

THE PUBLIC DEFENDER



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LOST, THEN FOUND: LAW SCHOOL GROWTH IN REAL TIME



ADRIANNA WILLIAMS

Stepping into a new environment means not knowing what is going to be thrown at you. Whether you're fresh out of undergrad, finishing your master's program, or transitioning from the workforce, law school is an entirely different beast to tame. The evening before starting your first day of law school is filled with all types of emotions—excitement, anxious, fear, worry—or you don't have any emotions. Then, the day finally arrives, and you find yourself sitting in the classroom, face to face with your professor and surrounded by your peers and you're overwhelmed by the unfamiliar environment. You feel out of place, you feel lost, and you don't know how to shake the feeling. As days and weeks quickly pass, new feelings begin to surface and the pressure starts to build—the pressure of cold calls, having to do outlines, trying to have law school all figured out. Imposter syndrome starts to creep in, and suddenly, you don't feel like yourself anymore—but amid all of this you stop trying to survive law school and you start learning how to grow within it.

Growing within the law school is when the turning points happen. Once you find your rhythm—briefing cases, learning from your mistakes, and becoming more comfortable with asking questions or being cold called on, you begin joining organizations and clubs, that's when you realized that your lost moment is shifting and what once felt so unfamiliar has now become your new norm. You start to look at the law school like your home, and not this scary place where you feel like you don't belong. Those earlier emotions transform into new feelings that allow you to see the bigger picture—your “why”. The turning points bring clarity: you weren't lost after all, just adapting, and now you're found.

With time and experience spent in the halls of our law school—whether in the classrooms, library, or the atrium—that initial emotion gradually gives way to confidence. Your found moment marks the true beginning of ongoing growth, a journey that continues, no matter the experience or classification. Ongoing growth combined with confidence, transforms you into an unstoppable person ready to conquer law school and any obstacles that it throws at you. Once you realize that law school isn't just something to survive, but an opportunity for growth where you can truly thrive, it becomes a pivotal moment in your journey.

WELCOME CLASS OF 2028 & 2029!



Nicolas Garon

Congratulations. You have made it to law school.

The first few weeks have probably felt overwhelming. Much like the final year of medical school, the first year of law school is often the hardest, and this degree is among the most rigorous in the world.

You are in a new environment, reading dozens of cases and hundreds of pages each week. At first, the material will not make sense, and the finish line of this journey will feel far away. Your story will vary from your peers. Some of you may have had prior exposure to law school material, while others are starting fresh. Some may adjust more quickly than others, and that is completely normal.

I remember my first week of law school. I was the first in my family to go to college, let alone law school. I felt like I was drowning. Then I heard the best piece of advice I ever received. A TA told us, “I came to law school alone. I knew no one, except for the two girls who sat next to me, whose names and emails I wrote down on the first day. Weeks later, I became very sick and missed nearly two weeks of class. To my surprise, those two girls, who I had only spoken to once, checked on me every day and made sure I had every set of notes.”

That moment showed me the difference from undergrad, where I sat in a room of 200 people and talked to know one, and no one talked to each other. Now, I found myself in a small close-knit and helpful space.

(Continued on page 2)

I had always been somewhat reserved, but I made the effort to break out of my shell and I found some of the best friends of my life. Southern University Law Center has students who are kind, willing to help, and dedicated to seeing each other succeed. The people you meet here will not only help you through this journey, but they will also later become your colleagues, associates, judges, and fellow leaders.

Law school is best taken step by step. Do not fixate on the finish line when you are only at the start. Think of each year as one piece of the journey. If you are full time, you will be here for three years. If you are part time, you will be here for four. Summer classes can move you along faster, but there is no need to rush if you cannot. What matters most is steady progress.

There will be moments when the work feels endless. Some subjects may frustrate you. At times, the workload will feel heavier than anything you experienced in undergrad. But your mind is capable of more than you realize. Over time, you will begin to connect the pieces. Subjects will build on each other. The puzzle will slowly come together.

