

INDIANA LAWYER

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Distinguished Barristers

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Indiana Public Defender Council
Drake University Law School, 2000

Why did you decide to enter the legal profession?

I wanted to stand up for vulnerable people and help make society better for the disadvantaged.

Who is someone who has inspired you in your career?

My inspirations are the civil rights freedom fighters, all the civil rights attorneys who made my life as a Black person and a woman, as I live it today, possible. Also, my grandparents.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

I can't choose one:

- Not every question deserves an answer.
- When my father passed, I was in law school. A friend told me, "You can slow down, but you can't quit."

What makes a good lawyer/judge?

For both, being good listeners, patient and respectful to all they engage with to resolve a matter.



What is something you wish people knew about lawyers?

The good we do to make society better.

What is the greatest issue you see facing public defenders, and what do you think the solution might be?

The greatest issue is funding. Public defender funding varies from county to county. It is often a line item in a county budget competing against all other county services for scarce county budget dollars.

In some counties, this results in low pay, lack of benefits and lack of investigative resources and support staff. Sometimes, public defenders practice in front of the very judge who hires them and decides whether they keep their job.

There is a shortage of attorneys in the state, and it is even more severe for public defenders, resulting in high caseloads that result in burn out and turnover, especially in rural counties.

A solution is a statewide review of defense funding and a commitment to the presumption of innocence and providing all the resources necessary to safeguard it with state resources. Defense counsel are the only attorneys mentioned in the constitution. There needs to be a statewide commitment to adequately fund constitutionally-mandated public defender services. Additionally, requiring each county to be part of the Public Defender Commission is key.

How do you spend your free time?

Garden planning, gardening, cooking and traveling.

If you could time travel to any period in history, where would you go and why?

As a Black person and a woman, I avoid traveling to the past.