committees met, and having conducted their examinations of the candidates, wrote to the Chief Justice, forwarding a joint report in which they reported that of the sixty-three (63) candidates forwarded to them, thirteen (13) did not pay their exams fee and, therefore, did not sit the exams. Of the remaining fifty, forty-five sat the three written substantive exams and the ethics exam. The five candidates that were exempted by the Court sat the ethics examination, along with the other forty-five persons who sat the three substantive written exams.

The report of the Examiners states that of the forty-five persons that sat both examinations, twenty-six made a successful pass; one of those who made a successful pass was recommended to forfeit admission because he had not practiced law for five years before sitting the exams.

The Supreme Court, by and through His Honor, Francis S. Korkpor, former Chief Justice, had forwarded to the office of the Grievance and Ethics Committee, through its Chairman, Counsellor George E. Henries, the Court's Opinion, In Re.: *The Petition of Jewel Howard Taylor, Lawrence K. Bropleh, et al., Attorneys-at-law of the Republic of Liberia, Praying to the Honorable Supreme Court of Liberia for Admission to the Honorable Supreme Court Bar as Counsellors-at-law*, decided February 18, 2022, during the October, A. D. 2021 Term of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Korkpor requested that the Committee probe into the allegation of unethical conduct which was reported by the Moral and Ethics Committee of the Board of Examiners of the Supreme Court against Attorney Julius Ronnie Addy, Jr. The report from the Board of Examiners to the Chief Justice recommended that though Attorney Addy, Jr., had made a successful pass, he should not be admitted as Counsellor-at-Law, since he had cast aspersion upon the integrity of the Examiners.

The Grievance and Ethics Committee held a hearing and submitted a report to the Supreme Court. In its report, the Committee recommended *inter alia* that the action of the Moral and Ethics Committee of the Board of Examiners of the Supreme Court was squarely based upon hearsay and there existed no effort (s) on the part of the Moral and Ethics Committee of the Board of Examiners to validate the justification for the action against Attorney Addy.

The Court met on the report and came up with the decision to have Attorney Julius Ronnie Addy, Jr. admitted along with the candidates being admitted today as counsellors-at-law, warning him to desist from hearsay that cannot be proven or validated.

In the Board of Examiners' report, the Board again emphasized the need for the Court to set a specific time for examination of candidates for admission to the Supreme Court Bar. The Board recommended that, noting the steadfast position of the Court, exams be administered on a regular annual basis in November; that the Court considers announcing the date of the examination at least four (4) months to the date of the Exams, both (i) qualification of applicants and (ii) the membership of the two Committees, so that the applicants can have adequate time to prepare for the exams. The committee also recommended a raise in the fee payment for the exams.

The Court notes that a similar recommendation regarding a set time for examination was made by the Board of Examiners in their report to the Chief Justice during the October Term of the Supreme Court, A.D. 2016. The Board requested the Court to adopt a defined schedule for examinations of attorneys desirous of becoming counsellors of the Supreme Court Bar, to ensure that applications are completed and submitted on time, and that applicants can plan their travels, study programs and other schedules.

In the Supreme Court's March Term, A.D. 2014, Opinion regarding the admission of successful attorneys as counsellors of the Supreme Court Bar, the Court held that the examinations for admission to the Supreme Court Bar be administered in November of each year. Subsequently, the Court again, in its October Term, A. D. 2016, endorsing the recommendation of the Committee calling for a defined time to be set for administering examination for admission to the Supreme Court Bar, held that examinations of candidates for admission to the Supreme Court Bar be administered between late November and early December of each year, and set the deadline for submission of petitions as of November 15. However, this schedule was not adhered to during the Court's October Term, A. D. 2023, primarily because of the General Elections held at the time and the volume of work that the Supreme Court was engaged with during the months of September thru January, 2023. The Court decided then that attorneys' petitions to the Court would be deferred to this March Term of Court, A. D. 2024. The Court, in consideration of this consistent recommendation from the Examination Committees, henceforth holds that examination for admissions to the Supreme Court Bar will be administered in November of each year, and petitions for admission of attorneys-at-law to the Supreme Court Bar be filed on or before October 15, of each year. No petition for admission for the exams in November of a concurrent year will be accepted by the Clerk of the Supreme Court later than October 15.

The MEC also recommended that three attorneys, Attorneys G. Alphonso W. Woiwor, Alexander V.S. Saylee and Patterson S. Blamo forfeit all grades made on the examinations, and that they be made to reapply at the appropriate time for admission to the Supreme Court Bar and re-sit the exams.