Most important of all, nothing you face here is beyond your ability. People will tell you absolutes: that you must study every waking hour, that you cannot take a single day off, that you can only succeed with their method. The truth is, you know yourself best. You succeeded in college, and you are capable of succeeding here. Do not let doomsday predictions shake your confidence. The four-minute mile was once thought impossible, stood unbeaten for decades, until it was broken, and then many others followed within a few months. Law school is the same. It is hard, but it is not impossible, if you have the mental desire to win.

Stay committed to your plan. Take advantage of your professors and classmates. Remember the purpose behind all your effort. Think of your family, your community, and those who believe in you.

The road may feel long, but you will surprise yourself with how far you come. The harder you work, the more you will impress yourself. Stay the course.

Sweeping Federal Law Brings Big Major Changes to Student Loans, Grants, and Repayment: *What Students Need to Know*



Maombi Jenita

This summer, Congress passed, and the President signed into law, one of the most comprehensive student aid reform packages in recent history. Dubbed the “Big Beautiful Bill” (BBB), this legislative overhaul promises to reshape how millions of student's access and repay higher education funding. From restricting Pell Grant eligibility to reducing federal loan repayment options, the legislation marks a turning point for both current and future college students.

While the reforms are wide-reaching, much of the confusion among students lies in what’s changing and what stays the same. At Western Kentucky University (WKU), officials are working to ease those concerns.

“One of the most common questions that we get is, ‘Is federal aid going completely away?’” said Bryson Davis, Director of WKU’s Department of Student Financial Aid Assistance. “That’s not the case... but we do hear students that are concerned about student aid in general.” (Ferguson, 2025).

Key Changes in the Big Beautiful Bill:

- Pell Grant Restrictions and Expansion:

The bill imposes stricter income thresholds for Pell Grant eligibility, reducing access for students from higher income families. However, it expands eligibility for students enrolled in non-traditional paths such as workforce development and vocational training. According to the National College Attainment Network, this shift is intended to support students entering the skilled labor market more quickly (NCAN, 2025).

- Scholarship Recipients Barred from Dual Aid:

Students who receive full-ride scholarships will no longer be eligible for Pell Grant funds. A move that is aimed at preventing duplicate funding and increasing availability for students with unmet financial need.

- Loan Caps and Fewer Repayment Options:

The bill also sets caps on the total amount a student can borrow from the federal government and significantly reduces the number of repayment plans available. While this could simplify decision-making for borrowers, critics worry it may limit flexibility for graduates with varying income levels.

- Shift Toward Private Lending:

With federal loan rates becoming less competitive, more students may turn to private lenders. “We are seeing some private lenders that are beating the federal rate,” Davis said. “Students just need to make sure they’re shopping for the best deal” (Ferguson, 2025).

FAFSA Remains the Starting Point

Despite the changes, financial aid officers urge students not to panic. For the 2025–2026 school year, the process remains largely unchanged, and students should still complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as usual.”

“We are already processing aid and getting offers out to students,” Davis explained. “As we receive guidance on implementing changes, we’ll work through it and keep students updated” (Ferguson, 2025).

Broader Implications for Access and Equity

Education advocates are closely watching how these changes will impact low-income and first-generation students. According to the Institute for College Access & Success, limiting federal borrowing and narrowing grant access could widen existing gaps in college affordability, particularly for students from underserved communities (TICAS, 2025).

Others argue that the bill’s focus on workforce programs may provide valuable support for seeking alternatives to four-year degrees. “This is an attempt to recognize the importance of technical training in the modern economy,” said Dr. Lisa Benton, a higher education policy analyst at the Urban Institute. “But we need to ensure it’s not happening at the expense of traditional academic pathways” (Urban Institute, 2025).

What Students Should Do Now

While many details remain unclear, especially regarding how current loans in repayment will be affected, WKU encourages students to be proactive. Those with existing loans should contact their servicers directly. Incoming and current students should stay engaged, check email updates, and schedule time with financial aid counselors.



Alex Wroblewski/AFP via Getty Images

Wait, AI Took My Face?

