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State Bar of Georgia Young Lawyers Division

# THE YLD REVIEW

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Working for the Profession and the Public

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## De la presidente

## ¡Sí se puede! El poder de decir que sí



**Veronica R.  
Cox**

**Este año como presidenta de la YLD**, aprendí algo simple pero muy poderoso: a veces la mejor palabra de liderazgo es "sí." No siempre es fácil, porque decir que sí significa confiar en otras personas, dejar un poco de control y aceptar ideas nuevas, cuando se sienten un poco inciertas.

Al principio de mi mandato, tenía una decisión. Podía liderar con estructura y tradición, o podía crear espacio para la creatividad. Elegí decir: "sí se puede." Y esa mentalidad cambió todo.

Nuestros líderes de comités, oficiales y directores llegaron con ideas frescas, diferentes y a veces inesperadas. En lugar de decir "así no lo hemos hecho antes," traté de decir, "vamos a intentarlo." Ese cambio pequeño creó energía. Las personas se sintieron apoyadas. Tomaron responsabilidad por sus proyectos, y trabajaron con más pasión.

Uno de los mejores ejemplos de este éxito fue la creación del primer *The YLD Review* en español. Esta idea vino de nuestro *YLD Review* equipo. Fue una idea valiente y muy importante, especialmente para nuestra comunidad legal que habla español. Decir que sí a esta idea no fue solo sobre una publicación; fue sobre inclusión, representación y crecimiento.

Y no solo un proyecto. En toda la organización, vi líderes tomando iniciativa, creando programas, y conectando a abogados jóvenes en todo Georgia. Cuando dices

## From the President

## Yes, We Can! The Power of Saying Yes



**Veronica R.  
Cox**

**This year as YLD president, I learned** something simple but very powerful: sometimes the best leadership word is "yes." It's not always easy, because saying yes means trusting other people, letting go of some control and accepting new ideas, even when they feel a little uncertain.

At the beginning of my term, I had a decision to make. I could lead with structure and tradition, or I could create space for creativity. I chose to say, "yes, we can." And that mindset changed everything.

Our committee leaders, officers and directors came forward with ideas that were fresh, different and sometimes unexpected. Instead of saying, "that's not how we've done it before," I tried to say, "let's try it." That small shift created energy. People felt supported. They took ownership of their projects and worked with more passion.

One of the best examples of this success was the creation of the first Spanish *The YLD Review*. This idea came from our *YLD Review* team. It was a bold and meaningful idea, especially for our Spanish-speaking legal community. Saying yes to this idea was not just about a publication; it was about inclusion, representation and growth.

And it was not just one project. Across the organization, I saw leaders taking initiative, creating programs and connecting young lawyers throughout Georgia. When

The YLD Review seeks to provide a forum for the discussion of subjects pertaining to the regulation of the legal profession and improving the quality of legal services, as well as other matters of general interest to Georgia lawyers. The statements, views and the opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of State Bar of Georgia, its officers, Board of Governors, sections, committees or staff.



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“sí,” estás diciendo: “confío en ti.” Y esa confianza crea más confianza.

Claro, decir que sí no significa decir que sí a todo sin pensar. Significa escuchar con atención, evaluar ideas y apoyar la innovación cuando vale la pena. Es un balance, pero también es un acto de valentía.

Mirando atrás, el éxito de este año no es solo mío. Perteneció a cada persona que tuvo una idea y decidió compartirla. Perteneció a cada líder que escuchó “sí” y creó algo especial.

“¡Sí se puede!” es más que una frase. Es una filosofía. Nos recuerda que el progreso pasa cuando creemos en nosotros mismos y en los demás.

Estoy orgullosa, no solo de lo que hicimos, sino de cómo lo hicimos: juntas y juntos, con confianza y con el poder de decir que sí. YLD

*Veronica R. Cox es consejera general asociada senior en OpenText.*

you say “yes,” you are saying, “I trust you.” And that trust builds more trust.

Of course, saying yes does not mean saying yes to everything without thinking. It means listening carefully, evaluating ideas and supporting innovation when it is worthwhile. It is a balance, but it is also an act of courage.

Looking back, the success of this year is not mine alone. It belongs to every person who had an idea and chose to share it. It belongs to every leader who heard “yes” and created something special.

“Yes, we can” is more than a phrase. It is a philosophy. It reminds us that progress happens when we believe in ourselves and in others.

I am proud, not only of what we accomplished, but of how we did it: together, with trust and with the power of saying yes. YLD

*Veronica R. Cox is senior associate general counsel at OpenText.*

From the Co-Editor

## The Ones Who Came Before Us



**Carlos Fernández**

**My Cuban grandmother was an educator,** my Cuban grandfather was a physician and I grew up in Cuban Miami. During my childhood I absorbed something I could not have articulated at the time: that people who looked like me occupied serious roles in serious places, and that this was ordinary.

That sense of the ordinary is everything. It is not inspiration. It is not motivation. It is simply the ambient fact of your world, and it settles into you before you are old enough to know it is working.

In Miami, the Cuban community had built something over generations. Professionals, educators, physicians, attorneys. The presence was dense enough that a young person never had to search for a reflection of themselves in a career they were considering. The reflection was already there, in a neighbor, a relative, a family friend. You did not think about representation because it required no thought. It was simply the landscape.

I did not understand this as a gift until I came to Atlanta.

The Latino community in Atlanta is large, talented and serious. What it does not yet have, in the same way, is depth of professional infrastructure. When I arrived and began practicing law, I noticed the absence of the connective tissue I had always assumed was standard. A bar association rooted in shared identity. Mentors who had walked the same road. Networks that existed before you needed them. I had to look. I found GALEO, the Georgia Hispanic Bar Association, the Latino Community Fund, organizations doing genuine work, building what other communities inherited rather

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## DON'T FORGET!

YLD committee membership expires at the end of the Bar year on June 30. Be sure to log in to your member portal at [www.gabar.org](http://www.gabar.org) and re-join one (or more!) of the 30 hard-working YLD committees.

**Membership is free of charge.**

## Más que abogados



**Nathan R.  
Miles**

**Cuando la gente piensa en los bufetes de abogados, por lo general piensa en los abogados.** Sin embargo, los bufetes no podrían funcionar sin esos profesionales anónimos cuyas contribuciones son absolutamente esenciales para el ejercicio del derecho.

Los bufetes de abogados son organizaciones complejas. Para mantener sus operaciones y asegurar que el trabajo avance, dependen de un equipo diverso de talentos que se extiende mucho más allá de los abogados. Por ejemplo, los secretarios legales gestionan agendas, coordinan la presentación de escritos y actúan como nexo entre los abogados y los tribunales. Los especialistas en tecnología salvaguardan los datos confidenciales y atienden situaciones técnicas para asegurarse de que los problemas tecnológicos no interrumpen el trabajo. Los equipos de marketing ayudan al bufete a contar su historia al mundo exterior. Los analistas financieros y los contadores garantizan la salud del aspecto empresarial de la firma, mientras que los gerentes de oficina coordinan la logística diaria que permite que todo lo demás funcione con fluidez.

Cada uno de estos roles exige sus propios conocimientos, habilidades y tipo de dedicación. Comprender quiénes son estos profesionales y qué hacen es importante por varias razones. En primer lugar, ofrece un retrato más preciso y honesto de cómo se prestan realmente los servicios legales. Ningún abogado alcanza el éxito de forma aislada; la calidad del trabajo que produce un bufete depende de la solidez de todo el equipo.

Esto también resulta relevante para la próxima generación de trabajadores que evalúan sus opciones profesionales. No todas las personas que se sienten atraídas por el mundo jurídico desean cursar la carrera de Derecho, ni tampoco tienen por qué hacerlo. Existen trayectorias profesionales significativas, intelectualmente estimulantes y bien remuneradas dentro de los bufetes de abogados que no exigen poseer un doctorado en Jurisprudencia. Además, algunas personas desempeñan una labor valiosa en los bufetes para determinar si, en última instancia, desean cursar la carrera de Derecho. Independientemente del motivo, los jóvenes merecen conocer estas vías profesionales, y los profesionales que las transitan merecen que se cuenten sus historias.

Ese es el objetivo de este artículo. A través de dos entrevistas con Haydee Ochoa y Andrés Ramírez, presentaremos quiénes son, cómo llegaron a sus puestos actuales, cómo es su día a día y qué consejos compartirían con cualquier persona interesada en seguir sus pasos.

Ochoa trabaja como especialista en apoyo a la investigación y la gestión del conocimiento. En una era marcada por las búsquedas instantáneas en Internet y la inteligencia artificial, Ochoa demuestra lo indispensable que resulta su trabajo para el correcto funcionamiento

## More Than Lawyers



**Nathan R.  
Miles**

**When people think of law firms, they usually think of lawyers.** However, law firms could not function without those anonymous professionals whose contributions are absolutely essential to the practice of law.

Law firms are complex organizations. To maintain their operations and ensure that work moves forward, they depend on a diverse team of talent that extends far beyond attorneys. For example, legal secretaries manage schedules, coordinate the filing of pleadings, and serve as a link between attorneys and the courts. Technology specialists safeguard confidential data and handle technical issues to make sure technological problems do not interrupt the work. Marketing teams help the firm tell its story to the outside world. Financial analysts and accountants ensure the health of the business side of the firm, while office managers coordinate the daily logistics that allow everything else to run smoothly.

Each of these roles requires its own knowledge, skills, and type of dedication. Understanding who these professionals are and what they do is important for several reasons. First, it offers a more accurate and honest picture of how legal services are actually provided. No lawyer succeeds in isolation; the quality of the work a law firm produces depends on the strength of the entire team.

This is also relevant for the next generation of workers evaluating their career options. Not everyone who feels drawn to the legal world wants to go to law school, nor do they need to. There are meaningful, intellectually stimulating, and well-paid career paths within law firms that do not require a Juris Doctor degree. In addition, some people do valuable work in law firms in order to determine whether they ultimately want to attend law school. Whatever the reason, young people deserve to know about these professional paths, and the professionals who follow them deserve to have their stories told.

That is the goal of this article. Through two interviews with Haydee Ochoa and Andrés Ramírez, we will introduce who they are, how they reached their current positions, what their day-to-day work looks like, and what advice they would share with anyone interested in following in their footsteps.

Ochoa works as a research support and knowledge management specialist. In an era marked by instant internet searches and artificial intelligence, Ochoa demonstrates how indispensable her work is to the proper functioning of a law firm. Law firm librarians are expert researchers, information architects and knowledge managers. They are responsible for selecting and maintaining the legal resource collections, both print and digital, that attorneys rely on in their daily work. They train attorneys and staff on the effective use of research



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de un bufete de abogados. Los bibliotecarios de los bufetes son investigadores expertos, arquitectos de la información y gestores del conocimiento. Se encargan de seleccionar y mantener las colecciones de recursos jurídicos, tanto impresos como digitales, de las que dependen los abogados en su labor diaria. Capacitan a los abogados y al personal en el uso eficaz de las bases de datos de investigación, localizan fuentes jurídicas complejas o poco comunes bajo plazos ajustados y, cada vez con mayor frecuencia, desempeñan un papel activo en la evaluación e implementación de nuevas tecnologías jurídicas. En resumen, se aseguran de que la información adecuada llegue a la persona indicada en el momento oportuno, un factor que, en la profesión jurídica, puede marcar una diferencia significativa.

