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# **WLAM Leadership Class 2022**

## **Attorney Lookbook**

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**HON. YVONNA ABRAHAM**  
**Judge at Wayne County Circuit**  
**Court**

**1. As a judge what does your typical day look like?**

My docket typically starts at 8:30 am. I have anywhere between 15-20 cases scheduled in a day including trial. I preside over matters regarding divorce, custody, parenting time, and other domestic relations issues.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

Actually, I didn't decide! It's based on vacancy and seniority. When I was appointed in July 2021, I thought this would be a criminal division seat. However, just a few days before I took the bench, I was notified by the Chief Judge that it was in fact a family division seat. I was disappointed at first because the majority of my legal experience was in criminal law, but I truly feel that God places you where you need to be and where you can make a difference. I am blessed and thankful to be able to help families in Wayne County and can't imagine doing anything else right now.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

I think it's important to bring awareness about the existence and influence of bias and stereotypes in the legal field. This is why we must remain resilient and persistent in achieving goals and surpassing milestones. I recall my first week as a Judicial Attorney for a Circuit Court Judge. One of the white older male veteran attorneys yelled across the room to me and said, "hey Arab girl, get me a cup of coffee". I responded with "excuse me" and he looked confused and responded with "isn't that your job as a secretary" and I looked at this man who had probably been practicing law longer than I was born and calmly said "P70405". He looked at me bewildered and said "YOU'RE A LAWYER" with shock and amazement. That day stayed with me and fueled me to work hard and achieve my goals. I've spent a good part of my career mentoring minority students and trying to do my part to create a more inclusive culture in the legal profession.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

GET A MENTOR! Multiple mentors as a matter of fact. I think it's so important to have that support system and people to be able to turn to for advice, guidance, and friendship in the field of law.

**CHRISTY DRAL**  
**Career Law Clerk at the Eastern District Court of Michigan**

**1. As a recent law clerk what does your typical day look like?**

My primary responsibilities are to perform legal research and draft opinions for a federal district court judge. I review attorney briefs, perform independent research, and advise the judge on the proper resolution of the motion under existing law. In the meantime, I also sit in on hearings, conferences, settlements and perform any necessary task in the busy operations of a trial court. This includes, helping to manage juries, addressing emergency issues, and supervising interns.

**2. How did you decide what area of law was best for you?**

Clerking was appealing to me because it involved finding the correct result, rather than advocating for whatever position my client needed me to take. I like the idea that I am helping in the administration of justice and working with a federal judge to arrive at proper and efficient resolutions to disputes. I loved law school, the studying and “solving” of issues. Clerking is similar to law school in that your job is to research and apply what the law is, rather than advocate for a change or extension of the law.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

It is important for me to speak my opinion without discounting it. Women often offer apologies for their views or feel the need to be less assertive. It is important for me to carry myself with confidence in order to project that I am just as capable as my male counterparts.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Pursue an internship in the court system to see if intense research and writing is for you. Avoid heavy political activity as the judiciary is required to be impartial and nonpartisan. Be very careful with your social media presence.



## **HON. KRISTINA ROBINSON GARRETT**

### **Judge at Michigan Court of Appeals**

#### **1. What does your typical day look like as a judge?**

My days are very different from when I was a trial judge. Typically, when the cases drop, I find out when I have to prepare for the cases for the following month. If let's say there are 30 cases, I may have writing responsibilities for 10 of those cases. But I still need to know the other 20 cases very well since I have to vote on them, and I may have to write a concurring or dissent for those cases. I work very closely with my law clerk because we prioritize the cases, draft, and write the opinions together. I really enjoy the deliberative process. On certain days, I come in and have reading days. I may read cases 3-4 times to first really understand the issues and determine the level of hardness for each case. The final opinions will not be written until after the oral arguments because I get the chance to understand the issues from the attorneys. I have more time now to focus on the varying issues now as opposed to when I was a trial judge. On other days, I take some moments out of my day to help students and aspiring lawyers and bar associations. I believe it is very important as a judge to give back to our communities.

