

IFETAYO (TAYO) BELLE**EXPERIENCE**

SCHOOL JUSTICE PROJECT, Washington, DC*Managing Attorney*

Jan. 2023 – Present

Senior Staff Attorney

Jan. 2019 – Dec. 2022

Represent court-involved young people with special education needs in schools and court proceedings arguing for community-based alternatives as a mitigation tool during sentencing. Supervise junior attorneys in all areas of direct representation. Counsel in federal class action on behalf of incarcerated students with disabilities who did not receive a free appropriate public education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advocate for policy and law changes in special education with the state educational agency and key stakeholders. Present legal trainings to practitioners on education rights of court-involved students.

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN, New York, NY

July 2014 – Nov. 2018

Staff Attorney. Represented clients in hearings and mediations based on violations of federal and state education laws. Drafted due process complaints, closing briefs, settlement agreements and prepare witnesses for hearing testimony. Led internal assistive technology policy working group that regularly convened city agency officials to increase access to technology used to access curriculum. Prepared and presented continuing legal education materials on assistive technology. Provided professional trainings for lawyers, doctors, educators and parents on the rights afforded to students with disabilities.

NEW YORK CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION, New York, NY

Sept. 2012 – June 2014

Equal Justice Works Fellow. Represented public school students in suspension hearings and Manifestation Determination Reviews. Assisted with litigation in *Monell* claim in federal court alleging excessive use of force against students by police in Syracuse. Served on statewide task force led by the New York State Education Department on a working group examining effective data collection methodology. Conducted policy research on school to prison pipeline issues for New York City campaign to reduce the role of school police.

LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, San Francisco, CA

Sept. 2010 – Sept. 2011

Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Fellow. Drafted successful Title VI administrative complaint to Federal Railroad Administration regarding equal opportunities in federal contracting for minority-owned businesses. Part of litigation team that prevailed in representing defendant-intervenors in a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of California's minority business contracting program. Provided legal services to formerly incarcerated clients encountering legal barriers to employment and occupational licensing.

OUTTEN & GOLDEN LLP, New York, NY

Nov. 2009 – Feb. 2010

Legal Intern. Drafted litigation memoranda alleging the U.S. Census Bureau's discrimination against applicants with criminal records had a racially disparate impact violating Title VII. Assisted in a mediation and arbitration.

NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND, New York, NY

June – Aug. 2009

Legal Intern, Voting Rights and Education Practices. Drafted memoranda on laches defenses and candidacy requirements for state offices. Drafted memorandum on standards for relief from court orders in institutional reform litigation involving public education.

HON. ANN WILLIAMS, U.S. COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SEVENTH CIRCUIT, Chicago, IL*Judicial Intern.*

Nov. 2008 – Feb. 2009

Drafted bench memoranda and orders assessing merits of petitions for rehearing and successive appeals.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT (CRRJ), Boston, MA

2L & 3L Academic Years

Research Assistant for Margaret Burnham, Director. Researched unsolved racially motivated murders in the Deep South from 1955-1969. Conducted discovery and researched expert witnesses in a §1983 lawsuit.

DENNIS SWEET & ASSOCIATES, Jackson, MS June – Aug. 2008
Legal Intern. Drafted the complaint in a successful § 1983 suit involving a Civil Rights Era double murder case for CRRJ (worked in local counsel’s office). Wrote a supplementary brief on pleading requirements to the Mississippi Supreme Court resulting in the overturning of a portion of a state law (Miss. Code Ann. § 11-1-58).

UNITED STATES SENATOR ROBERT P. CASEY, Washington, D.C. Jan. – Aug. 2007
Staff Assistant. Assisted constituents and analyzed current and pending legislation for senior legislative staff.

UNITED STATES SENATOR JOHN F. KERRY, Washington, D.C. Oct. – Dec. 2006
Legislative Intern. Attended hearings and drafted memoranda for legislative staff. Conducted policy research.

EDUCATION

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, Boston, MA J.D., May 2010
Activities: *Northeastern University Law Journal*, Senior Staff Member; Student Bar Association, Vice-Chair; Black Law Students Association, Secretary; Poverty Law Clinic (direct representation to low-income clients)

Teaching Fellow: Advanced Legal Skills in Social Context course, drafted practice manual titled “*An Analysis of Preferential Assistance Programs for Minority and Immigrant Small Business Entrepreneurs*,” instructed first-year students in a weekly course providing *pro bono* legal advice to a community-based organization

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, Columbus, OH B.A., Political Science, May 2006
Activities: ACLU, President; Undergraduate Student Government; Study Abroad, Quito, Ecuador
Internships: National Black Caucus of State Legislators; Ohio House of Representatives, Office of Joyce Beatty

BAR ADMISSION & PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Bar Admissions: District of Columbia, New York
- Admitted to practice in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia
- DC Bar, *Member*
- Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project, *Advisory Board Member*
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)
 - 2022 Presenter, “*Litigating the IDEA Rights of Incarcerated Students During COVID-19*”
 - 2020 Presenter, “*Advocating for the Special Education Rights of Court-Involved Students*”
- City and County of San Francisco, *Board of Supervisors, Certificate of Honor*. Presented by the Board President in recognition of efforts to advocate for equal opportunities in public contracting for minority-owned businesses.

