

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – The Black Pre-Law Association held its interest meeting last week. The co-founders, three UNC juniors, Jaleah Taylor, Joann Obioma, and Taylah Smith, started the organization to provide a community for underrepresented students pursuing pre-law.

Taylor says that the recent affirmative action decision also had an impact on her reason for wanting to start the group. She also says that this new barrier made her want to help make it easier for students of color to get into law school.

“It's always easier trying to go into another environment, such as law school, when you can see somebody else that has done, has gone through it that looks like you,” says Taylor.

The percentages for lawyers of color have been increasing in almost every racial category. However, the number of Black lawyers has stayed consistent over the past decade, according to the American Bar Association.

Dr. Erika Wilson, a UNC Law Professor, says there are several factors that have contributed to the underrepresentation of people of color in the legal field. The first being the generational issues.

“I think from an access perspective sort of the historical barriers that have kept Black and other people of color from the legal profession continue to trickle down in terms of, you can't be what you don't see,” says Wilson.

Wilson says the other factors are more tangible, like the LSAT. She says that people of color, particularly Black candidates score lower on the test. Wilson also says that the case studies in the first year of law school can take a toll on students' mental health.

“You're sitting in these classrooms where they're debating your humanity, literally. I mean, you're studying a case like Plessy v. Ferguson or some other outrageous case where the legal issue to be decided was whether or not Black people were fully human or should be afforded social and political rights,” says Wilson.

But this history of underrepresentation has only strengthened Taylor's decision.

“It's like more of a thing where, like, if no one else is gonna do it, I have to do it because we need those numbers to go up,” Taylor says.

The co-founders say they were impressed by the turnout of their first event and already have future events in the works.

“So many students were like ‘Thank you so much’. Even upperclassmen were like ‘I wish I had this my freshman year. I wish I was able to have a support system to keep going,’” says Obioma.

BPLA might just be getting started but the founders hope the organization will continue to support students even after they graduate.

Their next event is a panel with UNC, Duke, and North Carolina Central Law schools this Thursday at 5:30.