### Haydee Ochoa

***Cuéntenos su nombre y un poco sobre quién es usted fuera del trabajo. ¿Qué le gustaría que alguien supiera sobre usted como persona?***

Mi nombre es Haydee Ochoa. Fuera del trabajo, soy muy reservada. Me considero una persona introvertida. Me fascina la cultura, especialmente la cultura asiática.

***Cuéntenos sobre su educación, formación o experiencias de vida que le llevaron a trabajar en un bufete de abogados.***

Serví en el Ejército y he completado algunos cursos universitarios de criminología. Por casualidad, aproveché una oportunidad para trabajar en un bufete de abogados. Allí me dieron la oportunidad de crecer y de trabajar en distintos departamentos dentro del bufete.

***¿Cómo es un día o una semana típica en su puesto? ¿Qué tipo de tareas o proyectos la mantienen ocupada?***

Actualmente trabajo con el equipo de Investigación. Un día típico consiste en revisar expedientes judiciales, buscar artículos, proporcionar a los abogados credenciales para suscripciones y mucho más. Buscar expedientes en ciertas ciudades puede ser muy exigente cuando no están disponibles al público, pero ese tipo de tareas también hace que el trabajo sea divertido. Me siento como Coby para los abogados.

***¿Qué consejo les daría a los jóvenes que podrían estar interesados en su carrera?***

Cualquier persona que disfrute investigar, particularmente en el campo del derecho, debería considerar la profesión de bibliotecario. Disfruto mi puesto actual y estoy agradecida de tener esta oportunidad. Gracias.

databases, locate complex or uncommon legal sources under tight deadlines, and, increasingly, play an active role in evaluating and implementing new legal technologies. In short, they make sure the right information reaches the right person at the right time, a factor that, in the legal profession, can make a significant difference.

### Haydee Ochoa

***Tell us your name and a little about who you are outside of work. What would you like someone to know about you as a person?***

My name is Haydee Ochoa. Outside of work, I am very private. I consider myself an introverted person. I am fascinated by culture, especially Asian culture.

***Tell us about your education, training or life experiences that led you to work in a law firm.***

I served in the Army and have completed some college coursework in criminology. By chance, I took advantage of an opportunity to work at a law firm. There, I was given the opportunity to grow and work in different departments within the firm.

***What does a typical day or week look like in your position? What types of tasks or projects keep you busy?***

I currently work with the research team. A typical day consists of reviewing court records, searching for articles, providing attorneys with subscription credentials and much more. Searching for records in certain cities can be very demanding when they are not publicly available, but those kinds of tasks also make the work fun. I feel like Coby for the attorneys.

***What advice would you give young people who might be interested in your career?***

Anyone who enjoys research, particularly in the legal field, should consider the librarian profession. I enjoy my current position and am grateful to have this opportunity. Thank you.

### Andrés Ramírez

***Tell us your name and a little about who you are outside of work.***

My name is Andrés Ramírez. Outside of work, I am a person of family, faith and personal discipline. I like to make good use of my time, stay active, constantly learn and look for ways to grow as a person, whether through reading or videos focused on personal growth. As an example of that, I strongly identify with the book "How to Win

## Andrés Ramírez

### ***Cuéntenos su nombre y un poco sobre quién es usted fuera del trabajo.***

Mi nombre es Andrés Ramírez. Fuera del trabajo, soy una persona de familia, de fe y de disciplina personal. Me gusta aprovechar bien el tiempo, mantenerme activo, aprender constantemente y buscar maneras de crecer como persona, ya sea por medio de la lectura o de videos enfocados en el crecimiento personal. Como muestra de ello, me identifico mucho con el libro *Cómo ganar amigos e influir sobre las personas*. Cuando frecuento lugares o actividades sociales, disfruto poder conversar tanto con la persona de oficios varios como con el administrador o dueño del negocio.

Algo que me gustaría que la gente supiera de mí es que, detrás del rol profesional, hay alguien que valora mucho la humildad, la gratitud y el servicio. Creo firmemente, y es parte de mi filosofía, que la forma en que tratamos a los demás dice mucho de quiénes somos y de la educación que recibimos en nuestro hogar. Me esfuerzo por ser una persona confiable, positiva y constante; alguien que, aun en momentos de presión, procura mantenerse firme, en calma y, en lo posible, ayudar a otros con propósito.

Cuéntenos sobre su educación, formación o experiencias de vida que lo llevaron a trabajar en un bufete de abogados.

Mi camino hacia el mundo legal ha sido una combinación de formación técnica, experiencia práctica y aprendizaje constante. Empecé mi carrera en el área de archivos; luego, por mi actitud de servicio y apoyo al usuario, se me concedió una oportunidad en el área de tecnología. Sin embargo, mientras tomaba clases en la universidad, también trabajé en el sector de la hospitalidad. Es decir, siempre me he enfocado en mantener la productividad, resolver problemas con rapidez y brindar un servicio confiable.

Algo que vale la pena resaltar, como sugerencia general, es que entendi que trabajar en un bufete de abogados requiere algo más que conocimiento técnico. Exige discreción, sentido de urgencia, atención al detalle y la capacidad de apoyar a profesionales que dependen de la tecnología para servir a sus clientes de manera efectiva. Esa combinación de tecnología, servicio y responsabilidad fue lo que me permitió crecer y mantenerme dentro del entorno legal. Creo firmemente que un abogado merece ese trato profesional por el tiempo invertido en su formación y por el aprendizaje continuo, ya que las leyes de ciertas áreas de práctica cambian constantemente. En general, un abogado debe mantenerse a la vanguardia para ser competitivo.

Mis experiencias laborales también han influido mucho en mi manera de trabajar. He aprendido que la disciplina, la paciencia y la humildad son esenciales para avanzar. En un bufete, cada detalle cuenta, y mi propósito ha sido contribuir para que los abogados y los usuarios de las áreas administrativa y de apoyo puedan enfocarse en su trabajo con la menor cantidad de interrupciones posible. Una de mis reglas principales es no ser el motivo por el cual un abogado renuncie al bufete.

### ***¿Cómo es un día o una semana típica en su puesto? ¿Qué tipo de tareas o proyectos lo mantienen ocupado?***

Un día típico puede cambiar rápidamente, y eso es precisamente parte de lo que lo hace interesante y de lo que más disfruto: cero rutina,

Friends and Influence People.” When I go to social places or activities, I enjoy being able to speak with both the person doing general labor and the manager or business owner.

Something I would like people to know about me is that, behind the professional role, there is someone who greatly values humility, gratitude and service. I firmly believe, and it is part of my philosophy, that the way we treat others says a lot about who we are and the upbringing we received at home. I strive to be a reliable, positive and consistent person; someone who, even in moments of pressure, tries to remain steady, calm and, whenever possible, help others with purpose.

### ***Tell us about your education, training, or life experiences that led you to work in a law firm.***

My path into the legal world has been a combination of technical training, practical experience and constant learning. I began my career in the records department; then, because of my service-oriented attitude and support for users, I was given an opportunity in the technology department. However, while I was taking classes in college, I also worked in the hospitality sector. In other words, I have always focused on maintaining productivity, solving problems quickly and providing reliable service.

Something worth emphasizing, as a general suggestion, is that I understood that working in a law firm requires more than technical knowledge. It requires discretion, a sense of urgency, attention to detail and the ability to support professionals who depend on technology to serve their clients effectively. That combination of technology, service and responsibility is what allowed me to grow and remain within the legal environment.

I firmly believe that an attorney deserves that professional treatment because of the time invested in their education and their continuous learning, since the laws in certain practice areas are constantly changing. In general, an attorney must stay at the forefront in order to remain competitive.

My work experiences have also greatly influenced the way I work. I have learned that discipline, patience and humility are essential to moving forward. In a law firm, every detail matters, and my purpose has been to contribute so that attorneys and users in the administrative and support areas can focus on their work with as few interruptions as possible. One of my main rules is not to be the reason an attorney resigns from the firm.

### ***What does a typical day or week look like in your position? What types of tasks or projects keep you busy?***

A typical day can change quickly, and that is precisely part of what makes it interesting and what I enjoy most: no routine, and each day brings its own challenge. This includes handling technical issues, coordinating priorities, following up on requests and anticipating potential problems before they affect productivity. Anticipating problems is like compound interest on an investment. In other words, the more I can anticipate and act proactively, the more confidence and certainty I have that I am giving my best and possibly providing unique and personalized assistance.

y cada día trae consigo su propio reto. Esto incluye atender situaciones técnicas, coordinar prioridades, dar seguimiento a solicitudes y anticipar posibles problemas antes de que afecten la productividad. Anticiparse es como el interés compuesto en una inversión. Es decir, cuanto más pueda anticiparme y actuar de manera proactiva, más seguridad y confianza tengo de que estoy dando lo mejor y, posiblemente, una asistencia única y personalizada.

Durante una semana normal, puedo estar involucrado en distintos proyectos. Actualmente, por ejemplo, trabajo en la preparación de equipos para los abogados que se integran durante el verano, la coordinación de cuatro mudanzas de oficinas en distintas ciudades, el soporte a usuarios, la coordinación con otros departamentos, la revisión de procesos, el inventario, la comunicación con mis superiores y el apoyo en eventos, reuniones importantes, videodeposiciones, etc. También dedico tiempo a mejorar la experiencia del usuario, porque en un bufete de abogados la tecnología no debe ser un obstáculo; debe ser una herramienta que permita trabajar con eficiencia, seguridad y confianza. Aquí mi papel es muy importante, ya que mi deber es facilitar las actualizaciones de varios sistemas para todos los usuarios del bufete.

Lo más esencial en mi día a día es estar atento a las situaciones que requieren una respuesta inmediata, mientras que otras exigen planificación, comunicación clara y seguimiento. Para mí, el objetivo siempre es el mismo: proteger la productividad del equipo, brindar un servicio confiable y asegurar que cada persona, desde los socios hasta quienes llevan el correo interno de la oficina, se sienta apoyada cuando lo necesite.

***¿Qué consejo les daría a los jóvenes que podrían estar interesados en su carrera?***

Lo primero que aconsejo es asegurarse de tener pasión por el ejercicio del derecho. Este ambiente no es para todo el mundo. Se requiere actitud, carácter y, ante todo, disciplina. Mi otro consejo sería que desarrollen tanto sus habilidades técnicas como sus habilidades humanas. En tecnología, es importante seguir aprendiendo, adaptarse a los cambios y entender cómo funcionan las herramientas, sobre todo ahora, cuando la inteligencia artificial empieza a tener cada vez más influencia; pero igual de importante es saber escuchar, comunicarse con claridad y tratar a las personas con respeto.

También les diría que no subestimen el valor del servicio. En mi carrera, especialmente dentro de un bufete de abogados, uno aprende que resolver un problema técnico no es solo “arreglar una computadora”; muchas veces significa ayudar a alguien a recuperar tiempo, tranquilidad y productividad en un momento o una situación crítica.

Les aconsejaría dar prioridad a ser honestos, constantes, curiosos y humildes. Nadie lo sabe todo, y eso está bien. Lo importante es tener la disciplina para seguir aprendiendo, la paciencia para enfrentar los retos y la actitud correcta para trabajar en equipo. Una buena reputación no se compra; se construye con confianza, responsabilidad y dedicación. Y eso requiere mucho tiempo y constancia, por supuesto. YLD

Nathan R. Miles es un asociado senior en Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP en Atlanta.



During a normal week, I may be involved in different projects. Currently, for example, I am working on preparing equipment for attorneys joining during the summer, coordinating four office moves in different cities, supporting users, coordinating with other departments, reviewing processes, managing inventory, communicating with my supervisors and supporting events, important meetings, video depositions, etc. I also dedicate time to improving the user experience, because in a law firm, technology should not be an obstacle; it should be a tool that allows people to work efficiently, securely and confidently. My role here is very important, since my duty is to facilitate updates to several systems for all users at the firm.

