

MAKDA FESSAHAYE

EDUCATION

Northwestern University, Evanston, IL
Bachelor of Science in Communication Studies, 2011

Marquette University Law School, Milwaukee, WI
Juris Doctor, 2014

BAR ADMISSION

State Bar of Wisconsin, July 2014

EXPERIENCE

State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC), Madison, WI

Administrator, Division of Adult Institutions, 01/19 – Present

Appointed member of Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers' administration. Heads the Division of Adult Institutions (DAI), and is responsible for the overall operations and management of 36 correctional facilities, and 6 offices and bureaus. Oversees day-to-day operations of the division, which employs over 7,200 employees and cares for over 20,000 persons in custody. Directly supervises up to 15 employees. Establishes and manages priorities and goals for the division. Develops and implements operational plans, policies, programs, and strategic initiatives. Manages close to \$1 billion budget for the division. Works collaboratively with internal investigators and human resources on personnel misconduct concerns, including the investigative process and disciplinary action. Reviews and responds to internal and external complaints about the DOC, including but not limited to internal policies, operational issues, and employee conduct. Oversees and manages continued compliance efforts in relation to litigation concerns. Provides expert advice and guidance on operations, and policy to the DOC Secretary. Directs the preparation of special assignments and projects on behalf of the Governor and the DOC Secretary. Represents the DOC through written materials and speaking engagements, and in dealings with the legislature, media, law enforcement, advocacy organizations, labor organizations, community organizations, and members of the public. Engages with internal and external stakeholders on criminal justice issues, prison reform, public policy, public and government relations, and other major initiatives. Directs and oversees functions of the Department's emergency management team, which manages disaster preparedness responses. Manages responses to open record requests.

Legal Counsel, 05/16 – 01/19

Advised executive leadership, senior management, and human resources professionals on a range of legal matters including but not limited to labor and employment law, privacy law, inmate litigation, public records, and open meetings law. Skillfully and successfully managed labor and employment caseload on matters including but not limited to hiring processes, internal employee investigations, harassment claims, worker's compensation, unemployment insurance claims, disability, and leave benefits. Provided expert advice to human resources on personnel actions, including but not limited to recruitment, testing, hiring, and disciplinary actions. Litigated employment claims before administrative agencies such as the United States Equal Opportunity Commission and the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division. Successfully negotiated favorable settlements on behalf of the DOC. Provided advice and consultation on matters related to public relations, public policy, and government relations. Researched, prepared, and issued legal and policy recommendations and memoranda for executive leadership's consideration and action. Worked with outside counsel on claims against the agency. Reviewed and revised policies and procedures to comply with best practices, state laws, and federal laws. Developed and conducted statewide training for staff and senior management. Represented the DOC in dealings with local and state government agencies, labor organizations, and other external organizations. Served as chair of the Open Government and Privacy Law Practice Group. Served as a member of the Employment Law Practice Group, Management Advisory Team, the Breach Incident Report Team, and the Privacy Protection Team. Coordinated and supervised the law clerk program.

Employment Relations Specialist, 09/14 – 05/16

Reviewed employee investigations to determine the merits and the consequences of corrective action. Developed and conducted supervisory training in performance management, employee investigations, and grievance hearings. Acted as hearing officer in grievance proceedings. Mediated internal personnel issues. Represented the DOC in administrative civil service hearings. Provided guidance and counseling to management on human resources policies, procedures and practices. Served as a member of the Health and Safety Committee.

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), Milwaukee, WI

Law Clerk, 12/12 – 10/13, 01/14 – 09/14

Investigated and summarized findings in internal discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation complaints. Prepared witnesses for and represented MPS at unemployment hearings before administrative law judges. Processed and reviewed FMLA applications.

Marquette University Law School, Milwaukee, WI

Research Assistant, 02/14 – 06/14

Edited text and provided research for law review article focusing on employee benefits, ERISA, and pension de-risking.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Madison, WI

Legal Intern, 01/14 – 04/14

Monitored and reviewed school districts' compliance with special education regulations.

School District of Wauwatosa, Wauwatosa, WI

Legal Intern, 09/13 – 12/13

Researched issues regarding district compliance with federal and state education and employment laws. Prepared written materials for Human Resources Director's negotiations for collective bargaining sessions with labor organizations.

Marquette University Law School, Milwaukee, WI

Research Assistant, 05/12 – 08/12

Conducted data research for the Wisconsin Access to Justice Commission to present to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Compiled resources to aid the commission in supporting civil legal services for unrepresented low-income Wisconsin residents.

Peer Solutions: Brighter Future, Milwaukee, WI

Restorative Justice Assistant, 10/11 – 08/12

Facilitated restorative justice circles for inner-city high school students at risk of suspension and expulsion.

CURRENT PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS & MEMBERSHIPS

President, Wisconsin Association of African-American Lawyers, 2019 – Present

Member, Hoan Group, 2018 - Present

Diversity Recruitment Committee, Marquette University Law School, 2018 - Present

Board Member, Women in Focus, Inc., 2018 - Present

Member, Urban League of Greater Madison Young Professionals, 2018 – Present

Supervising Attorney, Unemployment Appeals Clinic, 2016 – Present

Co-Founder, Brunch of Professionals, 2015 – Present

Member, State Bar of Wisconsin, 2014 - Present

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Wisconsin Women in Government Rising Star Award, 2020

Wisconsin Law Journal Up and Coming Lawyers Award, 2019

Dominican High School Young Alumni of the Year Award, 2019

“Rising Star”, Marquette University Law School, 2018

Honoree, ATHENA Young Professional Awards, 2017

Pro Bono Honor Society, Marquette University Law School, 2014

Edward H. Meldman Scholarship Award, Marquette University Law School, 2013

Pro Bono Fellow Award, Association of Corporate Counsel, 2012

Thomas More Scholarship Award, Marquette University Law School, 2011, 2012

African-American Heritage Award, Northwestern University, 2011

Clinton Bristow, Jr. Academic Achievement Award, Northwestern University, 2009

Fellow Assistant Researcher Award, Northwestern University, 2009

Gardner-Exum Scholarship Award, Northwestern University, 2008

CERTIFICATIONS

Wisconsin Women in Government Leadership Seminar, 2017

G. Lane Ware Leadership Academy, State Bar of Wisconsin, 2016 -2017

Mediation Certificate, Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., 2016

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Tigrinya (fluent).

Spanish (conversational).