The Board, in its report, wrote thus:

“As part of the procedure adopted by the Moral and Ethics Committee (MEC) prior to its examination, candidates had to complete and submit a duly verified questionnaire prepared by the Committee. From the detailed application form completed and filed by each of the candidates and the interviews conducted, the MEC observed that three (3) of the candidates in persons of Attorneys Alphonso Woiwor (who failed the exams), Alexander V.S. Saylee (who did not complete the exams due to family emergency), and Patterson S. Blamo (who passed with decent scores in each of the exams conducted), did not meet the minimum five (5) year practice requirement when they applied for admission to the Supreme Court Bar. Suffice it to say, the MEC considers this conduct of the concerned candidates as shrouded in bad faith and dishonesty with the intent to mislead and deceive, since each of them is presumed to know or should have known that this very important requirement had not been met. The MEC proffers to Your Honor that they forfeit all grades made on the instant examinations – the three written exams and the ethics - and that they be made to reapply at the appropriate time for admission to the Supreme Court Bar and sit the exams again”

We are dismayed that though these lawyers, when admitted as attorneys-at-law, were reminded that integrity is the hallmark of the legal profession, they decided to pull this scheme. Rule 24 of the Code of Moral and Professional Ethics, states: “A lawyer’s word of honor is sacred and his dealing in all matters, and on all occasions, should not be such as repugnant to his oath, and degrading to his profession.” The Court will not accept that these attorneys or the counsellors filing the petitions on their behalf did not know when they filed the petitions that only attorneys who have practiced law for five (5) years are eligible to apply to this Court to be admitted as counsellors-at-law. The Judiciary Law Section 17.6, stated *supra*, requires that only an attorney-at-law who has been actively engaged in the practice of law for five years may submit a petition to the Supreme Court showing his moral and professional qualifications for membership in the Bar of the Supreme Court, and praying admission as a counsellor of the Court. Besides, this Court in its Opinion: *Admission of Attorneys-at -law to the Supreme Court Bar*, dated November 4, 2015, October Term, A.D. 2015, further held that:

“An attorney-at-law seeking permission to become counsellor-at-law, is not eligible to file a paper in the Supreme Court nor can he/she appear to represent himself/herself before the Bench until he/she has been passed on and admitted to the Supreme Court Bar. Only Counsellors-at-law are allowed to file papers in and appear before the Supreme Court. This means that the previous practice of attorneys filing petitions for admission to the Supreme Court Bar will no longer be allowed. We

hold that henceforth, all petitions of attorneys applying for admission to the Supreme Court Bar be signed by one or both attesting counsellors, and one of these counsellors must appear to present a petition before the Supreme Court, answering all questions relative to allegations made in the petitions and other related required attachments. This means, that a counsellor-at-law must be familiar with the allegations made in the petition presented by him on behalf of the applicant.

With counsellors-at-law now being required to file and present petitions on behalf of applicants petitioning for admission into the Supreme Court Bar, petitions for admissions to the Supreme Court Bar will be representative of the quality of papers expected to be filed in and bought before this Court, and that these petitions shall meet up with all the requirements laid down in the statute and Opinions of the Court.

By this, we hereby send a **caveat** to all who wish to apply for admissions to this Court's Bar, that the Court will no longer be considerate when passing on petitions for admissions to allow an applicant withdraw and refile or amend his/her petition, or to allow an applicant to provide the requisite papers. Applicants for admission to this Bar must, therefore, work closely with their representative counsellors in the preparation of their petitions.”

A review of the petitions filed on behalf of Attorneys G. Alphonso W. Woiwor, Alexander V. S. Saylee, and S. Patterson Blamo reveals that Counsellor J. Laveli Supuwood filed with the Clerk of the Supreme Court, on behalf of Attorney G. Alphonso W. Woiwor, a petition for admission to the Supreme Court Bar, on November 16, 2023, and the petition asserts that Attorney Woiwor graduated from the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, on December 18, 2018, and was admitted by the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court, Lofa County, on May 13, 2019, as member of the Lofa County Bar; that Counsellor Peter Wolobah Howard filed the petition for admission on behalf of Attorney Alexander V. S. Saylee, on November 23, 2023, and in his petition also asserts that Attorney Saylee graduated from the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law in 2018, and was subsequently admitted by the 15<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court, River Gee County, on May 13, 2019, as member of the River Gee Bar; and Counsellor J. Laveli Supuwood, who again filed the petition on behalf of Attorney S. Patterson Blamo, on November 17, 2023, asserts therein that Attorney Blamo graduated from the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law on December 12, 2018, and was admitted at the 12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Grand Kru County, on May 13, 2019, into the Grand Kru Bar.