The most essential part of my day-to-day work is staying attentive to situations that require an immediate response, while others require planning, clear communication and follow-up. For me, the goal is always the same: to protect the team’s productivity, provide reliable service and ensure that every person, from the partners to those who handle the office’s internal mail, feels supported when they need it.

***What advice would you give young people who might be interested in your career?***

The first thing I advise is to make sure you have passion for the practice of law. This environment is not for everyone. It requires attitude, character and, above all, discipline. My other advice would be to develop both your technical skills and your people skills. In technology, it is important to continue learning, adapt to changes and understand how tools work, especially now, as artificial intelligence begins to have greater influence; but it is just as important to know how to listen, communicate clearly and treat people with respect.

I would also tell them not to underestimate the value of service. In my career, especially within a law firm, you learn that solving a technical problem is not just “fixing a computer;” many times, it means helping someone recover time, peace of mind and productivity during a critical moment or situation.

I would advise them to prioritize being honest, consistent, curious and humble. No one knows everything, and that is OK. What matters is having the discipline to keep learning, the patience to face challenges and the right attitude to work as part of a team. A good reputation cannot be bought; it is built with trust, responsibility and dedication. And that, of course, requires a lot of time and consistency. YLD

Nathan R. Miles is a senior associate at Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP in Atlanta.

# Barrister and Broke



**Hannah Couch  
Hostetler**

**The first paycheck feels like a promise**—proof that the late nights, student loans and bar exam anxiety were worth it. But for many new attorneys, that promise quickly collides with a quieter, less glamorous reality: the cost of looking the part.

Before a single argument is made or a client is counseled, there's an unspoken expectation to present polished authority—tailored suits, quality shoes, structured handbags and a rotation of outfits that signal competence without repetition. And all of it must somehow fit within an entry-level salary already stretched thin by rent, loan repayments and the basic cost of starting adult life.

For many traditional law offices, clothing isn't just clothing—it's strategy (not to mention respect toward the bench when in court). It's credibility stitched into hemlines and confidence buttoned into blazers. Yet building a business professional wardrobe from scratch only escalates the stresses of being a new attorney with the normal case of imposter syndrome: how to appear established when you're anything but financially secure.

The pressure is subtle but persistent, showing up in courtroom glances, office culture and the mental tally of outfits worn "too recently." Beneath the surface of crisp white shirts and sensible heels lies a balancing act—between ambition and affordability, between fitting in and staying afloat—that few talk about, but nearly every new, young attorney with a desire to exhibit a more traditional, conservative and feminine style knows intimately.

In the fall of 2018, I was that new, young attorney clerking in a traditional law office setting on a government salary. The only mandatory dress code was that I wear a suit during court hearings and trials, but I certainly noticed there was a style amongst the employees that I admired and wanted to



match. Although I had a few professional outfits in my closet from summer internships, fall and winter were fast approaching, and the inevitable weight gained from bar prep stress told me I needed new work clothes immediately. But I was now completely on my own financially, and I had to be strategic.

Below is the strategy I took. While I applaud the various styles I've seen in the legal world throughout my career, this strategy is shared to help specifically new, young, budget-conscious barristers with a desire to exhibit a traditional, conservative and feminine style like me.

## 1 Courtroom Look

No matter your personal style, every attorney must have a traditional, tailored, formal suit in their closet for courtroom appearances, important client meetings and your first week at your new job. Traditional, formal suits are usually black, navy or dark gray. Although you will likely wear this the least, it will be the most expensive outfit in your closet.

When determining on what you should save versus splurge, this would be the appropriate time to splurge. My go-to starter suit brand is Alex Marie, which is available at Dillard's. Unlike other suit brands, it's

washer and dryer friendly, which will save you money in the long run—those drycleaning bills add up. A set typically costs \$300, but I recommend shopping for this at season's end during a sale.

For the blouse and undershirt, simply go on Amazon to find a few in different colors for as little as \$30 each. If you have a trial or several consecutive court appearances in one week, you'll appear as if you're wearing a different outfit each day simply by changing the color of your blouse. I recommend sizing up on button-down blouses; they always manage to shrink after the first wash, which sometimes led to unwanted exposure through my buttons. I also recommend purchasing some turtlenecks for the colder winter months.

Your shoes and accessories must be just as traditional and formal as the outfit. I recommend a nude-colored pair of shoes so that you can wear them with any outfit in any color. Heels are certainly never mandatory, but I personally welcome anything that gives me height. As such, my go-to heels since 2018 are the four-inch Jenn Ardor pointed, closed toe classic stilettos available on Amazon for less than \$50.

Jewelry is a completely personal style, but in keeping with a more traditional look, I recommend one ring per hand, one earring per ear and no more than one strand around

the neck and wrists. You can typically find jewelry matching this style and within all budgets at any women's clothing store in your area.

## 2 Everyday Professional

Many law offices have adopted a "business casual" dress code, with the exception of important work events outlined above. There are many different interpretations of "business casual" when it comes to feminine style, making wardrobe selection difficult to navigate when beginning a new job. The safest option, in my opinion, is to interpret "business casual" as "everyday professional" (in other words, a suit minus the blazer) until you've figured out your office's interpretation of the dress code.

For me, this usually means black dress pants and a colorful blouse. Budget-friendly black dress pants in a variety of fits and cuts are easily found on Amazon for \$40 or less. My favorite stores for fun blouses that are typically \$50 or less are Dish & Lily in Statesboro, Blue Door Boutique in Columbus and Red Dress in Athens. You can also shop at these stores online.

You can also never go wrong with a sheath dress. For the cheapest options with the most quality, I recommend searching for Calvin Klein sheath dresses on the clearance racks at T.J. Maxx, Marshalls and Belk for as little as \$30. It doesn't matter if those dresses were from one or five seasons ago, they're a classic and never go out of style. Bonus points if you find one of these dresses in a solid color because you can easily switch up the look each time by wearing a different scarf or cardigan.

## 3 Formal Legal Events

As an attorney, you will likely be invited to several formal or cocktail events for the state or your local bar, a nonprofit fundraiser or law school alumni event. While I knew I needed proper attire for court and the office, I had no idea that attorneys often carried such a formal social calendar.

When I discovered this, Rent the Runway wasn't even in my budget for a single event, let alone renting a different dress for

► SEE BARRISTER, PAGE 11

### Officers' Block

## If you could replace gavels with anything, what would you choose?



**VERONICA R. COX** | YLD President

Kazoo



**VIRGINIA C. JOSEY** | YLD President-Elect

Cymbals



**KINDALL BROWNING-RICKLE** | YLD Treasurer

A dog's squeaky toy



**CALEB RATLIFF** | YLD Secretary

One of those squeaky mallets that kids play with



**KENNETH MITCHELL JR.** | YLD Immediate Past President

A fist



**T. ALEC CHAPPELL** | YLD Newsletter Co-Editor

Thor's hammer, Mjölnir



**CARLOS FERNÁNDEZ** | YLD Newsletter Co-Editor

Pool noodle

# Beyond the Briefcase: Why the Courtroom Is Only the Beginning



**Juan  
Estrada**

*“A law license is not a ceiling. It is a door.”*

## The Long Way In

I want to tell you something nobody told me when I started: effort, alone, is not enough. Effort combined with vision—the stubborn refusal to believe your circumstances define your destination—that is a different thing entirely. I am the son of two immigrants, one from Mexico and one from Honduras. I am a first-generation lawyer and a five-year solo practitioner. I am also, as of this writing, a candidate for Georgia House District 109 in Gwinnett County. None of those facts were inevitable. All of them required a choice.

My entry into law was neither clean nor cinematic. I worked through law school as an insurance adjuster—not because it was glamorous, but because the mortgage did not care about my ambitions. The pay was poor. The hours were punishing. Corporate advancement seemed reserved for those willing to perform a particular kind of deference I did not have in me. But the work taught me something irreplaceable: how the other side thinks. When I eventually crossed over into plaintiff’s personal injury work, I understood the machinery of insurance defense from the inside. That knowledge has made me a better advocate for every client I have represented since.

There is an important lesson embedded in that experience, and it is one I wish we discussed more openly in the profession: no chapter of your career is wasted. Every assignment, every unglamorous job, every detour sharpens a skill you will eventually need. The obligation is simply to pay attention while it is happening.



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## Betting on Yourself When the Stakes Are Real

After law school, I took a brief detour to Washington, D.C., working for Sen. Bernard Sanders on the Senate Budget Committee. I believed—and still believe—that law and policy are inseparable. But I also recognized that my most immediate contribution was not going to come from the halls of the Capitol. It was going to come from returning to Georgia, to the communities that needed someone in their corner. When the bar results came in, that conviction became a decision.

I will not romanticize what followed. I was rejected from every public defender position I applied to. Bills arrived on schedule, indifferent to my plans. I took a job at a personal injury firm—again underpaid, again overworked—because that is what the moment required. I gave that employer honest work. And when the moment came, I left.

I opened Juan Estrada Law with \$2,000 in my pocket. My mortgage was \$1,500 per month. My office lease was \$700 per month. The arithmetic was not encouraging. But I had spent years watching other people bet

on institutions, on employers, on systems that were not designed with people like me in mind. For once, I decided to bet on myself. With the help of the Lawyer Referral Service, I found my footing. Five years later, the firm is still standing.

I am not telling this story to suggest that every young lawyer should go solo at the first opportunity. What I am saying is this: do not let fear of failure become the reason you never find out what you are capable of. The fear is legitimate. So is the possibility on the other side of it.

## The Courtroom Was Never the Final Destination

Here is something I have come to believe deeply, and it is the central argument of this article: a law license is not a ceiling. It is a door. The question is: will you choose to walk through?

I represent people who have been injured through no fault of their own, tenants who seek justice in a landlord-friendly state, and I’ve even fought to lower each and every one of our electric bills at the Public Service

Commission. I fight for them in courtrooms and across negotiating tables. That work is meaningful, and I do not take it lightly. But the law has also shown me, with uncomfortable clarity, where the system fails the people it is supposed to serve—not because of a bad judge or an unfair jury, but because the rules themselves were written without certain people in mind. That recognition did not make me cynical. It made me want to be in the room where the rules get written.

I am now running for Georgia House District 109 in Gwinnett County. The slogan is simple: Vote Estrada or Nada. The goal is not. I am running because we are at an impasse in American history where we can choose to continue going down the path that leaves working families behind or create a future that represents working people, not just the wealthiest in our nation. My life experience as a working person with few options, combined with my legal training—understanding how statutes are drafted, how procedural rights are exercised, how advocacy actually functions—is exactly the kind of expertise a legislature needs more of, particularly from voices that have not historically occupied those seats. A first-generation, Latino solo-practitioner running for state office is not a novelty to me. It is a logical continuation of the same work of helping those who seek justice and equity.

Young lawyers are uniquely positioned to do this kind of work. We are close enough to the beginning of our careers to remember what it felt like to be on the outside of the system. We are trained to argue, to research, to reason through ambiguity and to advocate for positions even when they are unpopular. Those are not just litigation skills. Those are governance skills that our profession gave us. The question is whether we have the courage to use these skills beyond the courtroom and the compassion to use them to the benefit of others.

### What I Would Tell the Next Generation

If you are a young lawyer reading this, I want to offer you the kind of advice I wish someone had pressed into my hands six

years ago—not as a list of platitudes, but as hard-won observations from someone who has lived in the margins of this profession and found a way to build something from them.