The Legal Battle for Digital Identity



OpenAI, ChatGPT (2025)



Bre'On Perkins

As AI takes over the social media world, influencers are left fighting for their legal rights. In 2025, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) has been on the rise. People across the world have used AI in the workplace, the classroom, and many places in between. However, what began as small uses by society has now reached a whole new level. AI has sparked a

wave of concerns, from public figures and influencers to government officials. Many social media platforms that we know and love, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, have been hit with AI-generated content that mimics celebrities and content creators without their knowledge or consent. This issue has created a growing legal and ethical battle over an individual's digital identity. This issue has created a war between what is truly legal and ethical when dealing with an individual and their identity on the internet.

In 2024, AI-generated content began rising in popularity, but by 2025, AI platforms became widely used across the world. Today, people frequently use platforms such as AI platforms such as Chat GPT, DALL-E, and any other free or cost-efficient tools to create content and make it appear as their own. These tools allow people to create videos, pictures, and other forms of media that directly mimic a person's body, face, and even voice with the click of a button. This has left many influencers and celebrities vulnerable without their knowledge or consent. "Artificial Intelligence is one of the most profound things we're working on as humanity." – Sundar Pichai (2020)

This may all be true, but at what cost? Every creator deserves to be protected. Award-winning actress, Scarlett Johansson, challenges OpenAI for using a voice nearly identical to her own. "I was shocked, angered, and in disbelief," she said, describing how others could not distinguish her voice from an AI-generated version. "In a time when we are grappling with deepfakes and the protection of our likeness, I believe these are questions that deserve absolute clarity." As AI use continues to rise, influencers are turning to lawmakers for protection. Some states have introduced legislation against AI misuse, but there are still no clear federal laws regulating unauthorized use of the content. In 2024, the NO FAKES Act was introduced to restrict and tackle the misuse affects content creators, influencers, and public officials. However, the Act is said to fall short of its mission to protect. Republican Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee commented, "While I appreciate Chairman Cruz's efforts to find acceptable language that allow state to protect their citizens from the abuses of AI, the current language is not acceptable to those who need these protections the most."

Social media platforms have also attempted to address the issue by removing AI-generated content. Although the platform claims to be removing the content, enforcement has been slow and inconsistent. This leaves influencer's brands and reputations vulnerable to fake content. The harsh truth is that many questions remain unanswered, with no clear guidelines around AI misuse. The ultimate question is: how far is the government willing to go to protect creators and influencers—or will they lose everything they have worked for?



David Dee Delgado/Getty Images

ICE in Louisiana's Summer?

Kaleb Gauthier

Shortly after the 2024 election, immigration policy in America has drastically changed due in large part to the Trump Administration's expanding the Department of Homeland Security and who may qualify for deportation. Most famously, naturalized citizens, some of whom were student protesters who held protests in support of Palestine demanding their schools divest funds/resources to Israel. Notably, Mahmoud Khalil and Rümeysa Öztürk. Others like Kilmer Garcia, while not a student activist or legal citizen, were deported without due process, raising similar constitutional concerns to Khalil and Öztürk. These incidents highlight the growing threats and failed efforts of deportation.

As deportations intensify and the constitutionality of those deportations are called into question, Louisiana has emerged as a central player in the national immigration debate. This is not only because Louisiana residents are facing the consequences of such policies. For example, following the US airstrikes in Iran, DHS began deporting Iranian-Americans, including a 50-year-old Louisiana resident.

But because Louisiana will now become the new epi-center of deportations, processing, arrests and detentions for ICE, the administration continues its policy of increasing deportations. With the new budget coming from the federal government, Louisiana has become a logistics hub for ICE deportation and detention. Louisiana detains nearly 7,000 people in ICE detention centers with eight facilities, several of which are privately owned and ran. Louisiana has the second highest immigrant detainee rate with Texas holding first place. Louisiana's ICE detainee facilities also have a history of abuse, ranging from unsanitary conditions, physical abuse, delays in allowing legal counsel, etc etc. This, in terms of sheer scale, puts Louisiana firmly in the discussion of the immigration debate as many people are now being transferred here as part of their deportation proceedings.

As for the "Big Beautiful Bill" Budget, the Republican-led government has allocated \$170 billion dollars along with additional \$75 billion in extra funding. Of that, \$45 billion of those dollars will be dedicated to detention facilities and centers, expanding ICE's current maximum detention capacity from 50,000 to possibly 100,000 if additional facilities are built. ICE in terms of funding, is the single largest federal law enforcement agency in existence. It's budget alone eclipses most nations' militaries.

