



Senior Staff Attorney & Staff Attorney, Children's Rights

Location: Jackson (MS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a leader in the fight against hate and bigotry in the United States, is seeking nominations and applications for a Senior Staff Attorney (SSTA) and Staff Attorney (SA) focused on Mississippi in the significantly expanding Children's Rights practice group. Joining a highly-talented team that uses impact litigation and policy advocacy as its primary tools to pursue justice and equal rights, the Senior Staff Attorney and Staff Attorney will support the development and implementation of SPLC's work in Mississippi to protect and advance the rights of children in the state and nationally.

As fear, division, hatred, and economic uncertainty persist in the American consciousness and manifest in discriminatory policies, speech, and actions, individuals across the country are reigniting their commitment to justice for all. The Southern Poverty Law Center's Legal Department is growing in response to the increased demand to protect those whose civil rights are being threatened across the country. Over the last 12 months, the growth of this team has been unprecedented.

Under the direction of Legal Director, Rhonda Brownstein and Deputy Legal Director, Zoe Savitsky, the Children's Rights practice area is growing to meet the increased demands for justice for children across the South and nationally, with a clear focus on ensuring that vulnerable children in the Deep South have access to the resources they need—particularly education and mental health services—to grow and thrive, and that they are neither excluded from nor denied such resources due to their background or characteristics. Vulnerable children in SPLC's focus-states are pushed into the school to prison pipeline at disproportionate rates, attend school in under-resourced education systems, and often have little or no access to vital mental health services. And in these states, the forces of deregulation and privatization are working to destroy the most important institution for building a democratic society, public schools.

The Senior Staff and Staff Attorneys for Children's Rights in Mississippi will work in collaboration with the Deputy Legal Director and Senior Supervising Attorney to execute SPLC's vision and strategy for children's rights work in the state. Reporting to the Senior Supervising Attorney, Christine Bischoff, the SSTA and SA will work alongside other attorneys, policy counsel, and advocates. Together, the team is challenging the privatization of public education and the structural inequalities that disproportionately direct vulnerable children from the classroom and toward prison, educate them in unjustly inadequate schools, and prevent them from accessing the services they need to flourish in their communities.

Specifically, the Senior Staff Attorney and Staff Attorney will be responsible for developing and litigating complex civil rights cases in state and federal courts, at both trial and appellate levels. The SSTA and SA will engage in litigation and public advocacy related to children's rights issues, particularly relating to



educational equity, including school funding, privatization, school vouchers, segregation/re-segregation, and other critical issues of equity in Mississippi.

The ideal candidates will be exceptionally talented impact litigators and strategists with a deep personal passion for pursuing justice on behalf of vulnerable children. They will have an understanding of the challenges facing children in southern states or states with similar demographic, social, and legal contexts and a natural intellectual curiosity to pursue new learnings and knowledge. Ideal candidates for SA will bring at least two (2) years and the SSTA will bring at least five (5) years of litigation experience and be barred or willing to sit for the next bar exam in Mississippi.

The search is being conducted by Katherine Jacobs, Callie Carroll, and Javier Garcia of NPAG. Please find application instructions at the end of this document.

HISTORY AND MISSION

Southern Poverty Law Center was founded in the late 1960s by Morris Dees and Joe Levin to secure the promises of the Civil Rights movement through impact litigation. While landmark court decisions of the 1950s and 1960s set precedents to usher in widespread racial equality, states and local jurisdictions were reluctant to implement changes to ensure all people had equal access to public resources and equal protection under the law. Instead, vulnerable communities, especially Blacks in the South, were subject to discrimination in the workforce, in schools, in state legislatures and the criminal justice system and hate-driven terror in their communities. Dees and Levin committed their careers at SPLC to pro bono litigation, taking on cases that few were willing to pursue and aggressively pushing for decisions that would have widespread implications.

In 1971, civil rights activist Julian Bond was named as SPLC's first president and the organization began to campaign for and win national financial support. As SPLC grew and expanded, it restructured its work to focus on four crucial areas of programming in the fight for justice. These include:

- ***The Intelligence Project***, (formerly known as KlanWatch) a team dedicated to monitoring, infiltrating, reporting, and shutting down the activity of domestic hate groups.
- ***Teaching Tolerance***, which combats prejudice among our nation's youth while promoting equality, inclusiveness, and equitable learning environments in the classroom.
- ***Civil Rights Memorial Center***, located across the street from SPLC and near other historic sites, features the names and stories of martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement, a theater, classrooms, and the Wall of Tolerance.
- ***The Legal Department*** continues to seek justice and advocate for the rights of all people, just as Morris Dees and Joe Levin did at SPLC's founding.

With critical wins over the years against discriminatory practices by individuals, the private sector, the government, educational systems, and criminal justice systems, SPLC's legal team has inspired hope and brought justice to individuals in the farthest reaches of our society. Landmark cases against the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nation significantly bankrupted elements of those groups and the Intelligence Project's sophisticated tracking of these groups continues to support the ongoing work of the legal team.



The Children's Rights practice area is one of six related but unique practice groups, which also include Economic Justice, Immigrant Justice, LGBT Rights and Special Litigation, Criminal Justice Reform, and Voting Rights. More information can be found at: <https://www.splcenter.org/>.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Every day, vulnerable children across the South are denied access to quality public education and key mental health services. Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi all rank at or near the bottom of the country in terms of poverty, education, health care, and other indicators of children's well-being. Children of color and children with disabilities are the ones who are harmed the most by these failures — particularly as states slash funding for education and social services or privatize those services.