#### **2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I did not imagine I would be here today, and truthfully I loved being a trial judge because I loved helping people directly. When I was at the district court, in my mind it was the "People's Court." But I also get to help people here now because I get to help people by creating law. My decisions are not just words on paper, instead, my decisions help many people across the state. I believe it's important to have judges that really care about the decisions that they make. I want to be a part of a change and my hope is that I will help people where they need it the most. Further, prior to serving as Judge, I worked as general counsel for the Wayne County sheriff's office and everyday when I would come in to work, there was a different issue and area of law that I was learning and would have to work through. These issues were challenging and I really enjoyed that. My passion is to be curious and I love the challenge of learning the new areas of law while figuring out how to apply these issues to the facts.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

I can't tell you how much it means to me and how much of an honor it is to serve on this court as the only black woman currently at this time. I am also the highest appointed black woman in the judiciary of our entire state since we have not yet had a black woman on the Michigan Supreme Court. And to know that I am only the third black woman to have ever served on this court and it's 2022. I believe it is so important to have diversity of thought and opinion when these cases are being decided. These cases are being decided by a 3 judge panel and we go through that deliberative process after oral arguments. I believe I can bring in the background and perspective to this process that I don't believe is representative of this court at all. And I hope that there will be more women of color on this bench. Our judiciary should represent our community because the decisions that are being made by judges should be made by people of varying backgrounds and experience since it directly affects the people.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

My advice to other women of color who are aspiring to continue and follow behind me, or anybody else, is to realize that it may not be an easy road, but it is a necessary road. And as long as you understand that you deserve and that you have a right to be there, you can do anything you put your mind to. You are just as good as anyone else, even if it takes you longer to learn something or whether you may be the first in your family to enter this field. It's ok because there will be people there to support you. The legal community is just that, a community. I will be there to support any woman of color who is there to join the ranks. And lastly, there is space for everyone and that is important to remember.



STACEY KING

**Civil Litigator at Garan Lucow Miller, P.C.**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

As a civil litigator, there is not necessarily even a “typical day.” The Court’s Scheduling Order dictates that on my calendar there is likely something “new” daily – depositions, Motion Hearings, Settlement Conferences, Facilitations, calls/meetings with clients, training and case management meetings with Associate Attorneys, etc. It is a rarity that I get an entire day to just sit at my desk and work on my cases! At least not without a slew of other attorneys and staff in my doorway. And what is on my calendar prescribes where I will physically be on any given day – my office, conference rooms, opposing counsel’s offices or Court.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

As many will likely say, I just “fell” into it, because this is the firm that took me on as a Law Clerk during my first year of law school. As I learned the law in law school, and as I learned how to practice law as a Law Clerk, I also learned that civil personal injury defense litigation was a good fit for me and something I was becoming good at! And having worked nowhere else, and having done nothing but this for the past 24 years, I feel pretty lucky to have “fallen” into this area.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

At this stage in my career (almost 25 years in), to me it means I need to focus even more than others on being a leader, having/showing confidence, and on trying my best to be influential and to serve as a role model to advance the interests of other women in the law.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

No better advice than to get in early by locating a law clerk or internship position at a private practice law firm (or several!), whether it be a small or large firm setting. Dig in quickly and absorb what those working as attorneys at that law firm have to share and teach, but also, make contacts! Practicing in civil personal injury defense in Southeastern Michigan is a very small (yet large) community, and it is often who you know, and not necessarily what you know, especially in those early years.



## **TANYA GRILLO**

### **Criminal Defense Attorney at Grillo Law**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

Since moving into more of an administrative position, my day to day tends to include a lot of paperwork. As the Managed Assigned Counsel

Coordinator for both the cities of Eastpointe and Southfield, I am responsible for appointing all cases for indigent defendants in both jurisdictions. I am also responsible for the approval of all invoices, requests for experts and investigators, and the communications from the court to the attorneys accepting appointments. From time to time, I also take on new retained clients and those cases vary from driver's license restoration to misdemeanor and felony cases in the tri-county area. As a solo attorney, I am constantly juggling the demands of courts and clients and every day is different based on the needs of all.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

In 1998, my sister was killed, and my family was thrust into the criminal justice system. Having sat through a criminal trial, I watched how our system operated and directly impacted litigants. When I decided to go to law school, I knew I wanted to work in the criminal justice system but was unsure of my path. After my first year, I had an interest in working in prosecution and met with one of the Deans. She suggested that I meet with a criminal defense attorney because the best prosecutors can see both sides of the coin. I started working for one of the best defense attorneys in the state and the rest is history.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

