

Education Law Committee Seminar

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

by order of presentation

Warren Ganjehsani

*S.C. Board of Technical & Comprehensive Education
Columbia, SC
(Course Planner)*

Mr. Ganjehsani has been Chief Legal Counsel for the S.C. Technical College System since 2018. In this role, he furnishes guidance to the System's sixteen institutions on personnel matters, student affairs, contracts, and a wide array of higher education issues. He spent five years as an Assistant Attorney General for the S.C. Attorney General's Office, where his duties included pursuing consumer protection actions and representing government officials in court proceedings. Mr. Ganjehsani was the S.C. Department of Public Safety's General Counsel from 2012 to 2017, during which time he managed all civil litigation for the state's largest law enforcement agency. Previously, he served as a Labor Attorney with the U.S. Army at Fort Jackson and was an associate with law firms in Atlanta, Georgia, and Charleston, S.C.

Mr. Ganjehsani is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of South Carolina School of Law. He has been admitted to the S.C. Bar since 1999 and the State Bar of Georgia since 2002. He is a member of the S.C. Bar's House of Delegates and the National Association of College and University Attorneys.

Melissa Nichols

*Furman University
Greenville, SC*

Melissa is the Civil Rights Officer at Furman University, where she serves as the Title IX and Title VI Coordinator, as well as the ADA and Section 504 Coordinator. She has a B.A. from Tulane University and a J.D. from Washington & Lee University School of Law. After law school, she clerked for Hon. Joseph R. Goodwin (S.D.W.V.) and then practiced law in D.C. and Northern Virginia for several years before moving to South Carolina and working with a firm in Spartanburg. In 2013, she left private practice to serve as the Crisis & Compliance Director and Legal Counsel for the Julie Valentine Center, Greenville's child advocacy and sexual assault recovery center. She has been at Furman since 2016 and is a member of the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA).

Sheila Abron
Fisher Phillips LLP
Columbia

Sheila Abron is a partner at Fisher Phillips, LLP. Certified as a Specialist in Employment and Labor Law by the South Carolina Supreme Court, Sheila represents companies and educational institutions—large and small—as they navigate employment issues related to hiring, discipline, investigations, employment discrimination, unemployment, and other related issues. As Chair of the Firm’s Government Contracting, Compliance and Reporting Practice Group, she has extensive experience providing compliance advice to federal contractors on affirmative action and OFCCP regulations and audits. Sheila also has a wealth of experience working on collective actions under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and class actions under wage and hour state laws. She is a member of the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA). Sheila also provides training for supervisors and managers on harassment, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) compliance, the Family Medical Leave Act, diversity and inclusion, and many other areas. Sheila is involved in various professional and community activities. She is a past president of the National Conference of Women’s Bar Associations, the South Carolina Women Lawyers’ Association (SCWLA) and the South Carolina Bar Young Lawyers (SCYLD) Division. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Columbia – Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and the Riverbanks Zoo Society. Sheila is active in the Richland County Bar, American Bar Association, and is a member of the Junior League of Columbia.

Prior to attending law school, Sheila was a member of store leadership for a Fortune 500 retail company, providing employee supervision and managing a variety of employee issues related to wage and hour, workers’ compensation, discrimination issues, performance management, and other personnel issues.

Sheila has been recognized for her contributions to the legal profession and her community at large, having been twice named to the Columbia *Regional Business Report*’s Women of Influence list, *Columbia Business Monthly*’s Legal Elite of the Midlands, and the American Bar Association’s On the Rise – Top 40 under 40. She has been consistently recognized in South Carolina Super Lawyers and was a recipient of the Leadership in the Law award. She was awarded the Johnathon Jasper Wright Award by The Honorable Matthew J. Perry Chapter of the Black Law Students Association at the University of South Carolina School of Law, is a three-time recipient of the President’s Award and a four-time recipient of the Star of the Quarter award from the South Carolina Bar Young Lawyers’ Division. Sheila has also been recognized as a Silver Compleat lawyer Award from the University of South Carolina School of Law Alumni Association. This award recognizes alumni who have made significant contributions to the legal profession and who exemplify the highest standard of professional competence, ethics, and integrity.

Sheila’s depth of experience in a variety of employment-related issues has made her a trusted source for commentary. She is regularly quoted in prominent media outlets such as Bloomberg Law, The Wall Street Journal, Inc. Magazine, SC Lawyers Weekly, Business Insurance, Federal News Network, Law 360, EHS Today, and HR Dive.

Patricia Ravenhorst
SC Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Greenville, SC

Patricia S. Ravenhorst is the **General Counsel and Director of Systems Advocacy for the SC Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA)** where she provides legal support for the organization; legal technical assistance and education to SCCADVASA's 22 member organizations and other professional partners and management of SCCADVASA's contract and pro bono attorney program. Ms. Ravenhorst has been training attorneys, criminal justice professionals and the community on the unique legal needs of survivors of crime; immigration and human trafficking for over 20 years. Prior to joining SCCADVASA, Tricia served as the Director and Attorney of the SC Victim Assistance Network's (SCVAN) Immigrant Victim Program, where she established the organization's specialized legal and supportive services to immigrant survivors of crime and the SC Immigrant Victim Coalition, which brings together professionals throughout the state working with immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and human trafficking. Prior to joining SCVAN, Ms. Ravenhorst practiced employment and immigration law at the Wyche Law Firm in Greenville, South Carolina. Her prior work experience also includes internships with the South African Secretariat for Safety and Security in Pretoria, South Africa. Tricia earned her Juris Doctor and Master of Arts in Political Science/Certification in Latin American Studies from Duke University and her Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs from Florida State University. Ms. Ravenhorst is licensed to practice before both federal and state courts in South Carolina and is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and the National Association for Victim's Rights Attorneys.

Melia Bowers Jefferson

*Wyche, PA
Greenville, SC*

Melia Bowers Jefferson focuses her practice on mediation and conflict resolution across a broad spectrum of disputes including corporate governance, business litigation, intellectual property, personal injury, and employment matters. As a mediator, Melia draws on her extensive background as a trial and appellate litigator, having represented plaintiffs and defendants at all stages of the litigation process in both state and federal courts. Melia combines this with deep experience in organizational and community leadership, offering a unique perspective that facilitates creative solutions that foster consensus among diverse stakeholders. In addition to her work as a mediator, Melia provides clients with guidance in corporate affairs, conducting internal and Title IX investigations, and evaluating intellectual property considerations within corporate transactions.

In addition to her time in private practice, Melia served as a law clerk to the Honorable Jean H. Toal, Chief Justice (Ret.) of the Supreme Court of South Carolina, and to the Honorable J. Michelle Childs, Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

A magna cum laude graduate of the University of South Carolina Moore School of Business, Melia holds dual degrees in marketing and finance. She earned her law degree at the University of South Carolina School of Law, where she served on the Editorial Board of the ABA Real Property, Probate, and Trust Journal, and held the position of President of the Black Law Students Association.

Melia has an extensive history of service to the Bar and currently serves as part of the SC Bar Leadership Academy planning committee and as one of five appointed members of the Independent Committee of the Supreme Court, which is tasked with reviewing ethical complaints and allegations of incapacity against any current justice. She also devotes her time to service in the community on the boards of directors for the Greenville Chamber of Commerce and Greater Good Greenville. She is a member of the Liberty Fellowship, which is a partner of the Aspen Institute and within the Aspen Global Leadership Network, and is recognized by Super Lawyers and Best Lawyers. Melia's work in promoting tolerance, goodwill, and common understanding in the community was recognized with the Peacekeeper Award from the Upstate Mediation Center in Greenville, South Carolina.