

Forman Watkins & Krutz Diversity Pipeline Program Helping Underrepresented Students Pursue Law Careers

The process to becoming a lawyer can be intimidating. Forman Watkins & Krutz started its Diversity Pipeline Program to unveil this process and help underrepresented diverse students from Mississippi's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) confidently apply for law school and pursue careers as civil defense litigators.

Initiated in 2021, the FWK Diversity Pipeline Program is a collaboration between the firm's Diversity & Inclusion Committee and Tougaloo College's Reuben V. Anderson Pre-Law Society and Jackson State University's Bob Owens Pre-Law Center. The program includes two phases of development, the Pre-Law Program and the Law School Program. The Pre-Law Program is curated to provide students with the information and preparation needed to make their law school experience more manageable and less stressful. Students who attend the Pre-Law Program are eligible to transition to the Pipeline Program's second phase, the Law School Program. This phase begins with a bootcamp offered in the Summer prior to students attending law school. As they make their way through law school, the program fosters mentor relationships with firm attorneys and offers a host of professional development opportunities geared towards preparing them for their legal career upon graduation, as well as a mini-clerkship during their December holiday break. Students who complete the Law School Program will then be in consideration for a Summer Associate position with the firm.

"The mission of the Forman Watkins & Krutz Diversity Pipeline Program is to expose diverse students to the legal environment so that they can see a path to life as a civil defense litigator," says Malissa Wilson, partner. "If we want to see more diversity, equity and inclusion in our legal profession, and specifically at civil defense firms, programs like these are critical in creating a pathway for diverse students to becoming a lawyer."

The firm recently concluded its third Pre-Law Program with eight students participating: Kennadie Boykin, Naya Singleton and Alexandria Williams from Jackson State University and Daija Gist, Jontrell Mack, Avery Robinson, Carmen Washington and Montae'l Williams from Tougaloo College. The students were provided an overview of "firm life" that included learning about civil defense litigation and the firm's practice areas, along with learning about the firm's Pro Bono, Recruiting, and Diversity & Inclusion committees. Students also heard from the firm's junior associates about preparations for law school and from diverse in-house counsel who work with civil defense firms, including Tiffanee Wade-Henderson, Associate General Counsel – Chief Ethics & Compliance Officer and Litigation at International Paper; Romika Wells, Director of Organization Development and Training at Wayne-Sanderson Farms, Inc.; Bobby Owens, General Counsel at OCI Americas; and Reginald Paige, Associate General Counsel at Sylvamo North America. There was also a professional development presentation led by executive coach, Candie Simmons, President of CLSimmons Consulting, LLC.

"This program provides a platform of support and a foundation of encouragement to do better, to propel and move forward towards law school. Each session had so much information and there were so many interactions with attorneys, hearing their experiences. It gives me hope that one day I'll share those same experiences. It was so inspiring as I begin this journey," says Naya Singleton, a senior at Jackson State University.

Following the 2023 Pre-Law Program, the firm kicked off its Law School Program by hosting its Diversity Pipeline Program Bootcamp. Tougaloo College students Tia Patrick, Jackneceya Womack, Malcolm Walker and Berniya Hardin were this year's participants. Patrick and Womack plan to attend Harvard Law School and Mississippi College School of Law, respectively, and Walker and Hardin plan to attend law school after completing their graduate studies. The

Bootcamp was an all-day educational event that featured a Q&A panel discussion with the firm's summer associates on first year law school experiences and best practices and a seminar taught by firm associates, Sampada Kapoor, Catherine Pettis and Chandler C. Agee on case briefing, outlining and writing the law school exam. The Bootcamp concluded with a mock law school lecture by University of Mississippi School of Law Professor Larry J. Pittman.

Over the history of the program, 21 students have participated in the Pre-Law and Law School Programs, with 12 currently enrolled in law school and eight preparing to apply. Students who completed the Pre-Law and Law School Programs held in 2021 and 2022 are currently enrolled at top law schools, including George Washington University, University of Alabama, Vermont University, Washburn University, Drake University and Suffolk University.

In a culmination of the program's purpose, the firm welcomed 2021 Pipeline Program participant Precious Thompson as a 2023 Summer Associate. As she enters her second year this fall at George Washington University, Precious will serve on the Federal Circuit Bar Journal, as a student ambassador; and on the Alternative Dispute Resolution Board.

"FormanWatkins helped me gain firsthand experience of what attorneys do. As a first-generation law student, I had a limited view of what attorneys actually did. Being a summer associate now, honestly, feels surreal. I feel like I can see, touch and feel the dream that I envisioned for so long when I was a little girl. I am beyond grateful for this opportunity, and I look forward to what the future has to offer me," says Thompson.

To learn more about the FormanWatkins Diversity Pipeline Program, visit [formanwatkins.com/pipeline](https://www.formanwatkins.com/pipeline).