Respect everyone you encounter—opposing counsel, the clerk behind the desk, the client who calls you four times in one day. The practice of law is smaller than it looks from the outside, and the relationships you build or burn have a way of following you.

Never stop learning. The law changes. The profession changes. The tools change. The lawyer who assumes mastery too early is the lawyer who gets outpaced. Stay curious. Stay humble about what you do not yet know.

Believe in your own capacity. Not naively—understand your limitations and work through them—but with the foundational conviction that you belong in the room, that your presence is not an accident and that the work you do matters. Without that belief, the hard days will break you. With it, the hard days just make you better.

And finally: acknowledge the people who took a chance on you. There is no such thing as a self-made lawyer. Somewhere along the way, someone opened a door, wrote a reference, gave you the case that taught you how to try cases or simply told you that you could do it when you were not sure. Find those people. Thank them. And then, when you have the ability, do the same for someone else.

We entered this profession because we believed the law could be a tool for justice. I still believe that. I believe it in the courtroom, I believe it in the Legislature and I believe it in my very own life when helping those who otherwise would be lost. The world does not get better on its own. It gets better because someone decides that “better” is worth fighting for—and then does the unglamorous, demanding, exhausting, meaningful work of building it.

That is what a law license makes possible. The rest is up to you. YLD

*Juan Estrada is the founder of Juan Estrada Law, a plaintiff's personal injury firm in Gwinnett County.*

### ► BARRISTER, FROM PAGE 9



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each event. Instead, I searched elsewhere for a cheaper option that I could wear repeatedly without notice. I determined that a black maxi dress with sleeves paired with rhinestone drop earrings would be my best choice. I was able to put together an elegant look for less than \$100.

### 4 Bathing Suits

Bathing suits were never on my “new attorney wardrobe” bingo card. Then came my firm’s summer pool party with my colleagues and bosses and my first time at the State Bar’s Annual Meeting at the beach with judges and other notable attorneys. I had a fantastic time at both events and never felt uncomfortable. But my stress was high in the weeks prior while searching for a bathing suit that wasn’t too conservative but also wasn’t as revealing as the trending bathing suit cuts at the time.

I ended up splurging on a Lilly Pulitzer one-piece suit that year for approximately \$150. This was after trying a few cheaper options from Amazon that did not appear to stay in place. The fit was modest, and the bright colors and patterns made it fun. It perfectly captured the style I personally wished to exude at this casual but professional setting, and it allowed me to enjoy the event without concerns about my attire. YLD

*Hannah Couch Hostetler is an attorney in Macon.*

## Member Spotlight | Northern District

Each quarter, The YLD Review highlights three of the Young Lawyers Division's most impactful members—one from each federal judicial district. Those featured in our Member Spotlight serve both the YLD and their local communities, excel in their practice and maintain the highest level of professionalism.

# Hannah Amanuel

### Tell us about yourself.

Hi, I'm Hannah! I grew up in Douglasville, Georgia, with my family of Georgia Tech fans. So, in true rebellious younger daughter fashion, I earned my undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia. After undergrad, I made my way to Atlanta where I got my law degree from Georgia State University College of Law. When I'm not working, you can likely find me reading a book or binging the latest hit reality TV show with my husband—or, more likely, being bossed around by my nearly two-year-old daughter.

### What is your practice area?

I have practiced plaintiff-side complex civil litigation since graduating from law school, with a focus on health care fraud and False Claims Act matters. I was drawn to this area because it sits squarely at the intersection of law, public policy and real-world impact. Early in my career, I had the opportunity to work with attorneys who were dedicated

to protecting government programs and advocating for whistleblowers. Watching how these cases could expose systemic issues and drive meaningful change left a lasting impression on me. When I was considering my next step, I was drawn to Cannela Snyder because of its commitment to holding institutions accountable, especially in False Claims Act cases where the issues are not only legally complex but also play a critical role in safeguarding the integrity of government programs. That focus on accountability and public impact aligned closely with what initially drew me to this practice area and ultimately reinforced my decision to continue building my career in False Claims Act litigation. It's challenging work, but it is incredibly rewarding to know that what we do can have an impact far beyond a single case.

### What is your involvement with the YLD?

I have been involved with the YLD since graduating from law school, and it has been a great place to maintain the sense of camaraderie that I valued so much during that time. Through attending meetings, CLEs and the social events, I've been able to build new friendships while also reconnecting with familiar faces. My favorite aspect of the YLD is that it truly has something for everyone. Whether it's happy hours, community service projects or even bingo nights, the YLD offers a wide range of opportunities for members to get involved in a meaningful but also fun way. I look forward to continuing my involvement in the YLD and hope to apply for the Leadership Academy in the near future.

### What advice do you have for young lawyers?

First, build relationships, not just wins. Early in your career, it is easy to focus solely on outcomes, but your reputation is built just as much on how you treat people as it is on the results you get. The legal community is small, and you will cross paths with the



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANNAH AMANUEL

same attorneys, judges and staff throughout your career. Being courteous, prepared and professional with everyone, including opposing counsel, goes a long way and will serve you well over time.

Second, seek out mentors. The value of strong mentorship cannot be overstated. Having people who are willing to invest in your growth, challenge you and share their experience can shape the trajectory of your career in profound ways.

Third, don't fear mistakes. They are inevitable, especially in a profession with such a steep learning curve. Address mistakes quickly, take responsibility and use them as opportunities to grow. No one has it all figured out at the beginning, and the best attorneys are the ones who continue to learn and improve every day.

Lastly, and most importantly, prioritize your wellbeing. Burnout is real, and it is more common than many people are willing to admit. Set boundaries, make time for friends and family, or simply step away when needed. It will allow you to show up as a more thoughtful, effective advocate for your clients over the long term. YLD

YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION  
STATE BAR OF GEORGIA

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## Member Spotlight | Middle District

Each quarter, The YLD Review highlights three of the Young Lawyers Division's most impactful members—one from each federal judicial district. Those featured in our Member Spotlight serve both the YLD and their local communities, excel in their practice and maintain the highest level of professionalism.

# Samuel C. Joyce

### *Tell us about yourself.*

I grew up in Macon, Georgia, and it's always been home for me. After graduating from the University of Georgia, I attended Mercer Law School in Macon and ultimately decided to stay in Macon to practice. It was important to me to give back to the community that did so much for me growing up.

Outside of work, I enjoy playing golf, traveling when I can, and keeping up with the Atlanta Braves. A lot of my background is rooted in sports, which has continued to shape how I approach both my career and everyday life.

### *What is your practice area?*

I practice litigation, specifically personal injury and workers' compensation. I was drawn to litigation because of the competitive aspect and the opportunity to give clients a voice. Coming from a sports background, I've always enjoyed that environment—preparing, strategizing and working toward a common result. Litigation naturally fits that mindset.

There wasn't necessarily one single moment where everything "clicked," but over time, you start to feel more comfortable. They call it the "practice" of law for a reason—you keep learning and improving every day. I've also been fortunate to have

several mentors along the way who have taught me a great deal, and I'm very grateful for their guidance. That's something I'd strongly encourage any young lawyer to seek out.

### *What is your involvement with the YLD?*

I first got involved with the YLD by simply showing up and putting myself out there. I think that applies to a lot of things in life—if you show up consistently, it can take you a long way.

What I've found most valuable about the YLD is the network of other young attorneys. As a young lawyer, having people to bounce ideas off of is crucial, and being able to do that through the YLD has been priceless. I find myself doing that on almost every case—running scenarios by friends and mentors, talking through strategy and getting different perspectives. That kind of support system is exactly what the YLD is all about, and it has made a real impact on my development as an attorney.

### *What advice do you have for young lawyers?*

Early on, one of the biggest challenges is confidence—especially when you're going up against attorneys who have been practicing much longer. It's easy to feel like they know more just because they've been doing



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAMUEL C. JOYCE

it longer. What I've learned is that you can close that gap by outworking them. Preparation and effort go a long way.

The best advice I've received—and something I try to follow every day—is to show up and remember that we are in the service business. Every client and every case deserve your full attention, no matter how big or small. If you keep that mindset and stay consistent, everything else tends to fall into place. YLD

THE  
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## Member Spotlight | Southern District

Each quarter, The YLD Review highlights three of the Young Lawyers Division's most impactful members—one from each federal judicial district. Those featured in our Member Spotlight serve both the YLD and their local communities, excel in their practice and maintain the highest level of professionalism.

# Kate Cobb

### *Tell us about yourself.*

I am a Savannah native, born and raised. I graduated from the College of Charleston (Go Cougs!) in 2020 and earned my J.D. from Mercer Law School (Bear Down!) in 2023. Savannah pulled me back the minute I graduated from Mercer, and I have been home ever since. I live here with my amazing husband, Powell, and our sweet dog, Lacy. I love everything about Savannah, from the history and culture to the tight-knit legal community to the simple fact that my family lives here. I have been practicing at Oliver Maner LLP for almost three years. When I am not at the office, you can usually find me on the water with friends, entertaining at home, window shopping on Broughton Street or heading over to my family's farm to enjoy the serenity of the low country.

### *What is your practice area?*

The answer I usually give is that I practice civil litigation, with a focus on probate, property and commercial disputes. The real answer is that I practice whatever is put on my desk. As a young lawyer, now is the time to explore and find what type of law motivates you, and the attorneys at Oliver Maner LLP have allowed me to do exactly that. They have spent decades building their practices alongside the people and businesses of Savannah, and learning from them

has shaped how I approach my own work. They taught me that good lawyering is not flashy or performative. Good lawyering is based in intentionality, honesty, hard work and enthusiasm.

### *What is your involvement with the YLD?*

My involvement with YLD is serving as a regional coordinator for the Georgia High School Mock Trial Program, which means I have the pleasure of being the annoying person flooding your inbox begging you to judge a round or two. This year had its ups and downs. Navigating a snowstorm and the logistical nightmare of rescheduling teams, courthouse personnel and attorney judges was certainly a down. But the second those students started arguing their cases in real courtrooms at the new Chatham County courthouse, it made it all worthwhile. Watching them reminded me of my own experience as a nervous high schooler in a pantsuit I borrowed from my mother, and the confidence and passion the program instilled in me from an early age. Getting to be even a small part of that experience for them is by far the best part of my YLD involvement.

### *What advice do you have for young lawyers?*

Be yourself. Yes, it is a cliché, but for good reason. Do not try to mold yourself into some abstract idea of what you think a lawyer is



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATE COBB

supposed to be. The parts of your personality that make you “you” are exactly what will shine through in your work, your relationships with clients, the way you handle opposing counsel and the way you tackle a case. You want clients to hire you, not a template.

Also, *participate*. I refer to myself as a “chronic participator” and (to the sacrifice of my availability on the weekends) I sign up for as many leadership opportunities as I can. Show up, say yes, volunteer and go outside your comfort zone. It is not embarrassing to be enthusiastic. YLD

## ► BEFORE US, FROM PAGE 3

than constructed. The work is real. The need is also real.

That discovery changed how I think about my own presence in this profession.

When I speak at a Riverdale High School, I am not delivering a message about possibility or perseverance. I am simply there. A lawyer, standing at the front of a room, being listened to. That is the entirety of what matters in those moments. Not

what I say, but that I am present and visible in a role that carries weight. Some student in that room is registering something without words for it. Years from now, when they are deciding whether law is a realistic path, they will have a stored image of someone who looked like them doing it without apology.

