

JESSA Y. MIRTLE

(b)(6)

PROFESSIONAL

Admitted: Connecticut & Massachusetts (2010), Rhode Island (2011)

Member: Connecticut Assoc. of Boards of Education (CABE); National Council of School Board Attorneys (COSA); Connecticut Bar Association

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

Connecticut State Department of Education, Hartford, CT

Legal Director, Division of Legal and Governmental Affairs, 2019 through present

Overview

- General Counsel and advisor to the Connecticut Commissioner of Education, Connecticut State Department of Education and State Board of Education.
- Manage a team of attorneys responsible for legal work product and advice pertaining to all aspects of education and school operations, including the Connecticut education-related response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Oversee legal advice provided to all departments of the Connecticut State Department of Education, on topics including but not limited to school desegregation and choice programs; special education; grant funding; employment law and nondiscrimination; teacher certification; and student nutrition.
- Work closely with and have developed strong relationships with key members of other Connecticut state entities, such as the Office of the Governor, Office of Policy and Management (OPM), State Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC).
- Engage management and leadership strategies to improve speed, accuracy, and consistency of advice within the division and agency, including but not limited to procuring and designing an online legal file management software to create efficiencies and improve outcomes.
- Institute supervisory best practices within division, including regular 1:1 meetings with staff and weekly team meetings, for increased communication and teamwork within division.

Pandemic Response

- Provide legal advice regarding Connecticut's education-related response to the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring rapid actionable advice to support state leadership emergency decision-making.
- Principal team member working on drafting and review of all Connecticut COVID-19 school guidance, including but not limited to the Connecticut State Department of Education's operative school reopening guidance document, *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together*.
- Active member of *Connecticut COVID-19 Education Reopening Rules Subcommittee*, with members from the State Department of Public Health, and stakeholders such as superintendents, pediatricians, and local public health officials. Participate in weekly or bi-weekly meetings to determine strategy and decision points for pandemic response.

- Coordinate input towards COVID-19 guidance from diverse stakeholders, including but not limited to school administrators, local government leaders, student and family advocates, and staff and educators.
- Directly manage and draft all education-related COVID-19 Executive Orders with review from the General Counsel for the Office of the Governor.
- Legal liaison working in conjunction with Office of the Attorney General to successfully defend to a challenge to the State's authority to require universal mask use in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (*CT Freedom Alliance, LLC, et al. vs. State of Connecticut*).
- Participate as part of an established expert panel on education and COVID-19 in webinars and roundtables weekly with an audience of multiple communities impacted by the pandemic, including one with school leaders and statewide local public health officials that regularly includes over 600 participants.

Litigation

- Coordinate strategy and response to major education-related litigation against the Connecticut State Department of Education and Connecticut State Board of Education as liaison to the Connecticut Office of the Attorney General.
- Key participant on team representing the State with the Office of the Attorney General and Office of the Governor in the *Sheff v. O'Neill* litigation, the nationally recognized desegregation lawsuit. Part of a team of lawyers that successfully negotiated a stipulated agreement expanding access for Hartford students to diverse magnet schools, establishing a plan for sustaining the program, and resulting in the withdrawal of a federal lawsuit challenging the *Sheff* student choice program placement system (*Robinson v. Wentzell*).

Legislative

- Draft, analyze and comment on proposed legislation, including working with our legislative liaison to meet with state leaders and legislators for input towards drafting legislative proposals consistent with the intent of multiple parties.
- Coordinate and staff the State Board of Education *Legislative and Policy Development Committee*.

Office of Faculty and Staff Labor Relations, University of Connecticut (UCONN), Storrs, CT

Senior Labor Relations Associate/Labor & Employment Attorney, 2019

Labor Relations Associate/Labor & Employment Attorney, 2015 through 2018

- Advised the University on labor relations issues, including participation in the administration and negotiation of collective bargaining agreements.
- Focus areas included the professional employee union (UCPEA-AFT), the maintenance and service employee union (AFL-CIO), and the graduate employee union (GEU).
- Participated as team member with a group of staff holding various positions at UConn, including Deans, Vice Presidents, and Vice Provosts, working toward collaborative and effective negotiation of collective bargaining agreements. Drafted multiple contractual proposals, and ultimately sections of contractual language, to bring together input from a cross-section of stakeholders with sometimes competing interests.

- Independently handled processing and resolution of employee disciplinary actions, grievances and arbitrations, including but not limited to drafting grievance decisions and conducting investigations.
- Provided legal analysis and advised leadership on employment law matters.
- Choreographed each step of decision-making process for managers having personnel challenges with employees they supervised, developing indirect experience with a broad range of staff management issues.
- Trained and advised managers on employee supervision and performance, and on making decisions consistent with law and policy, including under the FMLA and ADA.
- Worked closely with the UCONN Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) to ensure any contemplated employment actions or collective bargaining provisions were consistent with the UConn and OIE mission to foster a diverse and inclusive working environment and ensure compliance with the University's non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and related laws.
- Acted as Labor Relations representative on the UConn Emergency Operations Team to help develop UConn's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and participated in regular emergency response preparation meetings.

