

A n I n C L U S I V E I n T E R V I E W



with Kateri Hope Eisenberg, Esq.



The mission of the State Bar of New Mexico's Equity in Justice Program is to cultivate and grow a legal profession in New Mexico that is representative of and reflective of the people of New Mexico. As part of that mission, we bring you the series "Inclusive Interviews." We call these *inclusive* interviews both as a play on words and as a contrast to the term "Exclusive Interview."

Because legal employers with inclusive hiring and employment practices have a bigger talent pool from which to hire and access to a larger client base, these interviews serve to amplify that growing and cultivating inclusivity in our profession is beneficial to all legal employers, be they private firms, government entities or nonprofits.

This *Inclusive Interview* is with Kateri Hope Eisenberg, Esq. Kateri has been practicing law for four years and currently serves as a Rules Attorney for the New Mexico Supreme Court.

Q: What is your background?

A: I'm Native American from Taos Pueblo on my father's side, and New Mexican on my mother's side. I'm also part of the LGBTQ+ community.

The summer before law school I attended the American Indian Law Center's Pre-Law Summer Institute (PLSI). I graduated from UNMSOL in 2021. After graduation, I clerked for Justice Thomson on the New Mexico Supreme Court. During my clerkship I gained a deep appreciation and respect for the Judiciary and sought to continue my career through service to the judicial branch. I'm also on the PLSI Judicial Clerkship Committee (PLSI JCC).

Q: What made you want to become a lawyer?

A: I wanted to be a lawyer my whole life. My father was a public defender for over 25 years. When I was little he used to take me to his office. I spent my childhood hearing stories about how he protected someone's rights, or corrected an injustice. To me, my dad was a hero and I wanted to be just like him.

Q: Who is your hero in the legal profession? Who's career or work do you wish to emulate?

A: I think I take little pieces from everyone I work with. Justice Thomson is my example for mentorship. Rodina Cave-Parnall for passion and work ethic. My father for compassion. My husband, Michael Woods, for attention to detail. My best friend, Hailey Zock, for zealous advocacy. Professor Jenny Moore for how to teach and learn. Everywhere I look there are heroes.



Q: What has been your greatest accomplishment in your legal career or of what in your legal career are you the most proud?

A: Definitely joining the PLSI JCC. During PLSI, we had a panel about judicial clerkships. Several Native American lawyers who clerked presented to us about their clerkships. Those lawyers were all members of the JCC. Members from the committee continued to encourage me to pursue a clerkship throughout law school, and when I accepted my clerkship I joined the committee. Now I get to give back to Native law students and encourage them to pursue clerkships. Our committee assists with resume prep, holds mock interviews, connects students with former law clerks, and provides networking opportunities where students have the chance to interact with judges and justices. I'm so proud to be a part of the PLSI JCC.

Q: What has been the biggest challenge you have had in your legal career?

A: Probably the realization that I had to believe that I belong as an attorney because there were people who would look at me and instantly assume that I could not be one or that I did not deserve to take up space in that role. There were just a lot of assumptions about what role a young Native women could or should have. I had to be secure enough to know that none of those assumptions were a reflection of my capabilities.

Q: What is your favorite part of your current position?

A: The variety. I can work on any type of case and any kind of issue and it is never ever the same. I feel like I'm always learning and I love that. I also really appreciate the judges in the First Judicial, they are kind, hard-working, and committed to ensuring fair and just outcomes. I'm proud to work with everyone at the First.

Q: What is your advice for new lawyers who are from diverse backgrounds? What do you wish someone had told you when you were starting your legal career?

A: You can be a lawyer, and be true to your culture. And sometimes it will be hard to come back from a long trip home because the two worlds seem so different, but if the goals you have for yourself are rooted in your traditions you will find fulfillment in both worlds.

Q: If you could have a meal with any person real or fictional, who would it be, and why?

A: My Nani (grandmother) because I miss her. I'd make her all of the recipes she taught me, and we'd start a new puzzle. I'd show her my wedding pictures.

Q: What is something the legal profession in New Mexico can do to be more inclusive?

A: Things like these interviews! Centering the voices of those the legal profession seeks to include, listening to those voices, and recognizing where there is room for improvement without feeling attacked, or putting up walls to avoid uncomfortable conversations. When someone shares a difficult experience or lets you know they are feeling excluded try to decenter your own feelings about what they've shared. It's hard when, after best-efforts, someone says "Hey, I'm still feeling unsupported," but the priority should be addressing it instead of taking it personally.

Interested in being the subject of an Inclusive Interview?

Contact SBNM Equity in Justice Attorney Abby Lewis at abby.lewis@sbnm.org.