It means we work twice as hard to be noticed for our efforts. Often, we are undervalued and underappreciated. I have been the only woman in a sea of men in many conference rooms and critical meetings and on more than one occasion, an idea that I shared was rejected only to be brought up by a man and moved forward. I was once in a conference room with a male prosecutor and several police officers before a pre-trial hearing. The prosecutor stated my client was guilty, and I corrected the language and said "allegedly." After, the officers in the room started mimicking me

and saying allegedly to me over and over. I had to correct their behavior. This happens often and we have a long way to go to even the playing field.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Clerk, intern, job shadow, and gain real courtroom experience. I am the only lawyer in my family, so I did not have a roadmap to follow. Explore every opportunity and be open minded enough to explore the other side of the coin.



**ERIN KLUG**  
**IP Attorney at Dobrusin Law Firm**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

While some days are more exciting than others (attending a conference, meeting with clients, networking events....etc.), the vast majority of my days are spent in front of the computer responding to emails and taking calls. Earlier in my career I spent my days drafting patent applications and learning from more senior attorneys. However, as my practice has grown the responsibilities have shifted. While I still do substantive patent and trademark work, I now spend a significant chunk of time working directly with clients on their overall strategy to develop the patent and trademark portfolios.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

As with many patent attorneys, IP law was the only reason I went to law school. My background is mechanical engineering, and I love science and math. IP law is the only area of law that allows me to practice both science and law, two disciplines that are especially important to me. I enjoy working with my clients as they build their businesses, grow their brands, and protect their ideas. So, for me, IP was really the only option.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

Women, especially women of color and black women, continue to be significantly underrepresented in the law. Law firms are overwhelmingly white and male. In the US, there is no shortage of women entering the legal industry, with about half being women. However, as you progress up the ladder of seniority, the scales start to tip, with only one-third of law firm partners being women. Many leave the industry altogether, often around the time they start a family. The benefits of having a diverse team are well documented, so it's clear that if law firms could maintain gender diversity at a senior level they could realize significant business benefits. It's therefore an issue that everyone would benefit from addressing. I remain committed to seeing more women stay in this profession and hope that organizations like the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan continue to support women not just at the start of their career but also as they continue to rise through the ranks and break glass ceilings.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Get as much practical experience as possible prior to graduating from law school. Seek out opportunities to work directly with patent attorneys on drafting, working with inventors, and even on litigation. If you can get your foot in the door with practical work experience under your belt, that can set you up for success down the road. This kind of hands-on experience will really help you to stand out after graduation and will give you an edge when it comes time to apply for jobs. It's great if you can pass the patent bar prior to graduating but put a priority on practical experience.



**HON. ANNEMARIE LEPORE**  
**Macomb County District Court Judge**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

Prior to being a judge, I worked as an attorney at Aloia Law for ten years. I practiced in the area of criminal law, family law and civil litigation. On a typical day I would have court in the morning. I was always mindful not have multiple court dates for one morning. With zoom technology emerging out of the pandemic, that has

changed how many attorneys practice. Regardless of your ability to zoom into multiple courts, always be mindful of providing adequate time and attention to your client and the court. Sometimes I would have two different district courts in one morning for a pretrial hearing or sentence. On other days I might have a circuit court hearing or friend of the court matter. I usually would grab lunch and bring it back to my office. If I had court in the afternoon I would head there after lunch. If not, that time was for meetings with clients or potential clients. Office time was also used to write a brief, draft a judgment and return calls for when I was out of the office. Towards the end of the day is when I would enter my time for billing purposes and go over my schedule for the following day.