That is what I think about when I consider what Latino attorneys in Georgia owe this moment. Not grand statements. Not

formal proclamations about the importance of diversity. Presence. Consistent, deliberate, unremarkable presence in the courtroom, at the podium, in the school gymnasium, on the panel. The accumulation of ordinary appearances in places where our appearance is not yet ordinary.

The organizations exist here because people built them with intention and effort.

► SEE BEFORE US, PAGE 15

► BEFORE US, FROM PAGE 14



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GALEO. The Georgia Hispanic Bar Association. The Latino Community Fund. These are not amenities. They are infrastructure, and infrastructure requires maintenance and investment from the people who benefit from it. For Latino attorneys in Georgia, that means participation. Mentorship. Visibility in the profession as a whole, not only within our own community.

I was fortunate. The people in my family modeled what I later became. A young attorney may not have that same family landscape. What they can have is a profession that shows up in their world before they have fully decided who they are going to be.

That is the work. It is not complicated. It does not require a grand gesture or a formal program. It requires showing up, in the right places, often enough that a young person stops thinking of a legal career as something that happens to other kinds of people.

My grandmother taught school. My grandfather practiced medicine. They never described what they were doing in terms of legacy or impact. They simply went to work. I try to carry that same quality of attention into my own practice, and into the moments when someone younger is watching. The watching is the point. The presence is the present. <sup>YLD</sup>

Carlos Fernández is co-editor of The YLD Review.

Split Decisions

## Most cases are won through preparation and consistency, not courtroom brilliance.

*Split Decisions puts lawyers on the record—no fence-sitting allowed. We ask a big question, and they respond with strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree (plus a little argument to make their case).*



**DEREK CENTOLA**

The outcomes of most cases hinge on disciplined preparation, thorough factual development and consistent execution, not clever tricks. Judges reward credibility, organization and mastery of the record. So do juries. Gamesmanship may create noise, but sustained, methodical work is what actually persuades and ultimately wins cases.



**ALESSANDRO S. PACHECO**

As an assistant district attorney, it is my job to prove the crime(s) indicted or accused to the burden of beyond a reasonable doubt. Carrying the highest burden that the law imposes is something that cannot be done with gamesmanship, but rather with diligent and consistent preparation. In my role, it is certainly the case that the more prepared you are, the more likely that the case will resolve.

Additionally, diligent preparation helps you stay focused on the case, and more importantly on the critical issues that will ultimately decide the case. Winning a case can take many forms: a favorable verdict, an agreeable settlement where both sides walk away with something gained, a guilty plea, or even a nolle prosequi. That's the beauty of our corpus juris regardless of our practice. However, those various forms of winning are not possible without preparation, diligence and consistency. As such, by being prepared we allow ourselves to be in a position to get the best possible outcome for those we represent whether that be individuals, companies and different organizations, or the state.



**JAVION THOMAS**

While I'm not a litigator, my view is that most cases are won through thorough preparation and consistent execution. Mastery of the facts and law builds credibility and clarity, which I believe courts value. Litigation tactics may help at the margins, but they rarely outweigh strong fundamentals.



**DREW WILLIAMSON**

Preparation and consistency control outcomes by locking in facts, testimony and themes early, leaving less room for surprise. Gamesmanship may create short-term leverage, but disciplined case development and clean evidence/records are what ultimately persuade courts, arbitrators and jurors.

# More Than Language: Serving Spanish-Speaking Clients in Georgia Personal Injury Practice



Gaby  
Mejía

When our firm began building a dedicated Spanish-language practice group, I quickly discovered that serving Spanish-speaking clients well requires more than fluency. It requires a genuine rethinking of how we communicate, who we include and what our clients actually need to feel heard, informed and protected. The differences are real, they are meaningful and attorneys who understand them will serve this growing community far more effectively.

## Education Is Part of the Case

One of the first things I noticed is that Spanish-speaking clients—many of whom are immigrants or first-generation residents—often come to us without a baseline understanding of how the American legal and insurance systems work. Concepts like liability coverage, uninsured motorist protection, or the contingency fee structure are not intuitive if you have never interacted with them before. We spend more time on the front end of each case walking clients through what insurance is, how claims work and what it means to settle versus litigate. That investment pays off. Informed clients are calmer, more cooperative and better prepared to make decisions when it counts.

## The Family Is Part of the Decision

In many Hispanic families, major decisions are not made individually—they are made collectively. A client may be the named plaintiff, but a spouse, parent or older sibling is often part of every meaningful conversation. Early in a case, it matters to iden-



tify who the actual decision-makers are and to include them appropriately. Attempting to rush a client to a decision without involving the right family members can create distrust and delay. When we acknowledge the family's role and treat them as partners in the process, the entire relationship becomes more stable.

## Sensitivity Around Identification

Requests for identification documents can be a point of anxiety for some Spanish-speaking clients. Immigration status—whether directly relevant to a case or not—is a source of real fear for many families. A firm that handles these moments with discretion, clarity and compassion builds trust that no marketing campaign can manufacture. We explain what we need and why, we clarify what we will not share and with whom, and we make sure clients understand their rights. This is not just good practice; it is the foundation of a functional attorney-client relationship.

## Meeting Clients Where They Are

Communication style also matters. Many of our Spanish-speaking clients do not use email regularly. They use WhatsApp. Sending updates, requesting documents and maintaining contact through WhatsApp is not an accommodation—it is simply the most effective channel. Firms that insist on email

or formal correspondence often find that messages go unread and clients feel disconnected. We meet clients where they are, and that includes the platforms they already trust.

## The Value of a Spanish-Speaking Attorney

Perhaps the most significant factor in building trust with Hispanic clients is direct communication with the attorney. In many Latin American cultures, the lawyer holds a position of authority and credibility. Clients want to speak with the attorney directly—not through a translator, not through a language line, not through an intermediary. When a Spanish-speaking client can call and hear the attorney's voice in their own language, the relationship shifts immediately. It signals respect. Our firm's ability to offer that direct connection is not just a convenience; for many clients, it is the reason they choose us and stay with us.

Building a practice that genuinely serves Spanish-speaking clients is not a matter of translating existing processes. It requires thinking carefully about what clients actually experience and what they need to feel respected, confident and understood. The work is specific. It is intentional. And it matters. YLD

*Gaby Mejía is a case manager and developing paralegal at Kenneth S. Nugent, P.C., where she leads the firm's Spanish-language client services initiative.*

# The Argument for Serving on a Grand Jury



**Alexa  
Dato-Caudell**

**This spring, I was empaneled as the fore-**woman on a grand jury in the Superior Court of Hall County. Over the course of my grand jury term, my fellow jurors and I considered between 22 and 38 criminal indictments each day for more than six sessions, of which the criminal charges presented to us ranged from the common—domestic violence and possession of controlled substances—to the unusual—incest, aggravated involuntary manslaughter and theft of trade secrets.

In Georgia, grand jury selection is a blind, random process, giving all citizens an equal chance of being selected.<sup>1</sup> Compare this with a criminal jury, from which those in our profession are routinely dismissed during *voir dire* for a myriad of reasons, such as potential biases and potential influence over fellow jurors.<sup>2</sup> Considering that attorneys have an equal probability of selection as grand jurors, it is surprising that of the many attorneys I have spoken to about this experience, very few in our profession have served on a jury, and even fewer were excited about the prospect.

Following my experience, I would argue that, if given the opportunity, jury service is an extremely important form of public service for attorneys. We are uniquely qualified to consider criminal indictments given our legal training and our understanding of the burden of proof and the elements of the crime(s) presented. The role of the grand jury provides a direct service to the local community, serving a dual role as a defense against prosecutorial overreach while simultaneously protecting the public against crime.

Grand jurors are sworn an oath to “keep the deliberations of the Grand Jury secret unless called upon to give evidence thereof in some court of law of this State” and “shall present no one from envy, hatred, or malice, nor shall you leave anyone unrepresented from fear, favor, affection, reward,

or the hope thereof.”<sup>3</sup> The secrecy of grand jury deliberations is intended to guard the criminal investigation process as well as to protect the accused who may later be cleared of the accusations.<sup>4</sup> Grand jurors are further protected under Georgia law from being compelled to provide testimony as to their deliberations under O.C.G.A. § 15-12-72 and § 15-12-73.

In addition to their most well-known function of considering criminal indictments, grand juries in Georgia serve an additional role in government oversight, authorized to inspect county facilities and offices, investigate incidents involving officers’ use of deadly force, and prepare reports or presentments based on their findings.<sup>5</sup> Under O.C.G.A. § 15-12-71, grand juries must further inspect the condition and operations of the county jail as well as the clerk of the Superior Court, the judge of the Probate Court, and the county treasurer every three years. During our grand jury session, we were afforded the opportunity to review the budgets for the office of the district attorney, the clerk of court and the Probate Court. If deemed necessary by the grand jury, they may further appoint a committee of its members to “inspect or investigate any county office or county public building or any public authority of the county or the office of any county officer, any court or court official of the county, the county board of education, or the county school superintendent or any of the records, accounts, property, or operations of any of the foregoing.”<sup>6</sup> The authority of the grand jury to conduct investigations as the members deem fit is a powerful one, providing insight into the functionality of local government beyond what a regular citizen could easily observe.

It is worth noting that of the 144 total indictments presented to our grand jury, my grand jury returned all true bills, meaning we did not decline any of the criminal indictments presented. In reflecting on this experience as I returned to work, I consider whether the famous legal adage “A grand

jury would indict a ham sandwich” accurately reflects my experience. While this may appear true considering our grand jury did not return a single “no bill,” it would be wholly inaccurate to characterize our grand jury as a rubber stamp for the prosecution. There was thoughtful discussion given to difficult cases, considering the allegations in light of mental health history, class status and other relevant individual characteristics of the accused. In my role, I would carefully read each written indictment during the witnesses’ testimony to ensure the elements of each alleged crime were supported by evidence prior to voting, and our jury would not hesitate to ask for clarification or additional information to ensure each case was given the serious consideration it deserved. I feel confident that my fellow jurors took this responsibility seriously. We empathized with the victims and families that were impacted in each case, though we found humor in the strange facts of some unique criminal endeavors.

I’m happy to report that our jury could spot the difference between a sin and a crime, and I strongly encourage my fellow attorneys to reconsider their opinions on jury service as a privilege and an act of necessary service to our local communities. YLD

*Alexa Dato-Caudell is an associate attorney at Tallant Howell in Cumming, Georgia.*

## Endnotes

1. O.C.G.A. § 15-12-62.1 (2026).
2. See generally Michael B. Mushlin, *Bound and Gagged: The Peculiar Predicament of Professional Jurors*, 25 YALE L. & POL’Y REV. 239, 246-253 (2007) (discussing the historical prevalence of exemptions for professional occupations, including lawyers).
3. O.C.G.A. § 15-12-67 (2026).
4. See *Howard v. State*, 60 Ga. App. 229, 236, 4 S.E.2d 418 (Ga. Ct. App. 1939).
5. O.C.G.A. § 15-12-71 (2026).
6. *Id.*

## Affiliate Spotlight

# The Gate City Bar Association Young Lawyers Division: Advancing Community, Leadership and Service Across Georgia



**Shannan M. Young**

In January 2025, the Gate City Bar Association (GCBA) advanced its long-standing commitment to the professional development, mentorship and advancement of young Black attorneys in Georgia by formally establishing the Gate City Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (GCBA YLD). While GCBA has consistently supported young lawyers and law students through its programming and leadership, the creation of a dedicated Young Lawyers Division marked a significant structural and strategic milestone.