Sarah Comeau, Esq.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Attorney, advocate, and champion of education and juvenile and adult criminal legal systems reform. 12+ years of experience in DC working on legislative and policy campaigns, representing young people and their families, conducting legal trainings, and managing and building a non-profit legal services and advocacy organization.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

School Justice Project (SJP)

Director of Programs & Co-Founder | August 2015 – Present

Oversee organizational programs through management of five attorneys who represent young people with disabilities in DC's juvenile and adult criminal legal systems as well as supervise impact litigation, systemic and policy efforts, and legal trainings and community outreach.

Direct Legal Services

- Directly supervise attorneys, fellows, and law clerks.
- Manage organization case load, build referral pipeline, develop ongoing training program for attorneys, lead monthly case review, and monitor quality of representation.
- Represent clients with complex legal issues. Identify cases to bring for systemic change through impact litigation and build impact litigation cases.
- Bring systemic cases that result in the execution of interagency memoranda of agreement.
- Co-counsel complex federal litigation cases including *Charles H. v. District of Columbia*, 2022 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 83065, *Brown v. District of Columbia*, 324 F. Supp. 3d 154 (D.D.C. 2018), and *Easter v. District of Columbia*.

Systemic Advocacy & Policy

- Co-lead Thrive Under 25 Coalition with individuals awarded relief from second look laws.
- Led the campaigns that resulted in the passage of the Second Look Amendment Act of 2019 and the Special Education Attorneys for Emerging Adult Defendants Amendment Act of 2021.
- Worked on over 10 legislative campaigns to pass laws that include the Youth Rehabilitation Amendment Act of 2017 and the Student Fair Access to School Act of 2018.
- Maintain relationships with DC Councilmembers and staff and work with them to research, draft, edit, and pass legislative priorities relating to education and criminal and juvenile issues.
- Draft and deliver testimony at DC agency performance oversight and budget hearings.
- Develop budget campaigns and advocate with Councilmembers to successfully secure funding for education and justice-related priorities. Recently advocated for funding in the FY23 and FY24 budgets for the school within DC Jail and programs with Department of Corrections facilities.

Community Outreach & Legal Trainings

- Build know-your-education rights training for court-involved young people and their families.
- Partner with agencies to establish education legal clinics within local correctional facilities.
- Develop and implement legal training program for DC Superior Court judges and practitioners on best practices in representing and sentencing young people with disabilities and on education offerings in DC's juvenile and adult criminal legal systems.
- Conduct over 50 legal trainings for practitioners, judges, case and social workers, and educators.

Organizational Leadership

- Responsible for organizational strategic planning, developing policy and legislative priorities, and setting short- and long-term goals.
- Build, staff, and manage programs to achieve organizational goals.
- Recruit, hire, on-board, and train all new attorneys, interns, fellows, and consultants.
- Support Executive Director & Co-Founder on budget, operations, and development.

School Justice Project (SJP)

Co-Executive Director & Co-Founder | August 2013 – August 2015

Direct Legal Services

- Represented individual clients ages 16-22 on special education matters and provided mitigation and sentencing advocacy in DC Superior Court.
- Brought systemic complaints that resulted in agency recommended policy changes relating to

interagency collaboration for the provision of education to court-involved young people.

- Responsible for ensuring SJP's model of special education legal services could be embedded in underlying criminal or delinquency cases and resulted in improved court outcomes through integration of trauma and disability advocacy.

Organizational Leadership

- Responsible for recruitment, hiring, and on-boarding of attorneys and fellows.
- Managed finances and worked with accountant to produce monthly and quarterly financial statements for Board review.
- Responsible for grant writing and co-led development efforts with individuals.
- Began strategic planning for launch of three-programmed approach to fulfill mission through team expansion and direct representation, systemic advocacy and policy, and community outreach and legal training.

The Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia (PDS)

Distinguished Post-Graduate Fellow, Juvenile Services Program | August 2011 – May 2012

- Represented young people detained in DC's Youth Services Center in community status review hearings, youth family team meetings, and disciplinary hearings.
- Provided transition services and legal assistance during reentry.
- Identified and advocated for proper out-of-state residential placements with the assistance of the criminal defense attorney.
- Provided general education advocacy including school enrollment and credit recovery assistance.
- Engaged in advocacy with juvenile justice agency social workers to promote community placements instead of secure detention.
- Manage PDS office inside Youth Services Center (YSC).

RECOGNITION

Aspen Institute Urban Innovation Lab Fellow | Aspen Institute | 2015

Social Innovation Award | Teach For America | 2014

Fair Chance DC Partner | Fair Chance | 2013 & 2014

Echoing Green/Open Society Foundations Black Male Achievement Fellow | Echoing Green | 2013

SELECT SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS & PUBLICATIONS

- Keynote Speaker, National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children & Youth's Annual Conference (2023).
- "Education Rights and Common Issues Facing DYRS-Committed Young People," DC Superior Court training for attorneys appointed to the newly established post-disposition panel (2022).
- "Education of Court-Involved Young People in DC," Lunch and Learn for Hollingsworth LLP (2019).
- "Impact of Education Attorneys for Court-Involved Young People," DC Superior Court judges (2019).
- Presented Council for Court Excellence Justice Potter Stewart Award, Award Dinner (2017).
- [The D.C. Reentry Navigator: Empowering You to Succeed with a D.C. Criminal Record](#), Community Defender Division, Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia (2021), key contributor to Chapter 14: Education.
- Comment, *Judicial Sponsored Gentrification of the District of Columbia: The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act*, 19 AM. U. J. GENDER SOC. POL'Y & L. 1 (2011).

Complete list available upon request.

EDUCATION

American University Washington College of Law

Juris Doctor, cum laude, 2011

Honors: *Highest Grade*, Criminal Justice Clinic

Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law, Editorial Board, Note & Comment Editor

Ithaca College

Bachelor of Science in Integrated Marketing Communications, 2007

RACHEL L. RUSSO

EDUCATION

Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, DC

Juris Doctor, GPA 3.4, May 2014

Honors and Activities: Legal Research & Writing Law Fellow; Teaching Assistant for practicum course “The Role of the Juvenile Defender for Committed Youth”

University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL

Bachelor of Arts, Art History, *magna cum laude*, GPA 3.8, May 2009

Honors and Activities: Order of Omega National Honor Society; Rho Lambda National Honor Society; Undergraduate Honor Council; Athletic Department mentor and tutor; Delta Gamma Sorority Vice President

EXPERIENCE

School Justice Project, Washington DC

Director of Operations, June 2023-present

Supervising Attorney, September 2017-June 2023

Staff Attorney, September 2014-September 2017

- Represent court-involved students with disabilities in special education matters
- Advocate for community-based alternatives to incarceration during clients’ juvenile and criminal court proceedings
- Train and supervise junior attorneys in their direct representation of clients

Juvenile Justice Clinic, Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, DC

Student Attorney, Academic Year 2013-2014

- Represented juveniles charged with committing felonies and misdemeanors in DC Superior Court
- Researched, wrote, and litigated legal motions and memoranda
- Investigated cases comprehensively and developed defense theories

Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Youthful Defendant Unit, Baltimore, MD

Law Clerk, May 2013-August 2013

- Researched and drafted legal memoranda to aid in the sentencing of juveniles charged and convicted as adults
- Drafted motions for use during transfer hearings and juvenile and criminal litigation matters
- Investigated clients’ histories and alleged involvement in criminal matters and developed case strategies

Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, Juvenile Services Program, Washington, DC

Law Clerk, Academic Year 2012-2013

- Represented youth in institutional disciplinary hearings at DC’s long-term secure facility
- Advocated for detained youth regarding various conditions of confinement including denial of special education services
- Investigated, researched, and prepared for community status review hearings for youth facing detention

National Juvenile Defender Center, Washington, DC

Law Clerk, May 2012-August 2012

- Researched and drafted a legal memorandum on the Prison Rape Elimination Act for the Department of Justice
- Drafted materials for publication in the Juvenile Defender Resource Guide
- Created a database of all juvenile cases post-*Graham v. Florida* for adolescent development research arguments

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Higher Achievement, Washington, DC

Mentor, Academic Year 2011-2012

- Taught an after-school literature course to middle school students from low-performing schools
- Developed the students’ long-term education and career goals and created plans for achievement

Educate Tomorrow, Miami, FL

Mentor, January 2010-June 2011

- Assisted former foster youth with enrolling in a GED program, researching post-secondary education, and applying for jobs
- Educated former foster youth on budgeting and financial planning and transitioned her into independent housing

BAR ADMISSION

Member of the Bars of the State of Maryland and the District of Columbia