As a judge my morning docket starts at 9:00 a.m. and my afternoon docket starts at 1:00 p.m. On Mondays I hear criminal matters for the City of Sterling Heights. On Tuesdays I conduct probation violation hearings and sentencings. On Wednesdays and Fridays, I have a civil docket and Thursdays are criminal matters for the State of Michigan. I try to keep some afternoons open for preliminary exams, bench trials or court meetings. I am in the process of starting a sobriety court which will take place on Wednesdays. While the schedule is usually the same every week, something always comes up, like a wedding, arraignment, or search warrant. I also have jury trials set once a month.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

During law school I clerked for a circuit court judge, interned for the Macomb County prosecutor's office, and clerked for two different firms. I was able to see different areas of the law and get a feel for what interested me.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

I joined the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan – Macomb region early in my career. I'm very proud of the friendships I have made because it is very important that women support each other and discuss different experiences that they encounter. I personally saw a lot of women leave the practice of law, after what I believe, was due to a lack of support. I was told more than once that it would be very difficult for me to have a family and/or children while continuing to advance in my career. It can be very discouraging when the only colleagues you interact with are men with a different set of responsibilities. I found so much support and motivation from women in the legal field and it is an honor to be able to give my support and advice to other women.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Whether it is a desire to work at a firm or to become a judge, one of the best pieces of advice I can give is to network. Go up to someone you admire in court and introduce yourself. Ask a judge if you can visit and watch court one day. You never know who might become a mentor until you start to build a relationship. Also, always keep an open mind. In law school I always thought I would never want to practice criminal law or do defense work. I was very wrong, because once I did an internship I loved it.



**ANGELA MEDLEY**  
**Family Law Attorney at Polizzi & Medley Law, PLLC**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

Court days usually start with a Zoom hearing, unless that particular judge requires an in-person appearance, which is rare right now, but changing daily. The rest of the day is spent reviewing discovery, handling client phone calls, or drafting motions and pleadings. I also sit on various boards, so part of my day may include a Zoom board meeting.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

Lawyer is a second career for me, and I had a family when I went to law school. Family law seemed like the most natural transition for me, particularly since I had personal experience with divorce. I also do a bit of criminal defense work.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

I am in a unique position in that I am an older, but newer attorney. This means that other women lawyers who are my age have been practicing longer than I have. By the stories they tell, I know that they have battled, won, and paved the way for me so that I don't face the same challenges a woman attorney my age would have faced years ago. Truthfully, I have never viewed myself as a minority, only as a woman. As a woman attorney, I take great pride in being a fierce litigator and protector of people who put their trust in me.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Pay attention to civil procedure (this was NOT my best subject in law school). Memorize the best interest factors! Make connections with lawyers practicing in other fields of law because sooner or later issues will arise in your family case that will involve other specialties, and you will need to consult those lawyers.



**CONCETTA MOCERI-LOUZON**  
**Insurance Defense Attorney at**  
**Hewson and Van Hellemont**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

In the morning, I get my children to school and then I try to go for a walk to get some exercise and clear my mind (as long as I do not have any early hearings). If I have any hearings or depositions that day, I prepare for those first, so that I know I have time to review. After I prepare for any hearings, I go to my task list or my written list (I have many lists!) and start moving down the list. I usually work until about 6:00pm. Some nights I stay up late after the kids go to bed until around 12:00am finishing up my work. Other times, I go to bed early and wake up at 4:00am and get a head start on work, and then take a break when I take the kids to school/daycare. It all depends on my upcoming deadlines and what I have going on at home.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I would not say that I "decided this area of law was for me." Rather, an opportunity to learn this type of law presented itself to me, and I took that opportunity.

I started my career working for a small boutique firm that did commercial litigation and work for a community bank, foreclosing on assets for small business loans. In 2008-2009, the market crashed, and the banking work dwindled. My boss Joe and I tried to make it work for a few years, but by the end of 2012 it was obvious that he could not keep his doors open. My then boss had a pedigree in insurance defense. I did a few interviews, but there were not that many commercial litigation openings at the time, and I was the sole income earner in my household. Joe was hired at what was then called Kopka, Pinkus, Dolin & Eads, an insurance defense firm in Farmington Hills, Michigan. Joe was kind enough to negotiate that KPDE take me on for 3 months as a contract worker, to see if I could prove myself as an insurance defense attorney. I worked my tail off and was hired as a direct employee, and that's how I came to do insurance defense.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

What I want most of all is for women and minorities to take on leadership roles, in private practice, as judges, and in government roles, including as prosecuting attorneys. As a woman in the law, I want to help others to achieve those goals, even if I am not able to achieve these accolades for myself.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Do not be afraid to ask questions or ask for help. The smartest people I know are not afraid to ask even the most basic questions when they are learning something new.