Founded in 1948, GCBA is the oldest and largest voluntary bar association for Black attorneys in Georgia. For more than 75 years, it has served as a pillar of advocacy, professional excellence and access to justice. With a membership exceeding 500 attorneys, judges, professors and legal professionals, GCBA continues to play a vital role in shaping the legal landscape across the state.

The creation of GCBA YLD represents a natural extension of that legacy, ensuring that the next generation of attorneys is not only supported, but intentionally developed.

## Formation and Purpose

Recognizing the growing need for structured mentorship, leadership development and professional engagement among early-career attorneys, GCBA formally established its Young Lawyers Division to serve attorneys under the age of 40 or within their first 10 years of practice.

As reflected in its 2025 resolution, GCBA reaffirmed its commitment to en-

gaging young lawyers in leadership, service and networking opportunities that enhance their careers while strengthening the profession as a whole. The GCBA YLD was therefore created to provide a supportive and structured environment where young attorneys can build community, grow professionally and meaningfully contribute to the legal field.

## State Bar Affiliation

Following its formation, GCBA YLD petitioned for affiliation with the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia (State Bar YLD). In its petition for affiliate status, GCBA emphasized that such affiliation would provide enhanced access to leadership development, statewide collaboration and professional opportunities for its members.

At its General Session on June 6, 2025, the State Bar YLD voted to approve GCBA YLD as an official affiliate.

This designation formally integrated GCBA YLD into a broader statewide network of young lawyers and expanded opportunities for its members to engage in initiatives that advance both the profession and the community.

## Leadership and Organizational Structure

The successful launch of GCBA YLD was made possible through the vision and leadership of its inaugural chair, Shannan Young, under the administration of GCBA Immediate Past President, Christopher E. Bruce.

The division's inaugural leadership team—Keith Collins, Brooke Harrison, Porcia Lockett, Shombraya Goodman, Brianna Smith and Obasi Bryant—worked collectively to establish the division's strategic direction and operational framework.

From its inception, GCBA YLD has been guided by three core pillars:

- Community Building
- Professional Development
- Service to the Public

These principles continue to inform the division's programming and initiatives.

## Community Engagement

GCBA YLD has prioritized the development of meaningful relationships among young attorneys through a series of networking mixers and social events. These gatherings



The Gate City Bar Association YLD inaugural leadership team.

provide opportunities for connection, mentorship and collaboration among attorneys at various stages of their early careers.

To further strengthen engagement, the division will host monthly social meetups throughout this summer, creating consistent opportunities for members to build relationships and remain actively connected to the organization.

### Professional Development

In addition to community-building, GCBA YLD has developed programming designed to address the practical realities of legal practice—particularly those aspects of career advancement that are not typically taught in law school.

Under Young's continued leadership, the division is hoping to launch a comprehensive slate of programs this year, including:

- A Multi-Pathway Career Strategy Forum exploring advancement across large firm, small firm and public sector careers
- Programs focused on financial literacy, wealth-building and law firm ownership
- Skills-based sessions on negotiation, deposition practice and client development
- Discussions addressing leadership pathways, authenticity in practice and transitions to in-house or public service roles

These initiatives are designed to equip young lawyers with practical tools, strategic insight and the confidence necessary to navigate their careers effectively.

### Service and Community Impact

Consistent with GCBA's longstanding commitment to service, the YLD has actively engaged in initiatives that expand access to legal resources within the community.

To date, GCBA YLD has hosted wills clinics in partnership with organizations such as the Atlanta Legal Aid Society and



Members of the Gate City Bar Association YLD at a service event.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHANNAN YOUNG

record restriction clinics in collaboration with Georgia Justice Project, providing direct legal assistance to individuals seeking a second chance and an opportunity to build greater stability in their lives.

As current GCBA President Hon. Pierce Hand Seitz noted, "Gate City's Young Lawyers Division is making a meaningful impact within the legal and Atlanta community. ... Their work meeting the community's legal needs reflects the community-centered focus of Gate City."

Building on this momentum, GCBA YLD is developing a statewide Day of Service, during which young lawyers will engage in community-based projects across Georgia before reconvening for fellowship and reflection, further reinforcing the division's commitment to collective service and meaningful impact.

### Looking Ahead

Since its inaugural year, the Gate City Bar Association Young Lawyers Division has established a strong foundation for continued growth and impact. Through its focus on community, professional development and service, the division has positioned itself as an important contributor to both Gate City and the broader legal community.

As GCBA YLD continues to expand its programming and membership, it remains

committed to fostering leadership, strengthening professional networks and advancing access to justice throughout Georgia.

### Join the Gate City YLD

The Gate City Bar Association Young Lawyers Division invites attorneys across Georgia who are under 40 or within their first 10 years of practice to become part of this growing community.

Membership in GCBA YLD offers the opportunity to:

- Build meaningful professional relationships
- Access practical and forward-thinking professional development
- Engage in impactful service initiatives
- Develop as a leader within both Gate City and the broader legal community

For those seeking connection, growth and purpose within the legal profession, GCBA YLD strives to provide a space to not only show up and observe, but to actively grow, develop and lead. YLD

*Shannan M. Young is an associate attorney at The Edmond Firm in Atlanta and the inaugural chair of the Gate City Bar Association Young Lawyers Division.*

# Yo No Sé: The Importance of Breaking Down Language Barriers in Real Estate Transactions



Caleb  
Ratliff

Due to a growing and diverse real estate market, attorneys are encountering more transactions involving clients for whom English is not a first language. While interpreters and translated documents are essential tools, there remains a gap between formal translation and communication at the closing table. That gap is often bridged by a handful of key phrases. Among them, and perhaps the most important, is one many young lawyers overlook: “yo no sé,” or “I don’t know.”

At first glance, “yo no sé” may seem too basic to garner attention in a legal context. Yet its significance in a real estate closing cannot be overstated. A closing is not merely a procedural formality; this is most people’s largest financial investment in their lives. At a closing, parties execute agreements impacting long-term property rights, financial obligations and liabilities. Ensuring that everyone understands what they are signing is not only a matter of professionalism, it’s the right thing to do.

For attorneys, recognizing when a client does not understand is critical. In English-speaking transactions, uncertainty or misunderstanding often occurs and parties will take extra time in diligent reading and then ask follow-up questions for clarification. In my experience, in cross-language settings, however, those cues may be muted or entirely absent. Oftentimes, parties will just give a soft nod or an “OK” when a complex legal matter is presented, such as a variable interest rate or balloon note mortgage.

This is where “yo no sé” becomes powerful. When a client explicitly states, “I don’t know,” it is a clear signal that comprehension and understanding have broken down. But more importantly, attorneys should pay close attention to situations where that



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phrase should be said but isn’t. Silence, nodding or simple “OKs” should not be mistaken for understanding. A client who does not say “yo no sé” may still very much mean it.

The risk of proceeding without true understanding is significant. A closing conducted without meaningful understanding may later be challenged (or in some cases, unwound) on grounds such as fraud, misrepresentation or lack of understanding. Given that in most cases closing attorneys will represent the lender in a transaction involving a loan, diligence in this matter is of utmost importance to eliminate costly litigation and reputational harm that could be avoided by just making sure that all parties truly understand what is being signed. If the attorney represents a non-English-speaking client in the closing, this duty is heightened even more in regard to providing the correct information upon request.<sup>1</sup>

To mitigate these issues, young lawyers should take a proactive approach to language awareness. This does not mean becoming fluent but rather learning some key phrases and their meaning. “Yo no sé” is one such phrase, but equally important are expressions indicating understanding

on some level (“más o menos”), confusion (“no entiendo”) or affirmation (“sí, entiendo”). Recognizing these phrases or those like them allows young lawyers to pause, reassess and ensure that there is understanding before proceeding.

Of course, the use of an interpreter remains the best practice in cross-language closings or transactions. Interpreters provide accuracy, neutrality and a safeguard against miscommunication. However, reliance on interpreters does not completely absolve an attorney of their responsibility to observe and respond to client comprehension. Even with an interpreter present, young lawyers should engage directly with clients, maintain eye contact and confirm understanding.

In addition to verbal communication, written materials play a crucial role. Providing translated summaries of key documents—such as the closing disclosure, promissory note and deed—can assist with understanding and allow an individual to go at their own pace. While full legal translations may not always be feasible, even partial translations or explanatory outlines can make a meaningful difference.

I have also had times in the past when, in a pinch, I used my cell phone to assist in translating what a particular document or agreement is referring to. In that sense, technology and translation apps are helpful in bridging minor gaps, though they should never replace professional interpretation for substantive legal matters. Used appropriately, however, they can help young lawyers navigate simple exchanges and identify when more clarification is needed.

Ultimately, the phrase “yo no sé” serves as a reminder of a broader principle: communication in a real estate closing must be both accurate and understood. To throw in a sports context (as my mind often drifts to): attorneys aren’t just drawing up plays, they’re making sure the client understands the game before the ball is ever snapped. This responsibility becomes even more pronounced when language barriers are present.

By developing an understanding of key phrases and the contexts in which they arise, young lawyers can better protect their clients and themselves. A moment spent clarifying uncertainty may prevent years of dispute and unhappy clients. In that sense, “yo no sé” is not just a statement of confusion; it is an opportunity for understanding, integrity and professional thoroughness. YLD

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*Caleb Ratliff is a partner at Cox Byington Twyman LLP in Rome.*

#### Endnote

1. (“[T]he closing attorney acts only as agent for the client or clients who retained him”) In re Estate of Hubbell, 375 Ga.App. 756 (2025); (“a lawyer shall promptly comply with reasonable requests for information”) State Bar Rules and Regulations, Rule 4-102, RPC Rule 1.4(a)(4).



## La importancia de la Asociación de Abogados Hispanos de Georgia



**Victor Noriega**

Como presidente de la Asociación de Abogados Hispanos de Georgia (GHBA), y tras haber servido durante años como directivo de la misma, he sido testigo de primera mano de los beneficios que conlleva una asociación de abogados hispanos en el estado de Georgia.

En primer lugar, el servicio a la comunidad hispana, y a la sociedad en general, constituye uno de los beneficios más evidentes de la GHBA. La organización y participación de la GHBA en clínicas pro bono y en oportunidades de entrenamiento legal para aquellas personas que, de otro modo, no tendrían acceso a servicios legales, representa un valor positivo tanto para nuestro estado como para nuestra nación.

En segundo lugar, la GHBA sirve para fortalecer el vínculo que une a los abogados y profesionales del derecho hispanos que forman parte de la organización. Ya sea a través de experiencias compartidas, el idioma, la comida o una simple partida de dominó, la capacidad de conectar con otros abogados y profesionales del derecho como uno mismo fomenta un sentido de comunidad, mentoría y fraternidad que se perdería sin la existencia de una organización de este tipo. La GHBA, al igual que otras asociaciones de abogados, no sirve a la comunidad a la exclusión de algunos, sino a través de la inclusión de una amplia diversidad de personas, creencias e ideologías. La GHBA no está reservada únicamente para aquellos que poseen un linaje o un origen específico, sino para todos aquellos que se ven unidos, de una u otra forma, por las culturas y los pueblos hispanos. Al igual que ocurre con la población hispana de los Estados Unidos, los miembros de la GHBA abarcan todo el espectro de partidos políticos, razas, religiones y credos; y lo que hace tan especial a nuestra organización es, precisamente, nuestra actitud inclusiva hacia todos, sin temor a la censura ni a la cancelación.

