



UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI  
SCHOOL OF LAW

CENTER for ETHICS  
& PUBLIC SERVICE

# SPRING SPOTLIGHT



February 2026

The latest news and updates from the Center for Ethics & Public Service



As the Center for Ethics and Public Service (CEPS) celebrates its 30th anniversary, it stands as a powerful testament to the lasting impact of ethical leadership in law and public service. For three decades, CEPS has inspired students, practitioners, and scholars to wrestle with hard questions, engage deeply with the public good, and lead with integrity and purpose. Through vibrant dialogue, hands-on public interest experiences, and influential scholarship, CEPS has shaped generations of principled leaders who carry its values into courtrooms, classrooms, and communities.

This milestone year will be celebrated at CEPS's inaugural H.T. Smith Symposium on Civil Rights in Florida, Wednesday, February 18th, featuring the Andrew D. Fredman Friend of the Center Awards, a fitting tribute to a legacy that continues to strengthen justice, civic responsibility, and moral courage.

# Meet the Interns



**Ellie Majhess**

Legal Profession Program, 1L

Ellie grew up in Boca Raton, Florida, and earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Florida, where she majored in Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience and minored in Classical Studies. She is currently a first-year, first generation law student with aspirations to pursue a career in commercial litigation. Ellie is proud to serve as an intern in the Legal Profession Program.

**Jackqueline Goggins**

Legal Profession Program, 1L

Jackqueline grew up outside of Detroit, Michigan, but now calls Miami home. She is a first-year law student and graduated from the University of Miami in 2023 with a double major in Psychology and History with minors in Public Health and Biology. Before law school, she was an elementary public school teacher for English language learners and special education. Jackqueline is an intern in the Legal Profession Program and the 1L representative for Miami Law Women.



**Hanna Murphy**

Community Equity Lab, 1L

Hanna grew up in Connecticut before attending Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. She graduated magna cum laude as a major in Political Science and minor in Creative Writing. Between graduation in 2022 and beginning law school in 2025, she spent three years working as a litigation paralegal at Cravath, Swaine & Moore in New York City. Hanna enjoyed her time working in litigation and hopes to continue doing so after law school. She is excited to join the Community Equity Lab to combine her love of writing with current CEPS community engagement.





**Emma Eckenhausen**

Community Equity Lab, 1L

Emma is a first-generation American raised in Denver, Colorado. She is a first-year law student and earned her B.A. in Political Science from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2023. Prior to law school, she worked in government relations at a Denver-based lobbying firm and served as Campaign Coordinator for No on 309, an opposition campaign to a proposed Denver ordinance that threatened the livelihoods of hundreds of workers, particularly those from lower-socioeconomic communities. Emma is currently a spring 1L Intern in the Community Equity Lab.



**Ian Hughes**

Black Church Program, 1L

Ian Hughes is a 1L at the University of Miami School of Law. Raised in Davie, Florida, he has always been interested in civics, with experience volunteering in political, civil rights, and community organizations. He earned his bachelor's degree at Florida State University, graduating in 2023. He then spent two years working as Special Assistant to the CEO at The Children's Movement of Florida, a legislative advocacy organization focused on expanding access to early childhood education, healthcare, and systemic support for parents and educators. He wants to work in public interest, particularly environmental law, and is excited to join CEPS and contribute to the work of the Black Church Program.



**Kelsey Mira**

Black Church Program 1L

Kelsey Mira grew up in Miami, Florida. She studied Biochemistry and STEM Education at Florida State University, graduating magna cum laude in 2023. Kelsey is involved with other UM Law organizations including HOPE, OUTLaw, and MVLSA, and she intends to pursue environmental or maritime law. She is excited to work with the Black Church Program and hopes to boost youth education and improve environmental impacts in the community.





**Andrew Navarro**

Black Church Program, 1L

Andrew is a first-year law student who graduated summa cum laude from Kansas State University with a B.A. in Political Science and International Studies in 2025. Born in Miami and raised in Kansas, Andrew is honored to work with CEPS this semester to better understand community concerns and develop his advocacy skills on behalf of those whose voices are often unheard. This past summer, he worked with Catholic Charities in Kansas City, Kansas, at a nonprofit immigration firm. Andrew intends to pursue a career in civil and human rights following law school.