## **ESSENCE PATTERSON**

### **Complex Litigation Attorney at Honigman LLP Attorneys and Counselors**

#### **1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

As a 2nd year attorney my days vary somewhat. I balance my time between various research, drafting, and discovery-related assignments in the cases that I'm staffed to. I might also attend depositions, hearings, or client meetings. In addition, I try to stay involved in a couple bar and affinity bar associations so I often have tasks to complete for those organizations; these tasks might include helping to plan a volunteer event or attending a meeting.

#### **2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I've wanted to be an attorney since I was young but didn't quite know what that meant. I assumed it would be like what we all see on TV, so I always pictured myself as a litigator but couldn't put a name on what that meant until law school. After doing some transactional assignments and participating in the Transactional Law Competition during my 2L year I confirmed that I wanted to litigate. I chose commercial litigation because I enjoy working on complex problems with sophisticated clients.

#### **3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

Being a woman and minority in the law means that I have a duty to leverage my position to increase the number of other women and minorities in the profession.

#### **4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

I would encourage law students to seek internships, clerkships, and volunteer experiences during law school to get a thorough understanding of what commercial litigation looks like. I would also encourage students to take business law classes so they're familiar with the concepts that commercial litigators face.



**NINA M. PAOLINI-LOTARSKI**  
**Litigation Attorney at Aloia Law**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

Every day is a little different. I'll have office days, where I spend that time researching, writing, and strategizing for my cases. Other days, I could be in court for a hearing for a motion or trial. Other days, I'll be in depositions. It really varies day-to-day.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I always knew I would be in litigation but was not sure what area of law I wanted to practice. I made a point in law school to sign up for classes and programs that were in my area of interest. I also had a summer associate position at a mid-size firm that had lawyers that practiced in various areas of law. I was able to actually work in those areas and find out what I liked. I started as a lawyer in banking litigation and creditor's rights. This gave me a great foundation as a litigator. I made a point of working on different cases with different attorneys. In the last 2 years, I've been able to branch out on my own with cases and dictate the types of cases I take. In those years where I was clerking, interning, and starting as an associate, I was able to test the waters in the areas of business litigation and family law. I enjoyed both of them. My primary practice is family law, business litigation, construction law, creditor's rights/collection, and general litigation.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

Being a female and/or minority in law can be powerful. Each of us come from different experiences, families, cultures, societies, etc. From those experiences, we have different means of problem solving. As a woman, it is still a struggle in the field of law. Men (especially of a certain generation) may not respect you as a female attorney and may even underestimate you. When it is opposing counsel, this can be used to your advantage. I try to use it as a competitive tool. When they are co-counsel, it becomes more difficult. Keep the professional communications but put boundaries as to what you will do and what you are willing to speak about. These men are a minority in the practice but some hold powerful positions.

The difficulty is the sexism in the workplace – which very much exists. I made a point of only doing the tasks that would be expected of my male peers. For example, I previously worked for a firm that was going to have me learn how to do the court

filings, which were only done by the legal assistants. This was never asked of the male associates. This was only asked of me because (a) I would work late and (b) I am a female. I had to put my foot down (in a kind way) to say that I will not be learning that. Unfortunately, women have to still be on the lookout for the attempts to by male superiors to minimize her and her voice in the workplace. Anyone who knows me – knows that you cannot shut me up or make me quiet. Still, the politics of an office can still be misogynistic. It is hard to know about a workplace environment without speaking with folks who are working there (and willing to be honest) or those who *used to* work there.

I am the only female attorney in my current firm. However, I am more respected in my position here than in some of my other experiences in the legal field. I am encouraged to be a representative for the firm at social events. I am assigned a case load that is on par with my peers (or sometimes heavier than my male peers). I am also paid. Young lawyers are hard to value. Work hard and prove your value. When they won't pay for it, find somewhere else that will!

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Take the classes for that area – business law, family law, and secured transactions. Be sure to sign up for clinics, programs, or internships that specifically relate to those areas of law. Join Moot Court or a Mock Trial team. This will give you an opportunity to act as a real lawyer.



