

Featured Alumni

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Tell us a little about your background and how you got started in your career?

Growing up, there were no lawyers in my family. I went to law school not knowing what to expect and had a conception of the law as a "helping profession," like the social work, teaching, or medical fields. During law school, I connected with like-minded peers and professors passionate about civil rights and public interest law, solidifying my determination to pursue a legal career in that domain. After graduation, I clerked for a federal appellate judge and then was lucky enough to join the NAACP Legal Defense Fund as a Skadden Fellow. Being able to work alongside lawyers and advocates I had long admired at the Legal Defense Fund felt like fulfilling a dream, and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have been able to start my legal career there.

What prompted your move to Jenner?

As I gained more experience, I realized that effective advocacy for social change happens as a result of advocacy by committed lawyers in both public and private practice. At the Legal Defense Fund, I collaborated with a number of wonderful private practitioners who generously shared their expertise, time, and resources to a wide range of our projects and litigation, and I came to better understand the ways they, too, are able to contribute to improving society and the profession. I decided to explore this avenue to become a more well-rounded lawyer. Jenner & Block was at the top of my list because of its reputation for excellence and for being a values-driven firm. I also appreciated that Jenner's then-new New York office—led by Ron Marmer and Paul Smith at the time—had the intimate feeling of a small, boutique firm while benefiting from the support and resources of a national one. My time at Jenner was special. I met a number of very talented lawyers and developed many lasting friendships; to this day, one of my best friends remains Carletta Higginson, then a fellow associate and now the Chief Digital Officer of Warner Music Group.

You've had an interesting and varied career since leaving Jenner. You've worked in public interest non-profits, government, and academia. Can you give us an overview?

Since leaving Jenner, my career has taken diverse paths, including roles in other public interest non-profits, government, and academia. In 2008, I was appointed to work with the New Jersey Attorney

General's office overseeing the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights. Then, when my family settled in the DC area, I joined the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia as its Legal Director, a position I occupied for a decade. It allowed me to serve my local community and have a substantial impact on individuals' lives through a mix of individual representation, law reform, and systemic advocacy before DC courts, agencies, and council. I even had several opportunities to collaborate with lawyers from Jenner's DC office.

Tell us about your current role at the University of Virginia School of Law. What are you focused on researching and teaching?

Currently, I am a professor of practice at the University of Virginia School of Law and a distinguished fellow at its Karsh Center for Law and Democracy. I have been teaching seminars on topics such as law reform and impact litigation, school desegregation and integration, Asian Americans and the law, and public interest law practice. My focus is on infusing practical components into students' learning experiences, ensuring they understand how legal concepts translate into real-world applications. I try to draw not only from my public interest experiences, but also from my private practice experiences too, emphasizing that lawyers can make a difference regardless of their career path. I understand that many public interest-minded students view the practice of law in black and white, but my own evolution suggests a broader, more inclusive perspective of how one can contribute in this profession. I look back fondly on my time at Jenner, recognizing the indelible way the firm has helped shape my career.

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