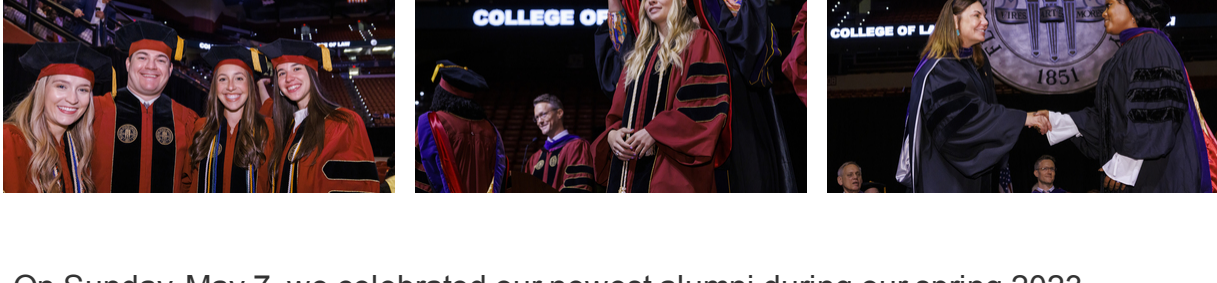


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From the Dean



On Sunday, May 7, we celebrated our newest alumni during our spring 2023 commencement ceremony and reception. During the ceremony, we conferred degrees on 177 J.D. graduates, 10 LL.M. graduates, and 104 J.M. graduates. Our students started law school having to take either all or some of their 1L classes remotely due to the global pandemic, but they adapted, flourished, and left their mark on the law school with their leadership. All members of the Class of 2023 should be extremely proud of their hard work and their many accomplishments as they pursued their degrees at FSU Law. Florida Supreme Court Justice Jamie Grosshans gave the commencement address. She offered the graduates advice for their future careers, focusing on the importance of words in the profession and being grateful. Grosshans remarked, “Words are powerful, and you have the opportunity to build up or to destroy. Speak slowly; choose your words carefully.”

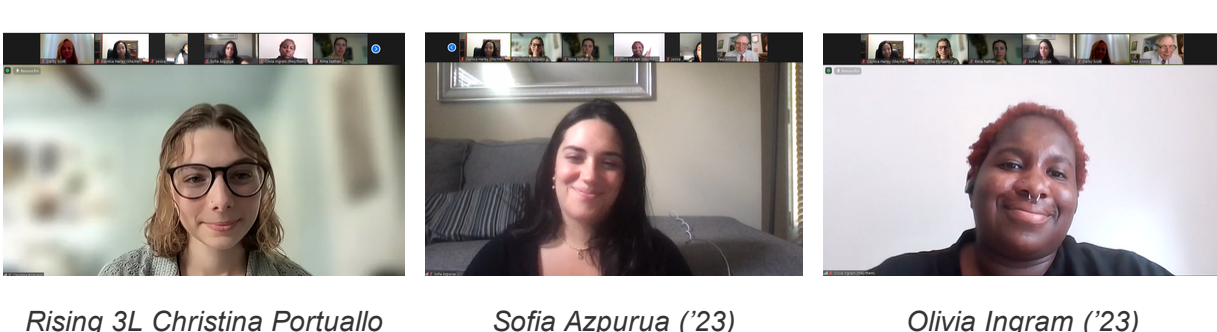
In addition, we recognized several special members of our community during the ceremony. FSU Law SBA President David Akintonde presented the Open Door Faculty Award to Dunbar Family Professor Steve Johnson for going above and beyond in the mentoring of law students. I had the privilege of presenting the Juris Master Leading the Way Award to graduate Lolita Burgess for being an example to her fellow students, among other things, and presenting the Raising the Bar Award to David Akintonde for consistently exemplifying the ideals of professionalism within the law school community.

Many thanks to Justice Grosshans, FSU President Richard McCullough, the FSU Law faculty, and many others for helping to make this celebration inspiring, uplifting, and memorable for our graduates! You can [view a recording of the ceremony](#) online.

