

Pro Bono Spotlight: Shanice Smith-Banks

Proskauer For Good Blog on **June 17, 2020**

Earlier this month, justices of the Louisiana Supreme Court took their places one at a time as the proceedings began, just like they have done over the past 200 years, but this court appearance was a little different. For the first time in its history, the Court heard arguments over Zoom. And while many seasoned litigators go their entire careers without a single argument before their state's highest court, first up that day was Shanice Smith-Banks who had just graduated from law school, and who will be starting her career at Proskauer's New Orleans office in the fall.

Shanice credits the criminal defense clinic at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law with teaching her more than any other class. Not only did she read cases but she analyzed legal issues while working directly with and advocating for clients. She wrote briefs, mastered all kinds of procedures and rules, and appeared in court on a number of different matters. Not only did she gain valuable hands-on experience, but she was able to learn about the criminal justice system up close, observing that defendants in criminal court were disproportionately black and how public defenders were forced to juggle overwhelming caseloads. But even as she was struck by deep flaws in the system, she left the clinic experience with hope.

In preparation for her appearance before the Supreme Court, Shanice worked under the supervision of Professor Majeeda Snead. They argued an ineffective assistance of counsel claim based mainly on the failure of trial counsel to object to an unfairly prejudicial jury instruction and the failure of the trial court to poll the jury to ensure that at least 10 jurors concurred in the verdict when, instead, the trial court asked if 9 jurors concurred. Preparation was difficult because of the time crunch with only about two weeks to submit the brief after they accepted the appointment. They worked remotely during preparation because the school facilities had been shut down indefinitely. The argument itself went well.

Now, as Shanice studies for the bar exam, she looks forward to starting her career at Proskauer where she will join the Labor & Employment Department and, no doubt, take on pro bono work relating to criminal justice, convinced by her clinic experience that as a lawyer she can make a difference.

[View Original](#)

[Related Professionals](#)

- **William C. Silverman**
Pro Bono Partner