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COURTESY PHOTO A for-profit college under investigation by the federal government is scouting its first law school campus in Southeast D.C.

Kaplan University's Concord Law School began speaking with property owners about leasing space around two months ago, said Michael Stevens, executive director of the Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District.

"They've been down here looking at multiple sites," Stevens said.

Until now, Concord's curriculum has been online only -- and its main marketing message has been the appeal of online learning. A Kaplan spokesman declined to comment on the physical campus.

The Department of Education proposed strict regulations last month after a federal probe of for-profits discovered low graduation rates, misleading recruitment practices, and in some cases, encouragement to forge federal aid applications to qualify for Pell Grants. For-profits received \$24 billion in federal loans and grants last year.

Department of Education spokesman Justin Hamilton said Kaplan's law school would fall under the new regulations, which would restrict recruiting tactics and require colleges to prove "gainful employment" of its graduates. "It's covered -- all the bachelor and grad programs," Hamilton said.

Concord has graduated 1,000 students in the past 11 years, a low number considering the more than 1,500 students currently enrolled in its online law degree programs.

Concord is not accredited by the American Bar Association, so its graduates can apply only to the bar in California, where Concord is registered as a "Distance Learning Law School."

Students should be "very wary," said Jose Cruz, vice president of higher education policy and practice for Education Trust, a nonprofit group focused on closing income and racial achievement gaps.

"They're operating at profit levels higher than Procter & Gamble's yet they have single-digit graduation rates -- so the question is, are for-profits investing enough in student success?"

Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, said it was a "precarious" time for Kaplan, which is owned by the Washington Post Co., to expand. "It could just be that Kaplan sees a market for law schools in Southeast that other markets aren't serving," he said.

McCluskey pointed to the support for-profit schools have received amid the federal investigation "from minority communities and minority legislators because they disproportionately serve those markets. This could be another way of shoring up that support, opening a law school in a high-minority market."

The Senate plans to hold its fourth hearing on for-profit colleges early next year.

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