Por último, considero que el aspecto más importante de la GHBA es que su mera existencia otorga credibilidad a los ideales de este país al que llamamos nuestro hogar. Los abogados que integran la GHBA, al igual que los de cualquier otra asociación de abogados, juran fidelidad a las Constituciones del estado de Georgia y de los Estados Unidos. Nuestros miembros defienden los derechos y los principios fundacionales de esta nación, partiendo de la perspectiva

## The Importance of the Georgia Hispanic Bar Association



**Victor Noriega**

As president of the Georgia Hispanic Bar Association (GHBA), and after serving several years as an officer of the GHBA, I have witnessed firsthand the benefits of having a Hispanic bar association in the state of Georgia.

First, service to the Hispanic community and the community at large is one of the obvious benefits of the GHBA. GHBA's organization and participation in pro bono clinics and legal training opportunities for those who would not otherwise have access to legal services enriches our state and our nation.

Second, GHBA serves to strengthen the bond that the Hispanic lawyers and legal professionals in the organization have with each other. Whether it is shared experiences, language, food or a simple game of dominoes, the ability to connect with other attorneys and legal professionals who share one's background builds a sense of community, mentorship and fraternity that would be lost without such an organization. GHBA, like other bar associations, serves not through the exclusion of others, but through the inclusion of a wide array of people, beliefs and ideologies. The GHBA is not only for those of a certain lineage or background, but for all those who are brought together in one way or another by Hispanic culture and people. Just like the Hispanic population of the United States, the membership of the GHBA spans all parties, races, religions and creeds, and what makes our organization so special is that we are inclusive of all, without fear of censure or cancellation.

Finally, I believe the most important aspect of the GHBA is that its very existence lends credence to the ideals of this country we call home. Lawyers who are members of the GHBA, like those of any bar association, take an oath to the Constitutions of the State of Georgia and of the United States. Our members stand for the rights and founding principles of this nation, with the perspective that those rights and principles are precarious, and in many instances, were denied to us, our parents and our families in our original homelands. Our members fight for equal justice under law because we understand that such a phrase cannot merely be carved in stone above court buildings but must be the precept we live by every day. If not, we risk this nation devolving into just another country like the ones



de que dichos derechos y principios son frágiles y que, en muchos casos, nos fueron negados, tanto a nosotros como a nuestros padres y familia, en nuestras tierras de origen. Nuestros miembros luchan por la igualdad de justicia bajo la ley, porque entendemos que dicha máxima no puede limitarse a ser una inscripción grabada en piedra sobre la fachada de los tribunales, sino que debe convertirse en el precepto que rijan nuestra vida cotidiana. De no ser así, corremos el riesgo de que esta nación vuelva a convertirse en un país cualquiera, semejante a aquellos de los que huyeron nuestras familias; lugares donde el dominio de los hombres y de los ejércitos se sitúa por encima de cualquier ley o derecho natural.

Los miembros de la GHBA defienden los principios más fundamentales de nuestra república, la cual celebra sus 250 años en este mundo. Ya sea que sus antepasados hayan llegado a esta gran nación a bordo del Mayflower o por el Mariel, a través de Ellis Island o por la frontera suroeste, entendemos que todos los hombres y mujeres han sido creados iguales y dotados por su creador de ciertos derechos inalienables. Es, por tanto, nuestro deber, no solo como abogados, sino como estadounidenses, proteger la vida, la libertad y la búsqueda de la felicidad para todos; incluidas esas masas hacinadas que anhelan respirar en libertad.

En resumen, el hecho de que existan asociaciones de abogados hispanos a lo largo y ancho de esta nación constituye un testimonio de la verdadera grandeza de Estados Unidos. Independientemente de su origen o procedencia, los hombres y mujeres que persiguen el sueño americano pueden llegar a esta nación y esforzarse por hacerlo realidad. No obstante, este sueño americano no debería quedar indebidamente relegado al mero logro de ciertos hitos económicos. El verdadero sueño americano, ese por el que todos nos esforzamos, puede resumirse en esta sencilla premisa: que dejaremos a nuestros hijos, a nuestros vecinos y a nuestra sociedad un mundo mejor que aquel que heredamos. Que preservaremos para este mundo, y para todos aquellos, a lo largo y ancho del globo, que alcanzan la vista desde los valles de la miseria y la mediocridad, esa ciudad resplandeciente sobre una colina, donde todo es posible para quienes se atreven a soñar. YLD

*Victor Noriega es un asociado en Troutman Pepper Locke en Atlanta.*

our families fled, where the rule of men and armies is above any law or natural rights.

The members of the GHBA uphold the most basic tenets of our republic, which celebrates its 250th year on this Earth. Whether your ancestors arrived in this great nation through the Mayflower or the Mariel, through Ellis Island or the southwest border, we understand that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, and it is our duty not only as lawyers, but as Americans, to protect the lives, liberties and the pursuits of happiness for all, including those huddled masses who yearn to breathe free.

In short, the fact that there are Hispanic bar associations across this nation is a testament to America's true greatness. Regardless of origin or background, men and women who seek the American dream can come to this nation and strive to achieve it. However, this American dream should not be unduly relegated to the mere achievement of certain economic milestones. The true American dream that we all strive for can be summarized by this simple proposition: that we will leave for our children, our neighbors and our society, a better world than the one we inherited. That we will preserve for this world, and for all those around the globe gazing up from the valleys of misery and mediocrity, that shining city on a hill, where anything is possible for those who dare dream. YLD

*Victor Noriega is an associate at Troutman Pepper Locke in Atlanta.*

**For more information about the Georgia Hispanic Bar Association, visit [www.georgiahispanicbar.org](http://www.georgiahispanicbar.org).**

# Ownership Shapes Legacy: A First-Generation Latino Perspective on Copyright



**Brian  
Jaramillo**

**I did not grow up understanding institutional prestige.** As a first-generation Latino student, my family believed that education was education, and a law degree was simply a law degree. Rankings, networks and institutional signaling were never part of the conversation in our household. The focus was stability, and the goal was security. This piece reflects on how that mindset shapes my understanding of copyright law, and why ownership is especially critical for first-generation Latino creators and the lawyers who advise them.

I graduated college early through dual enrollment and chose the most affordable path—taking classes locally, staying home, working and saving. Every decision I made was strategic with the information I had, and prestige was never a part of the equation. Only later did I begin to understand how institutions signal opportunity and that effort alone does not always determine access.

Long before I understood institutions, however, I understood responsibility. At seven years old, I was translating for my parents in adult spaces. I sat at real estate closings when my parents began investing in properties, where I saw names on deeds and helped build equity. These early experiences shaped my understanding of ownership in a tangible way and showed me how it could influence a family's long-term stability.

What I did not understand then was that ownership in creative industries functions the same way. In law school, studying copyright, I began to see how legal frameworks determine who captures the value of creativity. Copyright governs who controls, licenses and profits from creative works, who builds equity from culture, and increasingly, who is recognized as the author of that culture in the first place.<sup>1</sup>



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Questions about authorship and ownership are becoming more complex as artificial intelligence plays a growing role in creative production. On March 2, 2026, the Supreme Court declined to review *Thaler v. Perlmutter*,<sup>2</sup> a case addressing whether works generated entirely by artificial intelligence can qualify for copyright protection.

The dispute began when computer scientist Stephen Thaler attempted to register a visual work created by an artificial intelligence system he developed called the Creativity Machine. When Thaler applied for copyright registration with the U.S. Copyright Office, he listed the AI system itself as the author.

The Copyright Office rejected the application, stating that copyright protection requires human authorship. Thaler challenged the decision in federal court, but both the district court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit upheld the agency's determination that human authorship is a fundamental requirement under current copyright law. When the Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal, the lower court's decision remained in place. The Supreme Court's denial of review does not resolve the broader policy debate surrounding artificial intelligence and creative ownership. It does, however, reinforce a foundational principle of existing copyright law. Under current law, authorship must

originate from a human creator—but who is positioned to understand, protect and negotiate that ownership in practice is a complex question despite how simple it may appear.

The complexity of copyright matters because access to knowledge is not evenly distributed. Latinos make up roughly 19% of the U.S. population, yet only about 5% to 6% of attorneys identify as Latino.<sup>3</sup> We do not have precise numbers for how many of those attorneys practice intellectual property or entertainment law, but it is a small subset within an already underrepresented group.

At the same time, Latino cultural influence in music continues to expand. In 2026, Bad Bunny won Album of the Year at the Grammy Awards for *Debí Tirar Más Fotos*<sup>4</sup> and headlined Super Bowl LX a week later. Additionally, Karol G became the first Latina artist to headline Coachella in its 27 years, reflecting a broader shift toward the inclusion of Latin artists in mainstream music. These were historic milestones for Latino visibility on some of the largest stages in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Representation in decision-making rooms matters because perspective shapes negotiation. For young lawyers advising creators, this means understanding how copyright is structured in practice. Distinctions between masters and publishing rights, as well as the scope of grant-of-rights provisions, can determine who retains long-term

control and economic benefit. Ensuring that clients fully understand these terms before signing is critical. Lawyers, executives and advisors structure the agreements that determine who owns masters, publishing rights and creative control decades into the future. Without access to that knowledge, long-term value can shift quietly.

At 18, I did not understand institutional leverage or intellectual property ownership. I was focused on building stability for my family. Many emerging artists from first-generation or immigrant households are navigating similar realities. Intellectual property law is complex. Without education or informed counsel, it is easy to misunderstand what is being given away. As Latino influence in creative industries grows, the next frontier is not just visibility. It is ownership, authorship and legal representation.

My story is still unfolding. The lessons about institutions, access and ownership have come gradually. I hope to help guide the next generation of young Latino students and creators to understand earlier what I learned over time: visibility matters, but ownership creates legacy. The more active Latino voices present in the rooms where copyrights are negotiated and contracts are drafted, the more balanced the future of creative industries becomes. For young lawyers advising creators, this means paying close attention to grant of right provisions, understanding the distinction between ownership interests and ensuring that clients understand the long-term implications of what they are signing. <sup>YLD</sup>

*Brian Jaramillo received his J.D. from Atlanta's John Marshall Law School in 2026.*

## Endnotes

1. U.S. Copyright Office, *What Is Copyright?*, <https://www.copyright.gov/what-is-copyright/>.
2. *Thaler v. Perlmutter*, No. 22-1564 (D.C. Cir. 2024), cert. denied (U.S. 2026).
3. American Bar Association, *Lawyer Demographics*, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young\\_lawyers/about/initiatives/men-of-color/lawyer-demographics/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/about/initiatives/men-of-color/lawyer-demographics/) (last visited March 24, 2026).
4. *Bad Bunny Wins Album of the Year for "Debi Tirar Más Fotos" at the 2026 Grammys*, *The Guardian* (Feb. 1, 2026), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2026/feb/01/grammy-awards-2026-winners>.
5. *Karol G Makes History as First-Ever Latina to Headline Coachella*, *People* (Apr. 2026), <https://people.com/coachella-2026-karol-g-makes-history-as-first-ever-latina-to-headline-11948253>.

# Save the Date!

## 2026-27 YLD MEETINGS

### FALL MEETING

Oct. 15–18, 2026

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa  
Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

### SPRING MEETING

March 4–7, 2027

Fairmont El San Juan Hotel  
Carolina, Puerto Rico

### MIDYEAR MEETING

Jan. 14–16, 2027

Omni Hotel at the Battery Atlanta  
Atlanta, Georgia

### ANNUAL MEETING

June 10–13, 2027

Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center  
Kissimmee, Florida

# Pilar Lleras-Archila: Interpreter, Immigrant and Advocate



**Kindall  
Browning-Rickle**

**Interpreter. Immigrant. Advocate** for the Spanish speaking communities of Middle and South Georgia. That is Pilar Lleras-Archila.