**SYDNEY RUSHING**  
**Criminal Defense Attorney**  
**at Rushing Law**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

If you were to ask me this question before Covid 19 Pandemic and Now, you'd receive a much different answer! A typical day for me looks like this:

5:30am I'm getting up and trying to knock a few things off my to-do list before I get my girls up and off to Daycare.

8:30-9:00 I am getting on Zoom and starting my morning dockets. This can last anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours depending on the day.

Once I am off Zoom, I am looking at emails and returning calls. I take a lunch every day from 12:00-1:00.

If I have anything on the afternoon docket, I handle that. My consultation calls & scheduled client calls happen in the afternoon. I also am working on case files in the afternoons (Motions, briefs, etc.).

I leave work and head to the gym at 3:45. Pick my girls up from Daycare around 5:30/6:00, then it's family time until 9 pm.

Perks of being your own boss are that the above is a busy day for me. There are days when I don't have anything to do so I will return to lounging around after I drop the girls off. I pretty much do no work on Fridays.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I went into law school with my business degree thinking I was going to be a CEO of a fortune 500 company after graduation. Well, during 1L summer I interned at the Washtenaw County Public Defender's Office and that sealed the deal for me. From that moment on, I knew Criminal Defense would be my career.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

It means crushing stereotypes, especially in my practice area. It feels amazing to smash the expectations that women are "soft" or "dainty" or "nice". There's always the challenge of having to make it well aware that I am not one to be played with, but I am up for the challenge.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Make sure to take all the electives that are criminal defense in nature - Criminal law, Criminal Procedure, Trial Practice, a clinic that is trial based, etc. Be involved in Moot Court as it helps with your litigation skills. Attend networking events. Find a mentor or two in the field. Sit in court (or in your luck -- watch hearings on zoom). While you are in law school it is the time to clerk and try out several areas of law. That way you have a better idea of what you like and/or don't like!



**CASSANDRA SUDER**  
**Family Law Attorney at Findling Law**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

As a family law attorney my day looks different every single day. There is never a dull moment in family law. My day is filled with Referee hearings, motions, client calls, mediations, and client emergencies.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

Honestly, I was at a point in my legal career where I needed a complete pivot from the areas of law I had already practiced (health care law, medical malpractice, and class actions). I chose family law and here I am today.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

It is important to me to be a minority/woman in the law and to project a certain type of professionalism. My parents emigrated from Poland to Canada during communism and so I am not a stranger to what hard work looks like. I have had great role models and work ethic instilled in me from a young age. I think it is unfortunate but as a woman, especially in law, you need to work a little harder to prove yourself but never give up!

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

I believe to practice family law you need to be able to detach yourself from the emotions which can sometimes be very challenging. You are assisting individuals, as a neutral third party, during one of the hardest, if not hardest, points in their lives. You need to be empathetic but also be able to detach. This area of law is not for the weak. It is vital to have positive outlets for when you are not at work.



KIRSTEN J. SILWANOWICZ  
**Associate General Counsel  
Great Lakes Water Authority**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

A typical day for me usually includes a few meetings with people from various different departments at GLWA, reviewing and redlining vendor contracts, following up with outside counsel about a litigation matter, researching a new bill that was introduced to the Michigan Congress, drafting new internal policies, and managing our legal interns. However, with my role as in-house counsel, my schedule changes on a daily basis. This is one of the reasons I love my job so much.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

As a part of being in-house counsel, every day brings different issues that are interesting and exciting. There isn't a single day where I am doing the exact same thing as the day before. The constant change in legal issues makes me love the law more and more. In addition, working for a governmental agency has given me the ability to give back to my community, which makes me feel like I am making a difference.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

Women have come a long way in advocating for their rights over the course of the last century, but I know we're not done yet. Being a woman in the law encourages me to continue fighting and to speak up for others who have had to fight for their rights to be in the room, just like the women that came before me did for me.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Learn as much as you can about various different types of law, as you never know when you will need it. If you see a webinar that looks interesting, watch it. If you see an article in the ABA Journal, read it. The more knowledge you have, the better you can be as an in-house counsel.