**Keilly Miranda Torres**

Legal Profession Program, 1L

Keilly is a first-year law student from Miami, Florida. She graduated summa cum laude from Florida State University in 2024 with a B.S. in Political Science and a minor in Communications. Following graduation, she worked with the Family and Immigration Rights Center, where she managed intern projects, coordinated case referrals, and supported organizational operations. Keilly is currently an 1L intern in the Legal Profession Program with CEPS and serves as a student ambassador. She is also a member of the International Refugee Assistance Program and the Public Interest Network. In her free time, Keilly enjoys going to the gym, reading, spending time with friends and family, and going to football games.



**Sophie Lakin**

Community Equity Lab, 1L

Sophie is a 1L from Atlanta, Georgia, and graduated magna cum laude from Tulane University with a B.A. in Political Science and a minor in Spanish and Latin American studies. In her free time, she enjoys baking, trying new restaurants, and spending time with her friends and family.





**Gabriela Alvarez,**  
Black Church Program, 1L

Gabriela is a 1L law student born and raised in Miami, Florida. She graduated magna cum laude from Mount Holyoke College with a B.A. in Political Science and is a Posse Alum. Gabriela is passionate about housing and public service and is excited to serve as a CEPS intern this year.



**Julia Montejo**

Community Equity Lab, 1L

Julia is a formerly undocumented immigrant from Guatemala interested in immigrant rights and racial justice work. She began her career in 2018 as a community organizer at the Miami-Dade interfaith organization, People Acting for Community Together, where she spearheaded an immigrant rights campaign. Julia also served as development coordinator for the binational migrant rights organization, Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc., from 2021 to 2022, working on grant proposals, reporting compliance, and small donor relations for a multimillion dollar portfolio. After almost five years in nonprofit work, Julia joined the Y-Combinator backed startup, Extern, where she managed early career development programs for clients like PwC, the National Geographic Society, and the Home Depot. A Cornell University alumna, she lived in Jupiter, Florida, with her husband and dog prior to law school. She will be returning to her alma mater this summer as an intern at the Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide.



# Spring 2026 Events

**H.T. Smith Symposium on Civil Rights in Florida  
CEPS 30th Anniversary Celebration and Andrew  
D. Fredman Friend of the Center Awards**

*Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 5-8 PM*

**Lawyers in Leadership Awards  
Presentation and Discussion**

*Tuesday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6-7:30 PM*

**CEPS Lunch & Learn:  
Law Firm Management**

*Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 12:15- 1:30 PM*

***RSVP required for each event***



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# The Inaugural H.T. Smith Symposium on Civil Rights in Florida

The Center for Ethics and Public Service (CEPS) will host the Inaugural H.T. Smith Symposium on Civil Rights in Florida on February 18, 2026, convening scholars, practitioners, and community leaders to examine the nexus between activists and advocates at a moment when civil rights protections are increasingly deprioritized.

The symposium honors H.T. Smith, a UM alumnus and trustee, and one of Florida's most influential civil rights lawyers, whose career embodies the fusion of principled advocacy and direct action. Following his service as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army in Vietnam, he was the fourth African American graduate of the University of Miami School of Law. For more than five decades, H.T. Smith has been a force for justice—breaking barriers as one of the first African Americans to hold key legal positions in Miami-Dade County and earning national recognition as a top trial lawyer.

H.T. Smith's impact extends well beyond the courtroom. He led transformative movements that reshaped South Florida's civic and economic landscape, including the South Florida Coalition for a Free South Africa from 1984 to 1990 and the historic Boycott Miami campaign from 1990 to 1993, which produced lasting economic and educational opportunities for Black communities. His leadership also helped secure equal protection for women, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals under Florida law, and his philanthropic efforts resulted in enduring community institutions such as the NFL Youth Education Town Center in Liberty City. As a legal educator and mentor, H.T. Smith has shaped generations of advocates through his leadership of Florida International University College of Law's nationally ranked Trial Advocacy Program.

