



ILLINOIS PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION

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DATE: April 15, 2008
FROM: Illinois Paralegal Association's Board of Directors
SUBJECT: Formal Education of Paralegals

To Whom It May Concern:

This is an informative letter being sent to various individuals of the legal community to explain the differences in the education of paralegals. The Illinois Paralegal Association (IPA) does not endorse any specific school or program. However, in the best interests of the profession, the IPA does encourage all individuals to a higher standard of education.

The IPA understands the dilemma faced by employers in determining which qualifications are reasonably required for the successful paralegal. Although a paralegal holding a baccalaureate degree and a paralegal certificate is certainly highly qualified, paralegals holding an associate's degree in legal studies or with other paralegal education may be just as qualified depending on education, prior work experience and knowledge. Each employer must determine which individual will complement the work requirements of that position.

There is no governmental regulation of paralegals or mandatory specialized accreditation of paralegal programs. Paralegal education is not standardized. IPA recognizes programs that are American Bar Association (ABA) approved or approved by an educational governing body. Generally, programs fall into one of the following categories:

- Post-Baccalaureate Programs – a post-graduate program.
- Four-year (Bachelor's Degree) Programs – a baccalaureate degree in legal studies.
- Two-year (Associate Degree) Programs – an associate degree in legal studies.

An individual is not "certified" upon receiving a degree from these programs. However, an individual may receive a "certificate" upon completion of a program. The term "Certification" (one of five processes to regulating the paralegal profession) is a voluntary process by which a non-governmental agency or association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications (i.e. examination, work experience, etc.) specified by that agency or association. At present, there is no association or agency in Illinois granting "Certification." National paralegal associations offer competency examinations which upon successful completion would allow the paralegal to use certain designations such as a Certified Legal Assistant (CLA), Certified Paralegal (CP), or PACE Registered Paralegal (RP).

If you are interested in learning more about the education of paralegals contact the ABA at <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/paralegals> or the IPA at 815/462-4620 or at www.ipaonline.org.