Erin O'Connor
Dean Erin O'Connor



PILC Honors Outstanding Students



Rising 3L Christina Portuallo

Sofia Azpurua ('23)

Olivia Ingram ('23)

On Friday, May 5, the Public Interest Law Center (PILC) held its annual awards ceremony virtually to celebrate the clinics' accomplishments and honor some of PILC's most outstanding students and partners. Glass Professor of Public Interest Law Paolo Annino presented the awards and was joined by Clinical Professors Daynica Harley, Rima Nathan, and Darby Kerrigan Scott in speaking to the recipients' character and merit. Rising 3L Christina Portuallo received the Clinical Legal Education Association's Outstanding Clinical Student Award, which is given to one clinical student per law school who has demonstrated excellence in class participation and client advocacy. Portuallo made significant contributions to the Elder Law Clinic and Children's Advocacy Clinic (CAC). According to Professor Annino, during her time with the CAC, Portuallo dove headfirst into complex child client cases, dealing with clients' trauma and displaying true empathy and compassion. Sofia Azpurua ('23) and Olivia Ingram ('23) received PILC's Advocate on the Rise Award for demonstrating significant growth in public interest advocacy. Professor Annino shared a note from Professor Terry Coonan saying Azpurua is “brilliant, hardworking, dedicated, and achieves her goals.” Professor Harley said of Ingram, “To this day, our clients ask about Olivia; the trust Olivia has built with our clients has opened doors and torn down walls for the clinic.” The students also spoke about what their time in the clinics meant to them and thanked their professors and classmates for the meaningful experiences they had while participating in PILC clinics. PILC also honored Yesica Ramirez and Linda Lee from The Farmworker Association of Florida for providing guidance and assistance to the student participants of the Alternative Spring Break Program.

Alum Profile: Khari A. James ('17)

Khari A. James is an assistant state attorney for the Second Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office, where she prosecutes cases involving sexual violence, human trafficking, firearms, narcotics, and homicide. She is also cross-sworn as a special assistant United States attorney for the United States Attorneys' Office, Northern District, where she assists in the prosecution of federal human trafficking cases. In 2018, she worked for Legal Services of North Florida as a Human Trafficking Attorney to provide civil legal assistance to survivors of human trafficking. She has also previously worked at The White House and the Department of Homeland Security, and she clerked for a federal judge in Chicago. Outside of her career, she is an active member of the Tallahassee community. She is a board member for the Children's Home Society of Florida, a Knight Creative Communities Institute catalyst, and a member of the Leadership Tallahassee Class 40. She is still an engaged member of the FSU Law community. For the past few years, she has helped coach the Trial Team, and later this year, she will be teaching as an adjunct faculty member at the law school.



“There are several aspects of my job that I enjoy, but my favorite is having the opportunity to wake up every day and change lives. I have the great privilege of being able to seek and provide justice to members of our community who have been affected by violence. I love what I do and recognize the blessing I've been given by having the unique opportunity to change the lives of our most vulnerable and at-risk populations.”

Profile: May 2023 Grad Brian Maki

Desired Practice Location: Tallahassee
Field of Law Sought: Environmental or public interest; primarily interested in government work with an emphasis on administrative law



Brian Maki is from Pompano Beach, Florida. He attended Florida State University for his undergraduate studies and earned bachelor's degrees in history and psychology. He graduated from FSU Law with his J.D. last weekend. During the spring semester, Maki worked as a legal intern with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, where he helped prepare for several final hearings and performed legal research. Maki performed pro bono work during law school for the Hillsborough County Environmental Protection Commission, where he assisted with a research project, and for the Big Bend Coastal Conservancy, where he created a large reference document containing organizations with common conservation interests.

At FSU Law, Maki was a member of the *Florida State University Business Review*, and he graduated with a pro bono certificate. Maki would like employers to know that due to some health issues, and accompanying personal struggles, it took him more than three years to graduate from law school, but he persevered and plans to bring that same perseverance and commitment to his future job. If you are interested in connecting with or hiring Maki, visit his [LinkedIn profile](#) or email him at bcm12d@fsu.edu.

“I guarantee I will approach my fledgling legal career with the same tenacity and perseverance that I brought to my FSU Law career.”

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