The Children's Rights team works across the region — using litigation and other forms of legal advocacy — to dismantle the school to prison pipeline and ensure that all children have equal access to a high-quality education and mental health services. Across SPLC's offices, this work is organized by three priorities:

- **Stopping the “school-to-prison pipeline”:** The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is the harsh cycle of policies, practices, and procedures that, directly or indirectly, pushes children out of their schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. SPLC is working to stop that cycle by pushing back against the unnecessary or biased use of exclusionary discipline (suspension, referral to alternative school, expulsion) and school-based arrests that, individually and collectively, cut short a child's education and have life-long negative consequences.
- **Fighting for educational equity:** SPLC works to ensure that no matter a student's background and characteristics, he/she/they has access to a high-quality, well-resourced education in an integrated environment and can gain the tools and skills to succeed. Among other things, this means pushing back against forces working to deregulate and privatize public education.
- **Protecting children's access to mental health service:** All children deserve access to the services necessary to ensure their emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and to receive those services in the most integrated environment appropriate to their needs. To this end, SPLC is working to improve access to effective, community-based mental health services and to reduce the overreliance on institutionalized care.

In Mississippi, recent cases have focused on educational equity, though SPLC is expanding its children's rights work and developing innovative new litigation strategies to ensure equality, fairness, and opportunity for all children in these critical states and across the country.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACING THE ATTORNEYS

SPLC's mission to fight hate and bigotry and to seek justice for the most vulnerable members of society is a clarion call to professionals who are willing to commit their professional skills to the defense of a greater nation for all. The Senior Staff Attorney and Staff Attorney for Children's Rights in Mississippi will execute upon a compelling vision and strategy to effectively deploy tools to relentlessly pursue systemic justice on behalf of the most vulnerable children for the greatest possible impact. They will:

Implement SPLC's children's rights work in Mississippi, using all possible tools, including litigation, legislative campaigns, and public advocacy to advance the rights of children. Joining a highly-talented team of one other Senior Staff Attorney, two Community Advocates, and a support team member, the



SSTA and SA will be strategic in identifying otherwise overlooked policy and legal avenues and arguments to weaken and eventually eliminate policies and practices that disproportionately harm children from vulnerable communities.

Develop strategic children’s rights-related cases and lead cutting-edge litigation. The new SSTA and SA will work with the Senior Supervising Attorney to identify and develop cases. The SSTA will lead cases with the support of the SA, delegating work where appropriate, overseeing each stage of the process, and providing support and consultation.

Develop and lead public advocacy and awareness campaigns related to children’s rights in Mississippi. The SSTA and SA will collaborate with the Deputy Legal Director, Senior Supervising Attorney, Policy Counsel, and Communications Department to identify and support the advancement of state and local policy priorities through public awareness and advocacy campaigns and targeted testimony to legislative bodies. The SSTA and SA will lead outreach activities related to cases and campaigns in Mississippi.

Represent SPLC’s children’s rights work to a diverse array of internal and external stakeholders. The SSTA and SA will collaborate with other members of SPLC’s team to coordinate, collaborate, and align resources and strategy on key issues. The SSTA and SA will represent SPLC in various fora, including before community groups, legislatures, state agencies, and the press. They will build partnerships with other impact litigation nonprofits, municipalities, state agencies, community-based organizations, and universities to advance various projects, and with other law firms to secure and collaborate with co-counsel when necessary.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATES

The ideal candidates will be exceptionally effective litigators and strategists with an unrelenting commitment to justice on behalf of vulnerable children. While no one candidate will have all the qualifications enumerated below, ideal candidates will be trained attorneys and have many of the following skills, qualifications, and abilities:

- A sincere commitment to social justice and a keen awareness of the relationship between impact litigation, policy advocacy, and social change;
- Exceptional litigation skills and at least two (2) years for SA and five (5) years for SSTA of litigation or comparable legal experience;
- Initiative, vision, creativity, and a demonstrated willingness to take calculated risks in crafting and executing strategies; the absolute drive to succeed;
- A deep personal commitment to equity; proven success in engaging with diverse communities; lived experience that informs an authentic understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable communities and a sophisticated understanding of the historical nature of structural power differences with a lens into how that impacts social justice efforts today;
- Demonstrated knowledge of educational equity issues is a plus;
- Experience applying analytical skills to public policy issues, including an ability to synthesize and summarize large amounts of information and to focus quickly on the essence of an issue;
- Excellent communication skills, including research and writing, interpersonal and public communication skills, and an ability to translate vision and strategy into external messaging;
- Excellent interpersonal skills, including maturity, keen judgment, the ability to facilitate challenging conversations and quickly read interpersonal dynamics, and the ability to work with people from a wide array of backgrounds and perspectives and across projects;



- Success in a high-energy, fast-paced work environment; excellent and consistent attention to detail and the ability to prioritize and meet deadlines;
- A natural intellectual curiosity and personal drive for self-reflection, improvement, and learning;
- Patience, a sense of humor, gravitas and a high tolerance for ambiguity; the ability to adapt quickly to change; an optimistic outlook, a natural orientation towards collaboration with the self-confidence to move forward in areas of uncertainty or where there is not necessarily agreement;
- The ability and willingness to travel regionally;
- Spanish or other language skills relevant to the Southeast are desired; and
- Admission to the Mississippi Bar or willingness to sit for the next Bar Exam is required.

TO APPLY

This search is being conducted with assistance from Katherine Jacobs, Callie Carroll, and Javier Garcia of NPAG. Candidates are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Please send nominations and/or applications including cover letter describing your interest and qualifications, your resume, and where you learned of the position to the following email address: SPLC-CRMS@nonprofitprofessionals.com. **Southern Poverty Law Center is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Candidates of all backgrounds are encouraged to apply.**

NPAG is a national executive search and consulting firm dedicated to serving the mission-driven community. We partner with global mission-driven clients to deliver highly-tailored, innovative, and strategic senior- and executive-level search services. www.nonprofitprofessionals.com.