There is a high likelihood that this new ICE budget will see Louisiana become the epicenter of the Trump Administration's current deportation policy. With the possibility of new facilities being constructed, more detainees being brought into Louisiana from other states. As we currently see more waves of deportations directly targeting undocumented Louisiana residents in greater numbers.

The Hidden Power of Mentorship: Why Every Law Student Needs One

Law school is challenging – academically, mentally, and emotionally. But for students of color, especially those who are first-generation, it can feel even more isolating. The legal field often operates like a gated community: prestigious, traditional, and historically exclusive. That's why finding a mentor is not just helpful, it's essential.

I'll never forget the first time heard the word "mentorship" in law school. It was during my first semester at Southern University Law Center, that someone encouraged me to seek guidance not just from peers, but from someone deeply rooted in the legal profession – a professor or practicing attorney who could help me navigate the path ahead. The suggestion felt daunting. Like many SULC students, I didn't have a family member or close friend who was a lawyer. I wasn't sure who to ask, how to ask, or whether I'd even be "enough" to warrant their time.

Still, I decided to take a chance. I approached a professor I admired and asked if she would be willing to mentor me. Her response was honest and fair: "Pass my class. Finish your first year. Then we'll talk." I did just that.

What began as a hopeful request has blossomed into one of the most impactful relationships I've had during my time at SULC. She not only guided me through complex legal questions, professional decisions, and personal doubt, but she also introduced me to others in her circle. That one connection unlocked many more. I now have a network of attorneys and professors I can call on, and more importantly, who believe in me even when I'm unsure of myself.

Mentorship isn't just about having someone review your résumé or write you a recommendation letter. It's about having someone in your corner who sees your potential even on your worst day. Someone who's already walked the path you're on, who understands the nuances of being a student of color in a predominantly white and conservative profession. It's about accountability, empowerment, and legacy.

If you're reading this as a first-year student, don't let intimidation stop you. If you're a 2L or 3L who hasn't found a mentor yet, it's never too late. Professors, alumni, visiting attorneys, even upperclassmen – people are willing to help, but you have to take the first step. Ask. Introduce yourself. Show up.

Whether you're first-gen or from a line of lawyers, mentorship can elevate your law school experience. You are not meant to do this alone.

So, this year, I challenge you: Find someone who will hold the door open for you, and when you're ready, hold it open for someone else.



Bre Magee
Vice President

From a Mock Trial to a Mission: How Southern University Law Center Helped Me Find My Voice



Tierra Butler
Article Editor

I still remember the chill of the courtroom. It wasn't a real trial, at least not in the legal sense, but it felt real to me. I stood there, nervous but focused, at the front of a mock courtroom during Southern University Law Center's Minority Law and Research Institute in 2018. That week, I stepped into the shoes of a lawyer for the first time. And when it was over, I walked away with awards for Best Opening Statement and Best Closing Argument. More importantly, I walked away with a new identity—one I would spend the next several years growing into. I left knowing, with absolute certainty: I wanted to be a lawyer.

Participating in that program, led by Dr. North, was more than an opportunity. It was a transformation. In just a few days, we explored legal research, studied case law, heard from practicing attorneys, and engaged with legal minds who looked like us and believed in our potential. But for me, the most impactful moment came during that mock trial. Standing tall, making my case, using my voice with purpose; I had never felt more alive, more seen, or more certain of who I was meant to be.

When Dr. North handed me my certificates and said, "You better come back and see us," it didn't feel like a goodbye. It felt like a calling. And that calling led me back, back to the very place where my legal journey found its focus: Southern University Law Center. SULC didn't just open the door for me. It built the path.

I returned in 2023, not as a high school student discovering the law for the first time, but as a law student ready to dedicate myself fully to the study and practice of justice. Walking through the doors of Southern University Law Center again, I felt the weight of that promise I made to myself years earlier. This time, it was not a week-long program, it was the beginning of a lifelong commitment.

Since then, SULC has shaped me in ways that extend beyond textbooks and exams. It has challenged me to think critically, to speak with clarity, and to advocate with conviction. It has also given me a community of professors who invest in my growth, classmates who sharpen my thinking, and mentors who remind me that the pursuit of law is as much about service as it is about success.