When should one who has graduated from a law school be considered to practice law? Can one who graduates immediately be considered as an attorney-at-law? Attorneys G. Alphonso W. Woiwor, Alexander V. S. Saylee and S. Patterson Blamo stated in their petitions that they all were admitted at their various circuits as attorneys-at-law on May 13, 2019. If immediately after their admission as attorneys, they began to practice law, five years of practice would

have been as of May 13, 2024; therefore, they were not eligible to petition the Court for admission into the Supreme Court Bar in November 2023, as they did.

What is even interesting is that although the three candidates graduated from the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law on the same date, December 12, 2018, and were admitted on the same date, May 13, 2019, but at different Circuits, Counsellor J. Laveli Supuwood, who filed the petitions for admission on behalf of Attorneys G. Alphonso W. Woiwor and S. Patterson Blamo, asserted in the petition of Attorney Woiwor, that he graduated from the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, on December 18, 2018, and that Attorney Blamo graduated from the same school, in the same year, on December 12, 2018, leaving one to wonder whether The University of Liberia had two graduations for Law School students in December of 2018. Counsellor Peter Wolobah Howard who filed the petition for admission on behalf of Attorney Alexander V. S. Saylee, on the other hand, only asserted that Alexander V. S. Saylee graduated in December 2018, stating no specific date.

The Court also observed that Counsellors Festus K. Newon, Sr. and Augustine C. Fayiah signed and filed Counsellor's Affidavits, each stating in Count 3 of his counsellor's affidavit that Attorney G. Alphonso W. Woiwor had practiced law in the Republic of Liberia for five years before applying for the exam. Counsellors Molly N. Gray, Jr. and Alfred B Holmes who knew or should have known that Attorneys Saylee and Patterson had not practiced for five years also signed and filed a Counsellor's Affidavit on behalf of Attorneys Saylee and Patterson.

Again, the records show that the petitions for admission filed by Counsellors Alfred B. Holmes and Aaron B. Kparkillen, on behalf of Attorneys Gertrude W. Korvayan and Roland Bishop Doe, had attached to these petitions, copies of the passports of Attorneys Gertrude W. Korvayan and Roland Bishop Doe to evidence the Attorneys dates of birth and their nationality. The Court did not pass on and forward the names of these Attorneys to the Board of Examiners because of the recklessness of the petitioners Counsels.

The Court is flabbergasted by this, since it has consistently required that it would only accept a birth certificate as evidence of birth and nationality of an attorney applying for admission to this Court. As far back as its March Term, A. D. 2014, this Court, in its Opinion on the admission of Counsellor Kofa Jonathan Fonati and others as Counsellors-at-law, Associate Justice Yuoh, speaking for the bench, wrote:

“Some of the errors worth mentioning were; petitioners attached passport and affidavits of confirmation of birth to their petitions rather than birth certificates which would serve as the best evidence to prove their nationality, age and place of birth. It is the law in vogue that a person applying for admission to the Bar as attorney must

be a citizen of this Republic and have attained the age of twenty-one years. The Judiciary Law Rev. Code 17:17.1. Henceforth, absent a birth certificate from the authorized government agency responsible for the issuance thereof, or official instrument of similar status (for instance, naturalization certificate) this court will not admit any attorney-at-law into the Supreme Court Bar for lack of evidence authenticating the attorney's nationality and age."

The Court states that it has been battling with lawyers' failure to adhere to this requirement of a candidate presenting his/her birth certificate to substantiate the candidate's date of birth and nationality, and the Court cannot adequately express its frustration of the fact that our lawyers have refused to read the Court's Opinions and be *au curreant* with the laws and rules espoused by the Court therein.

This Court is weary by the lackadaisical attitude of lawyers in their practice of law. Just recently, in the Court's Opinion, *Intestate Estate of Zoe-gar vs. Intestate Estate of R.T. Gardiner*, delivered in its March Term, A.D. 2023, the Court in umpteen times has advised members of the Supreme Court Bar to be conversant with the Opinions emanating from the Supreme Court, and accordingly be guided by these Opinions in their representation of clients before the Court; that members of the Supreme Court Bar must always endeavor to update themselves with the decisions of the Court before filing cases before it, as the Court will not hesitate to use the full sanction of the law in punishing lawyers who deliberately file cases involving issues that have been clearly settled by the Court.

