

## **New Juvenile Justice Resource at the Administrative Office of the Courts**

The Office of General Counsel of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) provides advice and counsel to judicial officials and other NC Judicial Branch employees. They do not provide legal advice to the public or to litigants on either side of a court case. In addition to providing legal counsel, the Office of General Counsel assists Judicial Branch committees, task forces and work groups with the development and management of procedures, programs, and strategies that support the judicial community. They also review, monitor, and summarize legislative bills.

A new addition to the Office of General Counsel is an attorney who will work primarily in the area of Juvenile Justice. LaToya Powell left the School of Government (SOG) recently and started her new position as Assistant Legal Counsel at the Office of General Counsel in December 2017. In this post, I share the interview I conducted with LaToya last week.

### **Tell me about your experience prior to joining the NCAOC Office of General Counsel.**

Since graduating law school in 2005, my legal career has focused on Juvenile Justice. I first worked as a prosecutor in Johnston County, where I handled cases in criminal district court, domestic violence court, and juvenile delinquency court. I also served as a member of the Johnson County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council helping to address the needs of at-risk juveniles in the surrounding community. After leaving the District Attorney's office, I worked in the Appellate Section of the North Carolina Department of Justice handling juvenile delinquency appeals in both state appellate courts and the US Supreme Court. This was a natural extension of my work as a prosecutor.

Most recently, I worked as an assistant professor at the SOG where I provided research, writing and training related to juvenile justice for judges, juvenile defenders, prosecutors, juvenile court counselors, and other personnel of the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice (DACJJ) within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

### **Did you develop your interest in juvenile justice during law school or later once you began practicing law?**

My interest and passion for working in this area began before law school and while I attended North Carolina State University (NCSU) where I majored in criminology. While attending NCSU, I completed several courses in juvenile justice. What I learned in those courses explained a lot about what I saw happening to youth in my own community. Many youth were involved with the juvenile justice or adult criminal system due to social and environmental factors beyond their control.

**Are there any particular challenges thus far in your new position (and I know commuting is not one of them)?**

(We both LOL!) Commuting is definitely not a challenge since I live in Cary. My biggest challenge is the change in my client base. Previously, I consulted with judges, attorneys and other juvenile justice professionals. Now, on a day-to-day basis, I am often consulting with clerks. Many of their questions are about forms and orders. The questions are more procedural and technical, rather than legal. So, I have to learn NCAOC policies, such as the rules of record keeping to address these issues. This aspect of my position is something I did not encounter in my previous positions.

**What are you enjoying the most about your new position?**

I love being more directly involved in the day-to-day work of the courts. Previously, I had more of an advisory role. Now I am making decisions and developing resources that have a direct impact on the court system in North Carolina.

I am really excited about leading the implementation of “Raise the Age” (RTA) related reform for North Carolina courts. For example, a provision in the Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Act requires the Director of the NCAOC to set policies and procedures for chief district court judges to establish school-justice partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, local boards of education, and local school administrative agencies. The goal of the School-Justice Partnerships is to reduce the number of children who are sent to the juvenile justice system for misbehaving at school. I am developing a toolkit, along with a team of individuals that includes Chief District Court Judge J. Corpening of New Hanover County, which will support chief district court judges in establishing these partnerships. Because a great deal of my work at the SOG focused on educating public officials about the school to prison pipeline, it is particularly meaningful to me that I now get to help implement this policy.

**Will you be providing training?**

I will be providing technical assistance and training for jurisdictions as they begin to implement their School-Justice Partnerships. I will also occasionally train clerks on issues related to juvenile law. In February, I am teaching a session on Raise the Age at the Clerks of Superior Court Winter Conference.

**What are you looking forward to accomplishing in your new role?**

Obviously, I am looking forward to the successful implementation of RTA. I am also excited about the opportunity to work on other projects and future legislative reforms like RTA that will have a positive impact for youth in North Carolina.

**I know the judges, juvenile court counselors, attorneys and other juvenile justice**

**professionals miss consulting with you at the SOG. Are you still available to consult with any of them? If so, how can they contact you?**

Yes I am available for consultation. Part of our role at NCAOC is to provide legal counsel to all judicial branch employees, which includes judges, prosecutors, clerks and magistrates. I am still working very closely with the DACJJ through my work on RTA implementation.

I can be reached by email at [LaToya.B.Powell@nccourts.org](mailto:LaToya.B.Powell@nccourts.org) or phone at 919-890-1321.

**I have one last very important question. Are you still willing to present at my future trainings?**

Absolutely! I love teaching. That is the part of my former position that I miss the most and welcome any opportunity to come back and teach at the SOG.