I've grown through moments of difficulty and triumph, navigated the rigors of my first-year courses, prepared for oral arguments, collaborated on class projects, and found my voice in discussions on the realities of our legal system. Each experience has strengthened my need to not just become a lawyer, but to become the kind of lawyer who uplifts others, protects the vulnerable, and ensures that justice is attainable.

When I look back at that 2018 courtroom and the nervous student standing there, I see the beginning of a story that Southern University Law Center has helped me continue to write. From inspiration to transformation to realization, SULC has been both compass and guide. It has shown me that this journey is not about walking the path alone, but about carrying forward a legacy of excellence and service.

The mock trial gave me my first real taste of advocacy. For the first time, I wasn't just imagining what justice could look like—I was standing up and arguing for it. That moment lit the fire. Southern University Law Center gave me the tools to keep it burning.

Today, I walk these halls not as a curious teenager—but as a committed law student, someone shaped by experience, grounded in purpose, and determined to use the law to amplify voices too often silenced.

Southern University Law Center is more than a law school. It is a sanctuary for future advocates. A place where legacy meets ambition, where purpose is nurtured, and where students are not only taught the law, but empowered to transform it.

What Southern did for me, it does for so many others. SULC is a place where students from all walks of life are given not just access, but agency. It's a law school that doesn't ask you to shrink yourself to fit the mold; it pushes you to expand, to lead, and to leave your mark. Whether you arrive with a clear plan or simply a deep sense of purpose, SULC meets you where you are and helps you reach new heights.

So, to anyone walking these halls, sitting in these classrooms, or wondering if they belong: let this year be your fuel. Let every challenge sharpen your purpose, every success remind you of your power, and every setback push you to rise stronger. You're not just here to earn a degree. You're here to be molded and sharpened into the kind of advocate the world needs.

Southern University Law Center is more than just an institution—it's a launchpad. A legacy. A community that sees your potential and dares you to chase it. I know, because I've lived it. And as I continue this journey, I carry with me a truth that will never fade: Southern University Law Center gave me my voice. And now, it is my mission to use it.

This place can take you far. Let it.

"What? Like it's hard?"



Returning students

Aliyah (Lele) McCary

Welcome back to all returning students! Another year means navigating challenging and uncertain days with classmates, while culminating in a positive milestone. You're one semester closer to achieving the milestone of graduating and earning that Juris Doctorate (JD).

Did the summer unfold as planned? For many law students, internships are essential because they provide new experiences and insight, allowing individuals to reevaluate their career objectives and determine whether their initial aspirations remain aligned with their values. The familiar adage that undergraduate students often change their majors multiple times is similarly applicable to law school, especially after completing a summer internship. Hopefully, your internship experience, whether eye-opening or affirming, has helped guide your next steps.



Let's also acknowledge the students who chose summer classes instead of internships. Did you get enough sleep after completing that condensed and rigorous summer semester? This summer appears to have flown by faster than Sha'Carri Richardson on the track. While SULC's summer approach might receive mixed reviews, the professors deserve credit for condensing a full semester into a few short weeks.

First-year law students

Now, let's welcome the first-year law students who are full of energy and excitement, unaware of the challenges ahead. Congratulations on successfully navigating the demanding LSAT and law school application process. You have achieved something that many aspire to, yet few can attain, due to various circumstances.

Law school, however, is not undergrad or grad school, it's a world of its own. Law school is undoubtedly demanding, and Southern University Law Center will provide numerous challenges. The work load is heavy, the expectations are high, and your peers are just as smart and accomplished as you are. Consequently, it is perfectly acceptable to make mistakes during law school. It is strongly recommended that you interact with your BSA members and professors frequently, not only to gain a better understanding of the material but also to demonstrate your commitment and work ethic. This can lead to professors remembering you; you never know when you might need a letter of recommendation. This can lead to professors remembering you; you never know when you might need a letter of recommendation. Law school is a reciprocal experience—the effort you put in directly shapes the education you receive.