For their refusal to adhere to the Opinions of this Court, Counsellors Alfred B. Holmes and Aaron B. Kparkillen are hereby each fined United States Five Hundred Dollars (UD\$500.00). Let the word go forth that any counsellor who files a petition for admission of an attorney to the Supreme Court Bar and attaches a copy of the attorney's passport as evidence of date of birth and nationality will be suspended from the practice of law for a period set by this Court.

Also, for their negligence, or refusal to adhere to the Opinions of this Court, Counsellors J. Laveli Supuwood, Peter Wolobah Howard, Festus K. Newon and Augustine C. Fayiah are fined the sum of United States Five Hundred Dollars (US\$500.00) each, to be paid within 72 hours of the rendition of this Judgment.

This Court has reiterated that lawyers who file papers before it should ensure that said papers are representative of a counsellor of the Supreme Court Bar, and that papers filed before the Court be based on assertions well researched. Papers filed by lawyers of this Court in many instances are so despicable that at times the Court has required that these papers be re-done and refiled. The Court must now begin to take stringent measures to curb the careless and negligent behavior of lawyers appearing before it.

Because of his dishonesty, Attorney Patterson S. Blamo who passed in each of the exams conducted is disqualified for admission with the others today. He, G. Alphonso W. Woiwor and Alexander V. S. Saylee are barred from petitioning this Court for admission as counsellors of the Supreme Court Bar for a period of two years (2024-2026); that is, the Clerk of this Court will only accept petitions regarding these attorneys for admission to the Bar as of October 15, 2027. We hope that by this, those seeking admission to the Supreme Court Bar will seek to be upright, and that these attorneys will work to improve their character, as this Court has no place for dishonest lawyers appearing before it.

The Court will now thank the examination Board for its work done in such a short notice, and congratulate those who made a successful pass and are about to be admitted as Counsellors of the Supreme Court Bar. We note the exceptional performance of two of the candidates, Beyan G. Mulbah and Sedia Williams Wolor who made a pass in Category A (90% - 100%).

Listed below are the names of those in order of their rank who successfully passed the interviews and written exams conducted by the Board of Examiners. :

1. Mulbah, Beyan G.
2. Wollor, Sedia Williams
3. Wehyee, Tarlo N.
4. Domah, Darren L.
5. Yellowway, Alvin Weagar
6. Nyounway, Abraham B.
7. Kelley, Bowoulo Taylor
8. Kettor, Josephine Kennedy
9. Garpeh, Sr., Wilson S.
10. Sumo, Emmah W.
11. Tomah, Lawrence
12. Kaba, Sr., James B.
13. Saygah, William Gbaye
14. Williams, Augustine Wloba
15. Wilson, Harriet Kamara
16. Jalloh, Alvin Teage
17. Harry, Paul Yeenie
18. Zaza, Deddeh K.
19. McGill, Johnstone G.
20. Freeman, Robert G. K.
21. Saie, Mac John

22. Duahn, Powell M.
23. Tomah, Korpo Sumo
24. Tegli, Joseph M.
25. Taylor, Adolphus
26. Addy, Jr., Julius Ronnie
27. Wiles Talery, Alexandra Tonieh
28. Yealue, Jr., Garrison Doldeh
29. Kamara, Nadia Sartus
30. Brown, Mayalan Keita
31. Gray, Saifuah-Mai

Like others, some of you who have successfully made a pass to be admitted to the Supreme Court Bar, are not inclined to practice law or to appear before the Supreme Court, while others cannot wait for their *debut* before this Court. But whatever career path you choose to follow with your distinguished title of “Counsellor-at-Law”, remember that the attachment of this prestigious title carries with it certain significance. Your deportment, your moral standard, your verbal output, your character, and your general demeanor must now be impeccable, a reflection of your status, and your moral rectitude is of utmost importance. The status, soon to be conferred on you, places you in a rank of higher respectability by the public at large, your clients, peer and even your family and friends, and you must endeavor to live up to the responsibility the title places upon you. We wish you all a successful practice

WHEREFORE AND VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, by the power invested in us as Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of Liberia, we hereby grant the petitions of those listed above, admitting today thirty-one attorneys into the ranks of this Honorable Supreme Court Bar, Republic of Liberia, as Counsellors-at-Law, and with all rights and privileges appertaining thereto.

The Clerk of this Court is hereby ordered to issue each of the attorneys, named herein, a COUNSELLOR CERTIFICATE with the signatures of the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court affixed thereon, duly certifying that they have been duly admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court and are permitted to practice law before this Honorable Supreme Court of Liberia. AND IT IS HEREBY SO ORDERED