It is fitting to recognize and honor H.T. Smith's lifetime of service on the 30th anniversary of CEPS, which has served as an incubator and an accelerator for numerous public service campaigns and initiatives, including clinics, colloquia, interdisciplinary programs, oral histories and documentary films, student reading groups, and summer educational-outreach programs. The event will additionally honor the contributions of the 2026 Andrew D. Fredman Friend of the Center Award recipients.

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# Freedom School Program 2026

Empowering Young Minds in Coconut Grove Village West

Celebrating the Third Year of Freedom School

Building on the powerful momentum of the past two summers, the Freedom School Program is returning in Summer 2026, marking its third year of impact continuing its commitment to educating, empowering, and uplifting young people in Coconut Grove Village West.

**Program Dates: June 15, 2026 – July 24, 2026**

Once again, the program brings together the Center for Ethics and Public Service (CEPS), Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, and the Coconut Grove Ministerial Alliance to create a vibrant, culturally affirming learning environment rooted in community strength and shared purpose.

Over six enriching weeks, Freedom School 2026 will serve as a dynamic hub for learning, creativity, and leadership development. Students will engage in a robust curriculum that integrates Black history, social justice, and civic engagement with STEAM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) and meaningful enrichment activities. This holistic approach is designed to strengthen academic skills, encourage critical thinking, and foster confidence, pride, and cultural awareness.

As the program enters its third year in Village West, its mission remains clear: to ensure students leave not only academically stronger, but also empowered with a deeper sense of identity, purpose, and responsibility to their communities.

Freedom School 2026 continues to demonstrate that when education is grounded in culture and fueled by community partnerships, the impact is lasting and transformative. More details about enrollment and registration will be shared soon. We look forward to another inspiring summer of learning, leadership, and liberation in West Grove.

# Honoring Judge Mark E. Walker 23rd Annual William M. Hoeveler Award Recipient



On October 15, 2025, CEPS proudly honored Judge Mark E. Walker with the 23rd Annual William M. Hoeveler Ethics and Public Service Award, celebrating his outstanding commitment to ethics, justice, and the rule of law. Established in honor of the late Honorable William M. Hoeveler, a revered U.S. District Court Judge and the award's inaugural recipient, the Hoeveler Award recognizes individuals who exemplify integrity, fairness, and dedication to public service.

Judge Hoeveler, who passed away in 2017 at the age of 95, left behind a powerful legacy that continues to inspire the legal community today. Judge Walker, who has served on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida since 2012 and as Chief Judge from 2018 to 2025, has built a distinguished career defined by courage and principle. His decisions have played a vital role in protecting civil liberties, safeguarding voting rights, and upholding the First Amendment, ensuring equal access to justice for all.

The Hoeveler Award Ceremony brought together Judge Walker's family, friends, and colleagues from the bar and bench, along with current and former Miami Law students. Dean Patricia Abril opened the evening with remarks honoring both Judge Hoeveler's enduring influence and Judge Walker's remarkable achievements. Members of the Hoeveler family were in attendance to celebrate this special occasion. The event featured an engaging Q&A discussion session moderated by William M. Hoeveler Fellows Sara Howard of the Legal Profession Program and Emma Rice of the Community Equity Lab, followed by a heartfelt speech from Judge Walker, who reflected on the values that continue to guide his service on the bench and his commitment to ethical leadership in the legal profession.

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## **Lunch and Learn:**

### **A Conversation with Judge Kathleen M. Williams**

Honorable Kathleen M. Williams, U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Florida, shared insights from her distinguished legal career during a candid discussion with students on September 30, 2025. Appointed to the federal bench in 2011, Judge Williams has presided over some of the region's most complex and high-profile cases, drawing on a rare breadth of experience that includes service as a federal prosecutor, private practitioner, and Federal Public Defender.