Law school is also a diverse community, with students from all walks of life and a wide age range. Understand that it's unrealistic to expect to form close relationships with everyone, and that's perfectly acceptable. Law school is a demanding environment, but it is an admission test to everyone's abilities. You will face numerous challenges that will test your emotional, physical, and spiritual resilience, but it's essential to persevere. Do not hesitate to utilize the mental health counseling center, which is available to provide support. Be aware that it's common to form multiple social connections or experience changes in friendships, as not everyone will share similar interests or values. Remember that individuals have unique experiences, upbringings, and coping mechanisms. Law school is a personal experience, and it's essential to stay true to yourself and seek help when needed. Welcome to law school and prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

Louisiana Proposed Bill SB74: *A Step Backward for Juvenile Justice*



Kamaria Shell

In recent months, Louisiana has made progress in how it treats children accused of crimes. Unfortunately, legislation like Senator Alan Seabaugh's SB 74 threatens to reverse that progress. By proposing to give adult criminal courts jurisdiction over juveniles, the bill disregards decades of juvenile justice reform. It ignores the well-established fact that juveniles lack the same mental capacity as adults and abandons the principles underlying juvenile justice.

SB 74, which would have allowed certain juvenile felony cases to be tried in adult courts, was narrowly defeated in the Senate Finance Committee by a 6-5 vote. Although it did not pass, the proposal signals a dangerous direction for juvenile justice in Louisiana.

Currently, four parishes-Caddo, Orleans, Jefferson, and East Baton Rouge-operate specialized juvenile courts with exclusive original jurisdiction. Under current state law 15- and 16-year-olds may be transferred to adult district courts for felony charges at the discretion of the district attorney or attorney general. Seabaugh's bill proposed that juvenile courts would no longer have exclusive jurisdiction over all juvenile criminal cases, and in parishes without a special juvenile court, district, parish, or city courts would be given original jurisdiction over juvenile misdemeanors and certain felony cases.

This approach conflicts with scientific evidence and U.S. Supreme Court rulings such as *Roper v. Williams*, *Miller v. Alabama*, and *Graham v. Florida*, all of which recognize that adolescents have diminished impulse control, a greater capacity for change, and a stronger potential for rehabilitation than adults. Proposals like SB74 ignore these facts.

The juvenile justice system was created specifically to protect young people from the harsh and often harmful consequences of adult criminal courts. Its foundation is built on rehabilitation focusing on the individual needs of each child.

It is important to consider how a child arrived in the courtroom, not just the act that brought them there. The juvenile justice system recognizes that children are still developing-cognitively, emotionally, and socially. In contrast, the adult system prioritizes punishment over rehabilitation and is intended for those who have reached full maturity. Helping juveniles understand and take responsibility for their actions does not mean ignoring the action. It means offering them a chance to grow, to recognize what they did wrong, and to give them the tools and support to prevent them from re-entering the system.

Science is clear: adolescent's brains are still developing, making them more susceptible to impulsive and irrational decisions because of physiological immaturity. During this time, both brain structure and function are undergoing major changes.

The purpose of the juvenile justice system is rehabilitation and meaningful change. Redirecting youth into adult courts undermines that goal, contradicts scientific evidence, and is, at its core, morally wrong.

Letter from the Editor



Aaron Manzy
Editor-in-chief

It is with great pride and purpose that I welcome you to this edition of the Public Defender Newspaper. As law students, we stand at the crossroads of education and advocacy, learning not only the letter of the law but also the profound responsibility that comes with practicing it. This publication, one of rich tradition and historic background of our institution Southern University Law Center was created as a platform for dialogue, reflection, and engagement.

Here, we highlight the work of the institution, the importance of justice, the role we play—both as students and future attorneys. Each article and contribution reflect the seriousness of purpose and the sacrifices required to succeed, both in law school and in the pursuit of justice. We must remain informed about the world around us, empowering us to make sound decisions, protect our interests, and contribute meaningfully to the growth of our communities.

It is my hope that these pages inspire you to think critically, act boldly, and remain steadfast in your commitment to humanity. Thank you for reading, contributing, and continuing to embody the values that make our legal community stronger. Together, we not only study the law, but we also shape its future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ajm'.

Aaron J. Manzy
Editor-in-Chief
Public Defender Newspaper