**SHANEL T. THOMAS**  
**Associate Attorney at Kerr, Russell and**  
**Weber**

**1. As a recent law school graduate what does your typical day look like?**

As a recent law graduate, I'm preparing to sit for the July 2022 Michigan Bar Exam. For the past 2 1/2 months my days have been spent doing nothing but studying, learning, and reviewing. I was fortunate enough to be able to take time off work to fully prepare for the bar, so in the mornings I usually attend lectures, then memorize outlines and rule statements, and practice, practice, practice.

**2. How did you decide what area of law was for you?**

Upon passing the bar, I'll be an associate attorney at Kerr, Russell and Weber which is a corporate law firm. I don't think I necessarily decided corporate law was "for me" but rather I did a lot of internships that were criminal, family, clerkships, etc. to get a wide range of experience to know what I do/don't like - and I really liked the fact that corporate firms have so many practice areas. There are some I really like (i.e., labor and employment, municipality, medical malpractice) and some that I absolutely hate (tax & bankruptcy) but there is a wide range of practice areas to choose between and find your niche. I love that.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

I always tell people that I am a minority (x2) as a black woman. Being in such a male dominated field, and a predominantly Caucasian field, I feel honored every step closer that I get, that I endured the struggles and obstacles to be here. I look forward to mentoring and encouraging young women to come (African American or otherwise) and to share the importance of representation. If you can see it, you can be it. It is very humbling to be in a position that many people are not afforded. It also makes me want to foster and build connections throughout the legal community because there are a lot of women in the field and I think it's important that we network, as only we know what we go through.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue corporate law?**

If there is a law student that is pursuing corporate law, especially at mid-size or larger firms, put yourself out there and start early! Try to keep your grades as competitive as possible, to be able to get those internships early in your law school career (i.e., 1L summer). A lot of corporate firms hire associate attorneys from their pull of 2L summer associates. So, if possible, put yourself in a position to be prepared to apply and interview for summer associate positions for 2L-year, work hard, and you'll likely be offered a job. That's the traditional route however, that's not what I did. I started out with low grades, so I joined organizations, did a lot of internships to gain experience while working my grades back up. In the end, my experiences spoke volumes more than my grades regardless of how good they became. Ultimately, my advice is find a way to make it happen. Delayed is not denied. Do not feel like what everyone else is doing is what YOU have to do. Carve your own path. And stay eager to work and most importantly eager to make your mark.



## **PHAEDRA WAINAINA**

### **Senior Director of Talent at LIFT**

#### **1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

As a nonprofit executive my typical day includes a status review or stand-up meeting where we review our goals and programs and their execution to date. That meeting generates action items with specific due dates that I complete throughout the day, as necessary. Next, I hold external meetings and respond to emails, relationship building, and maintenance is an important part of my work. Both in my current role and in a traditional law firm relationships are essential to getting work done efficiently and accurately. The last few hours of the day I spend reviewing news articles and updates from the ecosystem so I can stay abreast of any new developments.

#### **2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

In law school my focus of study was labor and employment law. When I applied to law school it was in response to my desire to become an advocate for victims of human trafficking and in the U.S. many of the cases of human trafficking are classified as labor or employment crimes because they are linked to some form of service. Ultimately, I did not decide to pursue human trafficking as my field of study however my immersion in our nation's labor and employment law led me to where I am today. My work in education and workforce development uses my labor and employment background to address challenges and influence processes at the beginning of the pipeline. Most labor and employment issues are a result of three larger themes:

- *Communication Breakdowns* - A misalignment in expectations between the employer and employee.
- *Lack of Trust* - Employees do not trust their employers to protect their financial, physical, or long-term interest. Employers do not trust their employees to execute and thus choose to micromanage or fearmonger.
- *Lack of Investment* - Employees have failed to invest in the systems available to them and thus receive ineffective results in the workplace. Employers fail to invest in training or upgrades that can improve the quality of employment for employees.