Judge Williams reflected on the pivotal lessons learned throughout her career. As an Assistant U.S. Attorney, she prosecuted complex cartel cases that underscored the importance of precision and preparation. Her time in private practice at a major international law firm offered perspective on high-stakes corporate defense. However, she described her leadership of the Federal Public Defender's Offices in the Southern and Middle Districts of Florida as the most formative period of her career, shaping her deep commitment to judicial fairness and equal access to justice.

Addressing the challenge of cases involving parties with unequal resources, Judge Williams emphasized the court's responsibility to maintain balance through careful courtroom management and clear judicial reasoning. She noted that transparency in written and oral decisions is essential not only for litigants, but also for sustaining public trust in the judiciary.

Judge Williams also highlighted the Southern District of Florida's unique role as a national testing ground for international and cross-border legal issues. She encouraged students to value preparation, candor, and concise advocacy, and urged them to take advantage of experiential learning opportunities to develop strong litigation and advocacy skills. The event was moderated by Legal Profession Program Fellows Minah Malik and Sara Howard of the Center for Ethics and Public Service.



## **Lunch and Learn: Local Elections and Voting Rights in Florida**

On October 28, 2025, the Center for Ethics and Public Service hosted a Lunch & Learn on local elections and voting rights in Florida with Josh Kaufman and Dariel Gomez of the ACLU of Florida, moderated by Legal Profession Program Fellows Laura Bea and Paris Foy. Kaufman serves as the Statewide Organizer for the ACLU's Let Florida Vote campaign, working to expand and protect ballot access statewide. Gomez, now an organizer with the ACLU of Florida, began his advocacy work in high school by mobilizing his immigrant community in Broward County to help pass the Hollywood Immigration Resolution in 2021 and now focuses on voter education, access, and civic participation in Miami-Dade and across the state.

Kaufman and Gomez discussed voting rights, community organizing, and how law students can play a direct role in protecting local democracy. They explained that voter suppression in Florida often relies on fear and confusion rather than outright denial, as returning citizens are unsure about their eligibility and fear prosecution if they make a mistake. Immigrant and low-income voters face last-minute polling place changes, language barriers, and misleading information about deadlines and ID rules. Organizers respond by working at polling places and in neighborhoods to correct misinformation in real time and train volunteers to intervene early so voters are not discouraged from casting a ballot.

The speakers also addressed structural reform efforts in South Florida and the ACLU's collaboration with CEPS in *GRACE, Inc. v. City of Miami*, which challenges the City's 2023 commission map as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. A reform measure on the November 2025 ballot aimed at limiting future gerrymandering and shifting redistricting power toward the community. As part of the Stronger Miami effort, proposals would expand the City of Miami Commission from five to nine members to secure fairer representation for nearly 500,000 residents. The program concluded with a Q&A on volunteering and integrating legal training with grassroots organizing, leaving students with practical ways to get involved ahead of the November 2025 election.