Office of the Corporation Counsel, Waterbury, CT

Staff Attorney, 2012 through 2015

- Oversaw and was sole attorney handling large municipal workers' compensation legal program, with a workload that was previously handled by multiple outside counsel firms. Typically over 200 cases assigned.
- Defended the City in administrative proceedings, taking depositions, negotiating settlements, and providing legal advice on other employment-related concerns.
- Developed close working relationships both within the City municipal staff, but also with opposing legal counsel, outside counsel, and Commissioners.
- Engaged in partial oversight of the third party administrator (TPA) contracted to process workers' compensation claims, including providing preventative advice on claims prior to litigation.
- Managed student intern program, including developing supervisory standard operating procedures (SOPs) for onboarding, training, task assignment and oversight, and exit interviews for interns in high school, college, and law school.

The State of Connecticut Appellate Court, Hartford, CT

Judicial Clerk for Judge Bethany J. Alvord, 2010 through 2011

- Selected for prestigious clerkship at Connecticut Appellate Court. Performed case-related legal research, and drafted court opinions on civil and criminal appeals. Drafted legal memoranda on motions in pending appeals.

PRO BONO

UConn Masters in Public Administration Program, Hartford, CT

Panelist and Presenter, 2019 through present

- Invited as repeat panelist and presenter for classes such as “Theory and Management of Public Organizations” to discuss topics including leadership, decision-making, creating healthy and productive public workplaces, solving organizational problems, managing risk, etc.

New England Science and Sailing (NESS), Stonington, CT

Human Resources Committee Member, Advisor, 2017 through 2019

- Performed advisory role on Board of Trustees Human Resources Committee for NESS, an educational non-profit that provides STEM-based education programs via marine experiential learning for students.

OTHER SELECTED EXPERIENCE, LEGAL CLERKSHIPS, and INTERNSHIPS

Robinson & Cole, LLC, Hartford, CT

Health Law Intern, 2009 through 2010

Researched and drafted memoranda of law relating to transactional and regulatory health law issues. Revised HIPAA—a Guide to Health Care Privacy and Security Law, published by Aspen Publishers.

Sweeney & Griffen, LLC, New Britain, CT

Law Clerk, 2009- 2010

Researched and drafted memoranda of law relating to contract enforcement and election statutes. Indexed and reviewed discovery documents in preparation for deposition and trial.

Donovan Hatem, LLC, Boston, MA

Law Clerk, Summer 2009

Researched and drafted memoranda of law relating to construction disputes, zoning, statutory interpretation, damages liability, contractual claims and design professional law. Updated Massachusetts section of the Construction Lien and Bond Law publication.

Connecticut Superior Court, New Britain, CT

Judicial Clerk, 2009

Prepared chambers for all phases of civil litigation, including trial, conferences and short-calendar motions practice.

Budlong & Barrett, LLC, Hartford, CT

Law Clerk, 2008

Researched and drafted memoranda of law relating to dissolution of marriage, trusts and estates, and property law.

The Deaton Law Firm, Providence, RI

Office Manager and Litigation Paralegal, 2006-2007

Managed small legal office and provided paralegal support for busy plaintiff-side asbestos litigation firm.

EDUCATION

The University of Connecticut School of Law (UCONN), Hartford, CT

Juris Doctor with Honors, 2010

Honors: CALI Awards for Excellence in Class Performance (highest grade in class) for Constitutional Law, Moot Court, and Right to Privacy Law

Journal: Connecticut Insurance Law Journal - Notes and Comments Editor

Research Study: Same Sex Marriage and Health Insurance

Activities: Student Animal Defense League, Vice-President; Women Law Students' Association, Mentor; Connecticut Bar Assoc. Young Lawyers Section

Trinity College, Hartford, CT

Bachelor of Liberal Arts with Honors in Sociology, 2005

Honors: Departmental Award for Excellence in Sociological Studies, Long Walk Scholar

Thesis: Topic - The Influence of Public Interest Groups on Sex Education Policies;
Title – The Stigmatization of Sex: The Battle over Sex Education in the United States

Activities: Captain, Women's Rugby Team; Manager, Underground Coffeehouse

CERTIFICATIONS

Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations: *Certificate in Labor Relations for Contract Administration, 2016*

FEMA: ICS for Higher Education and National Incident Management System (NIMS), 2018