

Wishing LaToya Well as She Leaves the SOG

This is a bittersweet post as it is a goodbye to my friend and colleague, LaToya Powell, who has decided to leave the School of Government (SOG). Tomorrow is her last day, and I hope you will join me in wishing her well.

LaToya joined the SOG in the spring of 2013, as part of what I affectionately refer to as the “Class of 2013.” That spring, four new faculty members joined the SOG: LaToya and myself along with Trey Allen (who works with municipal and county clerks) and Meredith Smith (who works with clerks of superior court). LaToya and I were originally referred to as the two halves of retired faculty member, Janet Mason, since together we covered the field of juvenile law, with me focusing on child welfare and LaToya on juvenile justice. In some ways, we worked closely together – figuring out the courses to teach together and the intersection of the children and youth who appeared in both systems. We quickly realized we would be focusing on our respective substantive areas individually. And soon, we were no longer referred to as the collective Janet Mason. LaToya stands on her own.

LaToya came to the SOG with expertise in her field, having been a juvenile prosecutor and then specializing in juvenile justice appeals at the NC Attorney’s General Office. There she handled one of the national landmark juvenile law cases, *In re J.D.B.*, 564 U.S. 261 (2011), focusing on juvenile interrogations. She wrote a [bulletin](#) about the state of juvenile interrogations after *In re J.D.B.*

During her time at the SOG, she focused on helping the professionals involved with juvenile justice in North Carolina by creating two practical tools, a [juvenile justice case compendium](#) and a [behavioral health information sharing guide](#). She also provided consultations to those professionals seeking assistance, with a new focus on juvenile court counselors. Her advice was appreciated as one recipient commented, “thank you for always being available for questions and guidance.”

LaToya emphasized teaching while at the school, driving across the state time and again to make herself available to those that requested her expertise. She also regularly taught for the district court judges, prosecutors, and juvenile defenders as part of the SOG’s regular education programs. Her skills as an instructor were recognized in course evaluations that included comments like “excellent job putting course together - excellent presentation;” “well explained, very patient, good handout;” “thorough, knowledgeable, and helpful;” and “we appreciate her knowledge and scholarship as well as her approach to instruction.”

For the past two years, LaToya focused on the school to prison pipeline, which is the nationally recognized term for school discipline practices that include referrals to school resource officers for minor offenses or misconduct, resulting in an increase in the number of youth involved in the judicial system because of juvenile or criminal charges. She taught to a wide variety of audiences in various local judicial districts who were looking at the issue and possible reform efforts.

On Friday, LaToya starts her new position as Assistant Legal Counsel in the Office of General Counsel at the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts. There, she will be leading the implementation of juvenile justice policy reform within the judicial branch related to [Raise the Age](#) of juvenile court jurisdiction. She will continue to support judicial branch employees in various ways, including providing legal advice and training, serving on various judicial branch committees, and developing educational resources. She will also work on juvenile justice related legislation and collaborate with stakeholders on legislation and policy related to the juvenile court system. Although her work will specifically focus on the judicial branch, North Carolina as a whole will benefit from her expertise and commitment to the issues related to juvenile justice.

She's leaving you all a farewell present, as she has been working on a new juvenile law bulletin on Juvenile Capacity to Proceed Hearings. That bulletin is with the SOG's publications department and should be available next month.

On a personal note, I'll miss my friend and her loud happy laugh that floats down the hallway. And I'll miss the opportunity to read evaluations that say things like "good team" or "together, they are perfect." I am excited for her that she will be able to work directly on the issues she is so passionate about for the judicial branch. I'm confident in knowing the state will continue to benefit from her expertise. And, I know where to find her and now you do too.