## **Roundtable Discussion: Current Challenges Facing the Legal Profession**

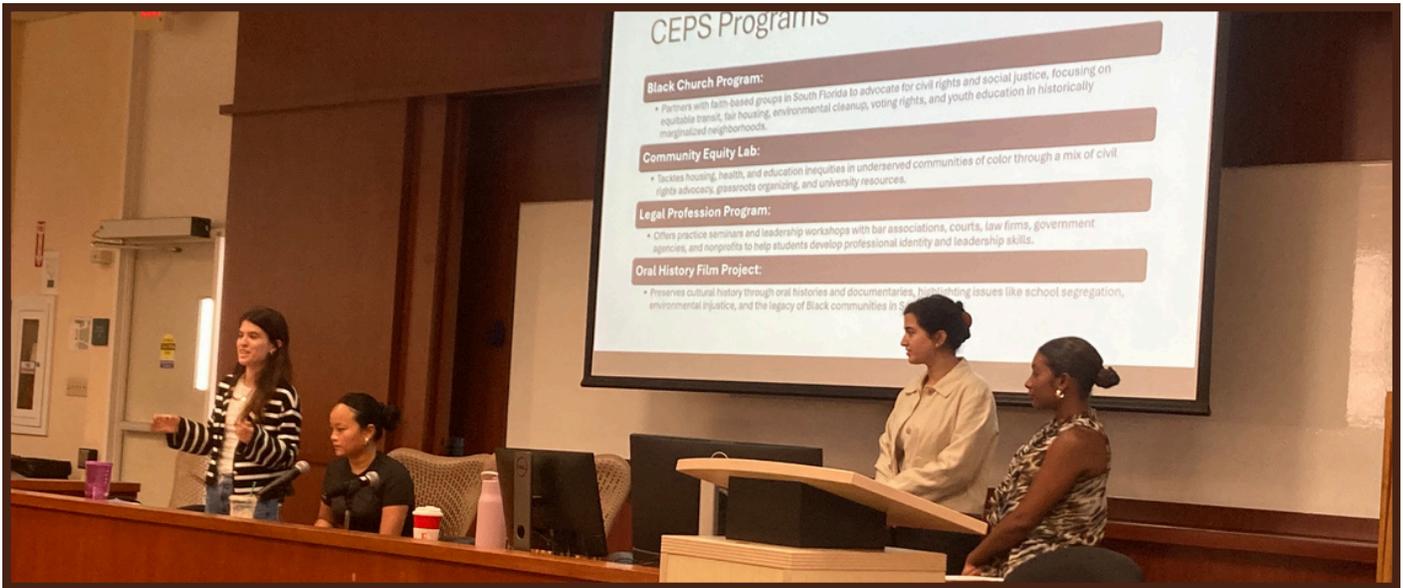
On September 17, 2025, CEPS hosted a roundtable on “Current Challenges Facing the Legal Profession in American Law and Politics,” featuring Professors Charlton Copeland, Caroline Mala Corbine, and Rebecca Sharpless. The event was moderated by Legal Profession Program Fellows Sara Howard and Paris Foy.

The conversation highlighted three themes for early-career lawyers and law students: addressing ethical questions that arise in periods of governmental change; the profession’s growing reliance on courts and litigation; and practical considerations for attorneys pursuing roles in government and public service.

Speakers observed that litigation increasingly serves as a central venue for resolving policy disputes, shaping how attorneys conduct research, advise clients, and evaluate risk. They noted that young lawyers must be prepared to interpret statutes, administrative guidance, and emergency directives simultaneously, often under significant time pressure and public attention. For those considering public-sector careers, panelists emphasized understanding agency procedures, internal deliberative processes, and the practical limits of legal authority within administrative institutions.

The discussion also addressed professional identity. Panelists encouraged students to seek mentorship across practice settings, carefully document legal reasoning, and develop subject-matter competence before pursuing high-visibility roles. Panelists offered clear takeaways on how these developments shape day-to-day practice and professional responsibility, emphasizing preparation, adaptability, and sustained engagement with the ethical dimensions of legal work.

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## Welcome to the Legal Profession

On September 16, 2025 the Center for Ethics and Public Service hosted the 1L Welcome to the Legal Profession event, offering first-year law students an introduction to the structure, values, and expectations of the legal field. The program emphasized the ethical foundations of the profession and encouraged students to begin developing both a professional and personal identity grounded in service, integrity, and responsibility. CEPS faculty, staff, and programs were highlighted as ongoing resources to support students' professional growth and ethical development throughout law school and beyond.

The discussion explored the many roles lawyers play as advocates, counselors, and problem-solvers, often balancing multiple responsibilities in practice. Students were introduced to a wide range of career paths—including litigation, corporate law, intellectual property, and family law—as well as the organizational structure of law firms and legal workplaces. Presenters encouraged students to seek mentorship, remain adaptable, and stay open to evolving career opportunities.

The engaging and supportive session fostered thoughtful questions and candid conversations about the realities of legal practice. The event was led by Legal Profession Program Fellows Minah Malik, Paris Foy, Sara Howard, and Laura Bea, whose insights and experiences helped ground the discussion in both professionalism and practice.





## Community Equity Lab

### U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Complaint Update

The Community Equity Lab (the “Lab”) is continuing to research legal theories, strategies, and solutions to combat the mass eviction and displacement of low-income tenants and homeowners and restore fair housing in Coconut Grove Village West.