Born in Colombia, Lleras-Archila immigrated to the United States with her husband at the age of 18. When she moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, on March 3, 1979, Lleras-Archila did not speak any English. She had a limited ability to read English thanks to her education in Colombia.

A few weeks after arriving in Minnesota, Lleras-Archila went to the grocery store with her husband. When she went to pay the clerk what she owed, she did not understand the clerk and could not figure out how much to pay. This incident left her with a deep desire to learn English. So, as any reasonable person would do, she started watching daytime soap operas. Her favorite was “As the World Turns.” Through many episodes and untold television drama, Lleras-Archila taught herself English. Her watching habits paid off and she was fluent in English by December 1979.

Lleras-Archila believes that learning a new language is one task but to speak a second language takes confidence. “You can understand a language, but you cannot speak it, speaking it comes with confidence.”

Lleras-Archila and her family moved to Dublin, Georgia, in 1996 where she began teaching English as a second language. When planning her lessons, she made sure to include the importance of American culture, because culture is an integral part of learning any language.

Lleras-Archila met now District Attorney Harold McClendon at her church in Dublin, and he asked her to come to court with him one day because he needed an interpreter. Her first appearance was in front

of Judge Townsend in the Dublin Judicial Circuit. Townsend was impressed with her language skills and encouraged her to become a certified interpreter.

The Georgia Commission on Interpreters is the regulating body for certified interpreters in Georgia. To become an interpreter, one has to take a written test and then pass a three-part certification test, which can be difficult.

After becoming a certified interpreter in 2008, Lleras-Archila began her career working as a courtroom interpreter. She also works as a medical interpreter, going to doctors’ offices and hospitals when needed. Lleras-Archila has been an interpreter in almost every kind of case imaginable including divorces, depositions, child custody, misdemeanors, felonies and federal cases. Her favorite cases to interpret are adoptions, because she gets to see happy families come to the courthouse.

Lleras-Archila practices simultaneous translation, where she speaks as the client is speaking so she does not miss anything. She thinks that judges and attorneys should take time to recognize that interpreters are just a voice in the courtroom. Some judges struggle to understand that it is the client asking questions of the court, not the interpreter. There are also some questions that tend to trip up some Spanish-speaking clients like, “Are you an American?” Some of her clients are from Central or South America and answer yes, because they identify as American. The question, “Are you a United States citizen?” is much clearer and easier for clients to understand.

Being an interpreter in Middle and South Georgia requires a lot of travel for Lleras-Archila. She works in Athens, Augusta, Brunswick, Cordele, McDonough,



PHOTO COURTESY OF PILAR LLERAS-ARCHILA

Pilar Lleras-Archila, who is originally from Colombia and immigrated to the United States in 1979, has worked as a certified court interpreter in Georgia since 2008.

Middle Georgia and Savannah. Lleras-Archila’s husband, Jose, is an architect by trade but has also started interpreting. This allows them both flexibility in that they can be in two courtrooms at once.

As a child, Lleras-Archila thought she wanted to be a nun because they help people. In becoming an interpreter, she has found a career that is fulfilling and allows her to help people every day. YLD

*Kindall Browning-Rickle is an attorney at Daniels Law LLC in Eastman.*

# A Resolution Urging Law Students to Consider State Government



**Cameron Keen**

**In January, I started a new position as** general counsel to the Georgia State Senate president pro tempore. Before starting this job, I worked at a great law firm with incredible colleagues, but I was looking for a change and had an interest in exploring state government. I only loosely knew what pro tempore meant (and I had to triple check how to spell it before submitting my application), but my gut told me applying would be worth the risk. My gut was right. It's been one of the most fun jobs I've ever had.

In short, I provide legal and policy advice to the Georgia State Senate leadership. Every day is different, and my to-do list is usually tossed aside before my second cup of coffee (around 9 a.m.). Like any legal job, this job can be stressful, especially during the legislative session, but it is extremely rewarding.

Although I'm still learning the ropes, in just five months here I have learned countless lessons, met incredible people and grown as a lawyer in ways I could not have imagined.

So, to law students and young lawyers everywhere, here are just a few of the many benefits I have experienced while working in state government:

## **Almost every office is lean-staffed, and sitting on the sidelines is not an option.**

State government is the perfect place for people who want to both handle complex issues and get their hands dirty by doing real work. Because there are few staffers tasked with handling countless projects, there is a real opportunity to take the lead, assist in developing meaningful legislation and advise elected officials on critical issues. Ev-



eryone is busy, particularly during session. The upside of this is with hard work and extensive preparation, you can be the go-to lawyer on important and interesting issues.

## **You work with incredible leaders from across the entire state.**

During session, I had dozens of meetings with people whose reputations I had heard of for years. While I wish I had time to ask them a million questions about life and work, many of those meetings lasted 10 minutes with no time for small talk. With the task at hand important and the speed of the legislative process unpredictable, I had the pleasure of jumping right into work with these well-respected leaders who quickly became my friends and colleagues. Additionally, I met legislators and constituents from St. Simons to Dalton, Bainbridge to Hiawassee, and everywhere in between. The fields of work, backgrounds and interests of the people I spoke with were just as varied. From industry experts to concerned citizens, this job reminded me of the importance of seeing people for who they are instead of focusing on their titles.

## **You're not just a lawyer, you're a problem-solver and trusted advisor.**

Although I'm still learning how to best do this, my job as a government general counsel is not to tell people no. Instead, it's to provide thoughtful legal analysis that helps decisionmakers navigate challenges and understand their options. I'm also forced to solve problems, often very quickly, to reach the best result possible amidst many competing interests. This may look like bringing people who disagree to the table, suggesting creative routes to get a piece of legislation over the finish line or educating myself on a policy area I've never heard of. This job also requires a high degree of precision and thoughtfulness in what used to be mindless social interactions—you learn quickly that people love to quote what “the lawyer” said.

## **Your work is immensely important and tangibly helpful.**

The state government cannot do everything, but it can do a lot. As a state government lawyer, you get to see this firsthand.

► SEE RESOLUTION, PAGE 29

# The Last Call: My Boss' Death Taught Me About Living



**Forrest  
Lind III**

**I hope this story inspires you to think** about not only your clients and career, but your real life too.

## The Call

"We have a lot to get through by the end of the year, let's talk about it on Monday. For now, get some rest over the weekend." When Monday came, my boss "M" was gone and those were the last words I ever heard from him. The last words of a partner some warned me would be "prickly," "difficult" or "tough" to work for when I joined years ago. In a firm of more than 1,300 attorneys, I worked as a two-man niche finance team with M, and he passed on the morning of two massive transactions that had to close that day. M's passing and the struggle of maintaining an equity partner's practice during the busiest time of the year by myself showed me not only the significance of our careers as attorneys to our clients, but also how important it is to live a life beyond that career.

## What Do You Want?

If you are good at your job, success can fool you into feeling comfortable or, perhaps worse, complacent. Whether you are a niche finance attorney, a veteran civil litigator, a prosecutor or a revered defense attorney, you are not immune to this. Life has a way of shaking you out of that to teach a lesson, and it can be a creative teacher. Does that mean we need to always be alert, anxious of the imminent 100-mile-per-hour curveball? No, but it means you need to think about what you want out of your life both inside and outside the firm. Inside

the firm that means you need to be aware of how significant you are to your clients and your practice area. Outside the firm can be a much bigger ordeal.

## Billable Hours on Borrowed Time

When M died, I had two massive deals in front of me, and was missing a critical, complex piece of the transaction that M handled solely, and largely in secrecy. In a matter of hours I had to figure out how to craft that piece. Almost as a parting gift, M had started a draft on our system that I used to craft the missing pieces. Another partner that, by his own words, owed me a favor stepped in to sign the documents I crafted. For the deluge of deals that had to get done by year's end, I pushed myself harder than I ever had. There was enough deal volume for three people. Laws like the One Big Beautiful Bill Act were taking effect and raising novel questions I would have gone to M to get the answers for. Instead, I worked around the clock and answered the tough questions myself. Had I quit, M's clients would not have been able to close their deals by year end. Doing three people's jobs at once was physically and mentally exhausting. However, had I quit, the clients and their counterparties would have been lost. I say this not to aggrandize myself, but to remind lawyers, young and old, how significant your work is to the clients. If you ever feel like you are just moving paper, think about what the clients would do if you did not. Given M's health and relatively young age, please also have a plan for your clients' work if you do not get up tomorrow.

## Think About You

Your importance to your clients can make life beyond the profession tough, especially when you enjoy being a lawyer. The job will take all the time you want to throw at it,

and will sometimes even reward the contribution. Success in our profession can yield recognition, purpose, compensation and other positive reinforcement. But we owe ourselves more than good jobs. M passed at a relatively young age and in good health. He was a laser-sharp finance attorney, an industry thought leader and a big law decision maker. Yet, memories of coworkers and the industry that looked up to him will fade. He will be remembered by his family for a much longer time, and they will likely think more about his role as a father, husband, churchgoer, sportsman and a smiling face. Ask yourself, beyond success as a lawyer, what do you enjoy in life? What makes you smile, what gives you purpose and what makes you feel like you?

## Live

After months of shouldering M's work, I asked myself those same questions. My family, church and automotive hobby were my answers. I was a mechanic before law school and carried a piece of that career when I entered the legal profession many years ago. I often joked that my legal career turned my previous job into my hobby. When I joined my now-previous firm, I entirely dedicated myself to the legal profession. In doing so, I gave up a big part of life that I enjoyed and what made me, well, me. It took pushing myself beyond sustainable limits to realize that I needed to go back to a balanced life. Taking some time to relax, turn wrenches and see family cemented this realization for me. As luck would have it, at the same time my early-career mentors reached out with a great deal. I now have a job that allows me to do all the things that I enjoy while working with people I love and diligently representing my clients.

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*Forrest Lind III is a finance attorney at Brodnan & Budd, LLC, in Atlanta, Georgia.*



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**Forsyth County Juvenile  
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**Small Firm**  
Durham Bray Law Firm

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*Total points*

**Page Perry**  
*Points per person*

The Georgia Legal Food Frenzy is an effort of the Office of the Attorney General, the State Bar of Georgia, the YLD and Feeding Georgia, a statewide network of regional food banks.



► RESOLUTION, FROM PAGE 27

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of this job is speaking directly with constituents, helping them solve problems and sometimes even developing legislation that may improve their daily lives. Additionally, the network you cultivate while working in a state general assembly, agency or court is unmatched. This network not only benefits you, it also allows you to better serve others.

**The skills you learn in state government can transfer to any opportunity you may seek down the road.**

If you ever decide to pivot to private practice, start a company, become a lobbyist or teach, the skills you learn in state government will only make you more competitive and better equipped to do the job. Employers recognize this. Virtually all state government legal positions require people skills, multitasking in high-pressure environments, delivering excellent work quickly and working within budget constraints. These lessons are invaluable and will uniquely prepare you for wherever your career takes you.

**You don't have to bill hours.**

This one speaks for itself.

Having now worked in big law and in state government, I can confidently say that the reward of doing this kind of work far outweighs the paycheck and prestige of all the other jobs you hear about in law school. If you are interested in learning more about state government opportunities, please reach out, or visit the Team Georgia Careers website at [careers.georgia.gov](https://careers.georgia.gov). YLD

Cameron Keen is general counsel to the Georgia State Senate president pro tempore in Atlanta, Georgia.



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