My work in education and workforce development aims to circumvent these barriers by encouraging employers to spend time articulating their needs to their employees and the academic partners that provide them talent. Those conversations result in best match and fit employment relationships that have healthy lines of communication, established trust between parties and adequate investment in the processes and procedures needed to get the work done.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

As an African American woman in the law my cultural and gender identity play a large role in my work. This is inherent for a few reasons, the first being that both of those characteristics are visible upon seeing me. The second being, in many cases I am the only woman, or the only African American in the rooms I enter. Earlier in my career my awareness of my "otherness" was alienating, I struggled to feel comfortable in my own skin in rooms that I was very well qualified to be in. I was careful not to be too angry or speak too loudly for fear of feeding into a stereotype. As I've grown to become more comfortable in my skin and in my career, I am intentional about being my authentic self and that includes an awareness of my race and gender and the role it plays in how I show up. I am intentional to educate about my race and gender both when asked and when necessary and I am conscious to build awareness of my journey and make room for those who come from similar communities.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Try everything that piques your curiosity. There is no clear path to purpose but there are plenty of options to explore along the way. I could not have written my current job description any better than what it was written when the position found me, it perfectly intersects my professional expertise and passions. That alignment in expertise and passion comes with self-awareness. Also, find mentors who are currently in roles you think you may want to pursue. They can give you honest insight about the daily responsibilities and what previous experiences will translate well and best prepare you for that role.

**STEPHANIE WITUCKI**  
**Chief Referee Third Judicial Circuit**  
**Court of Michigan**

**1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

As Chief Referee, on a typical day, I supervise, provide support and training, when necessary, delegate tasks, address case and staff escalations, and maintain timekeeping for the referee department, court clerical services department, and the Friend of the Court scheduling department. I review the referee dockets for scheduling accuracy and to determine and prioritize docket needs. I keep current with changes in statutes and court rules that affect the Family Division and recommend implementation of necessary changes in operations. I preside over dockets, depending on coverage needs, which includes case review, legal research, conducting the hearings, and issuing Referee Recommendation and Orders. I record division statistics, generate reports, and prepare memos for the Friend of the Court and Presiding Judge. I participate in regular meetings with staff, Friend of the Court, court executives, and judges as well as participate in strategic planning and serve on committees. This position brings a variety of work on a daily basis.

**2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I practiced in many different areas of law before deciding to focus exclusively on family law. I found myself gravitating toward family law cases, I think, because I am a child of divorce and helping children and families is important to me.

**3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

I am proud to be part of the continuously growing support for women in the legal profession and appreciate and support the strong relationships and camaraderie among female attorneys.

**4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

In addition to knowing the law, family law practitioners require patience, integrity, good listening skills, responsiveness, effective communication, and a passion for helping families. Invaluable experience in family law matters is offered through working at the Friend of the Court or with a mentor who has significant experience in family law. Develop a network of colleagues proficient in family law, attend family law seminars, and join the family law section of the State Bar of Michigan as well as your county's family law bar association.



## **PATRICIA WOODRUFF**

### **Family Law Attorney**

#### **1. As an attorney what does your typical day look like?**

I work for Wayne County Circuit Court as the Judicial Attorney for Hon. Mary Beth Kelly. I am primarily remote and start my workday around 8:00 a.m. by logging in and checking our courtroom's email to see what orders need to be reviewed, urgent motions that need to be scheduled, and basically anything that needs immediate attention. I log into Zoom and we start our docket every day at 9:00 a.m. I work through lunch most days because there is always something to be done, whether it is a Personal Protection Order that needs attention, an emergency motion regarding a child's welfare, or monitoring the court proceedings via Zoom. I prepare the docket every day, and send it to Judge Kelly, along with orders I have drafted, the materials that have been filed and any private notes I have. By far, the most rewarding part of my day is meeting with self-represented litigants and providing information on the court process and walking them through what to expect.

#### **2. How did you decide this area of law was for you?**

I decided to go to law school for the sole purpose of helping children and families. I pulled from personal life experiences, the good and the bad, to assess what I could do and how I could grow into a family lawyer I could be proud of.

#### **3. What does it mean to you to be a woman/minority in law?**

It's very important to me to be a good example and lift other women in the profession up. As the only lawyer in my family, I had no idea what I was in for when I started law school and it was very overwhelming. I tend to give special attention to women law students who reach out and provide as much helpful information that I can because it is my privilege and responsibility to do so.

#### **4. What advice would you give to a law student who wants to pursue your specialty?**

Reach out to me! Network, join the Family Law Section of the State Bar and read the Family Law Journal, connect to me on LinkedIn and let's grab coffee!