In 2024, under the federal Fair Housing Act, the Lab compiled data and information to support a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) investigation of the City of Miami’s policies and practices that lead to systemic housing discrimination. The investigation was initiated on behalf of the Coconut Grove Village West Homeowners and Tenants Association, Inc. (“HOATA”), the Coconut Grove Ministerial Alliance, Inc. (“CGMA”), and Grove Rights and Community Equity, Inc. (“GRACE”), and Dr. Akinshimaya Nnamdi, collectively as Complainants, in collaboration with the legal team from the Community Justice Project (“CJP”).

On September 16, 2025, HUD issued a determination of no reasonable cause relating to the investigation. The basis for the dismissal was a lack of “standing,” however, HUD’s investigative report detailing the investigation does not adequately explain the rationale behind this finding.

As a threshold issue, the absence of an explanation raises questions about the investigative process and regulations applied. The Lab is working with the Complainants and CJP, as well as regional and national coalition of civil rights groups to determine recourse opportunities. This collective effort is helping to identify additional causes of action and opportunities to challenge the systemic housing discrimination and re-segregation.

The Lab is committed to supporting our community partners by promoting equitable housing, government accountability, and the protection of long-standing communities from persistent displacement.





## Good Government Project

The Black Church Program (BCP) launched the creation of a Good Government Project (the “Project”) to strengthen voting rights and promote accountability of elected officials on behalf of CEPS community partners. The Project aims to further equip community members with clear, accurate, and accessible information.

During the fall 2025 semester, the undergraduate and law fellows and interns conducted in-depth research focused on the City of Miami elections. The scope included a thorough review of all thirteen mayoral candidates, as well as a detailed analysis of the proposed charter amendment referendums. After gathering and evaluating this information, the students compiled their findings into a user-friendly voting support booklet. The booklet was intended to help residents navigate the complexities of the ballot. Maximizing reach, the booklet was distributed digitally to various voting rights organizations, churches, and community groups, and printed copies were made available at several community meetings in the weeks leading up to Election Day. The students also facilitated three in-person presentations for community partners, walking attendees through the contents of the booklet and explaining the implications of the referendums to encourage informed and confident voting.

Following the November 2025 election, the Project shifted focus toward long-term civic engagement. The team developed a research methodology for tracking, analyzing, and summarizing legislative decisions at the federal, state, and local levels. The Project will continue building on this foundation by conducting ongoing legislative research and preparing a comprehensive, shareable report that synthesizes the findings. The overarching goal is to provide constituents with clear, timely information about how their representatives are voting on key issues before the next election cycle. By increasing transparency and public awareness, the Project hopes to empower community members to advocate for better representation and more responsive governance.

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**Mission**

Founded in 1996, the Center for Ethics and Public Service is a law school-housed ethics education, experiential skills training, and community engagement program devoted to the values of ethical judgment, professional responsibility, and public service in law and society. The Center’s mission is to educate law students to serve their communities as citizen lawyers.

**Programs**

CEPS operates three programs: the Black Church Program, the Community Equity Lab, and the Legal Profession Program. Program faculty, staff, and students collaborate with the Florida bar and bench; anti-poverty, civil rights, environmental, and public health organizations; civic and faith-based groups, nonprofit corporations, and neighborhood associations; and schools and colleges across the University of Miami.

**Community Impact**

Since 1996, CEPS faculty and staff have trained more than 1,432 graduate and undergraduate fellows and interns, and collaborated with more than 51,000 civic leaders in ethics and professionalism programs as well as anti-poverty, civil rights, environmental justice, and public health campaigns. CEPS faculty also have been widely cited in law journals and in the media.



**FOUNDING DIRECTOR**  
Professor Anthony V. Alfieri

**SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER**  
Dr. Keshia Merritt

**PROGRAM COORDINATOR**  
Anaïse Boucher-Browning

**FREDMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION  
PRACTITIONER-IN-RESIDENCE**  
Emily Balter



**Contact Us**

University of Miami  
School of Law  
1311 Miller Drive  
Coral Gables, FL 33146  
Phone: (305) 284-3934



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