



INSPIRING *THE FUTURE*

Photo of Randall Ainsworth courtesy of and by Winston Zhou.



The Hon. Elijah E. Cummings '76 leaves a legacy of leadership

By Wanda Haskel

AS PROTESTS ERUPTED following George Floyd's death last May, the memory of Elijah E. Cummings '76, who died in October 2019, was alive in the streets of his beloved Baltimore and across the nation. With marches remaining largely nonviolent, it was as if the congressman was leading the crowds, just as he did after Freddie Gray died in police custody five years earlier, megaphone in hand, urging peace while demanding justice.

Cummings' legacy also echoes at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law where he stayed deeply connected throughout his illustrious career, ever an inspiration.

His commanding voice reverberates in Westminster Hall where he jointly hosted a town hall with former Maryland Carey Law professor Sherrilyn Ifill, head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., and the law school in 2016. The event provided a forum for local citizens to share stories of abuses by Baltimore's police department on the city's Black residents with Department of Justice lawyers.

His image is etched in the annals of Maryland Carey Law's Black Law Students Association, over which he presided as president during his student days.

He is remembered in the classroom where he and then Baltimore City Councilman Nick Mosby co-taught a class in a series focused on issues of injustice in Baltimore.

"Elijah left all of us with the challenge to take action individually and together to make the world a better place," says his longtime mentor and friend Maryland Carey Law Prof. Larry Gibson, who was one of the few, along with former presidents Obama and Clinton, selected by Cummings to speak at the congressman's funeral.

And, indeed, Cummings' many visits to the law school were punctuated by exhortations to students and the law community at large to use their JDs to be change agents for social justice in a country that still has a lot of work to do.

Spurred by grief and a desire to honor Cummings' legacy, the Maryland Carey Law Board of Visitors moved swiftly in the weeks following the congressman's death to establish a scholarship in his name. The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings '76 Scholarship Endowment supports students interested in careers in public service.

"The Cummings Scholarship," says Robert J. Kim '83, former chair of the Board of Visitors, "honors Elijah by continuing his legacy of empowering students to become legal leaders, using their education to do good in the world."

The first recipient of the Cummings Scholarship, Baltimore native Randall Ainsworth '23, promises to answer Cummings' call to action.

Haskel: Inspiring the Future

In high school, Ainsworth created a peer-to-peer mentoring program called Brother to Brother, which helped troubled minority students in his school succeed through community service, peer-to-peer counseling, education, and fostering a sense of brotherhood. The motto of the group was, “Once you have been restored, go back and strengthen your brother,” words that could easily have been spoken by Cummings himself.

During college, Ainsworth worked at the Center for Urban Families, establishing a curriculum for a career-readiness and re-entry program for formerly incarcerated individuals in Baltimore City. Through Brother to Brother, he met his mentor, now-retired Chief Judge Wanda Keyes Heard ’82, the first female chief judge of the Baltimore Circuit Court, where he interned as an undergraduate at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Watching Judge Heard use her position to ensure equal application of the law stirred his ambition to become a jurist, since, he jokes, Barack Obama beat him to becoming the first Black U.S. president.

With outstanding grades and an impressive resume, Ainsworth had his pick of top-tier law schools but says he chose Maryland Carey Law after comparing the cultures and environments of the different institutions. “Centered in Baltimore City, Maryland Carey Law has dedicated itself to serving and empowering the surrounding community,” says Ainsworth. “Sometimes it’s the intangible things—the sense of community that matters most.”

“Nurturing a supportive community is a salient value at our law school,” says Dean Donald B. Tobin, “and Elijah’s legacy of lifting people up is a guiding force as we continually strive to help all students reach their potential.”

One way is through the Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative in which Ainsworth is also a participant. Established in 2017, the initiative is a collaboration among the law school and various firms and corporate partners, DLA Piper; Pessin Katz Law; Miles & Stockbridge; Gordon Feinblatt; Gallagher Evelius & Jones LLP; T. Rowe Price; and Deloitte to support a shared vision of increasing diversity in the legal profession. In addition to financial support, Diversity Scholars receive individualized mentoring from attorneys and extensive professional development opportunities.

Programs like the Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative help the law school recruit high-achieving students from diverse backgrounds, and Maryland Carey Law is proud to have the highest percentage of African American students among the top-50 ranked

law schools in the country. However, says Tobin, “we must do better.”

In the early days of one of the nation’s oldest law schools, the University of Maryland did not accept people of color. “That shameful part of our history, which I am grateful ended in 1936 with the admittance of Donald Gaines Murray after the landmark case *Murray v. Pearson*,” adds Tobin, “will always remind us that we must continually work for equality of opportunity at Maryland Carey Law.”

As critical as recruitment is, says Assoc. Dean of Diversity and Inclusion Russell McClain ’95, people from diverse backgrounds need to feel supported once they are enrolled. McClain, a top scholar in implicit bias and stereotype threat within educational environments, heads up a host of programming designed to give students from diverse backgrounds a sense of belonging in law school. Initiatives include a pre-orientation class to help diverse incoming students

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acclimate and ongoing support for a range of affinity groups, including the Black Law Students Association (BLSA), whose trial team took first place at the national BLSA regional competition last spring.

Just as important, says McClain, is educating the whole community on issues of racial justice and promoting a culture of diversity and inclusion. Each year a portion of orientation is dedicated to discussing with students, “how diverse we are and how we appreciate the range of backgrounds that contribute to our mission,” says McClain. Additionally, the associate dean offers implicit bias and micro-aggressions workshops and trainings for faculty, students, and administrators throughout the year. After George Floyd was killed by a Minnesota police officer, McClain

moderated community discussions for the law school and UMB. Along with faculty, students, and administrators at the law school, McClain is helping to facilitate discussions about ongoing programming, curricular reform, and other ways to address issues of race, justice, and equality within the Maryland Carey Law community.

Meanwhile, Elijah Cummings' call to action may be felt most profoundly in Maryland Carey Law's Clinical Law Program, says its co-director Prof. Michael Pinard. "All our clinics work on issues of racial justice and poverty for people who are burdened with an access to justice deficit. We represent the individuals and communities Congressman Cummings cared so deeply about."

In the fall of last year, Maryland Carey Law faculty wrote a statement on the death of Elijah Cummings, giving voice to why he will always inspire his alma mater to work for social justice: "Throughout his life Congressman Cummings fought for Baltimore, cried with Baltimore, and rejoiced with Baltimore. He used his opportunities and talents to lead, to inspire, and to agitate. Truly selfless, he reached back as he climbed." ■



Prof. Russell McClain (right) with students.

IN 1951-2019
MEMORIAM

Elijah
Cummings



Famed civil rights leader, tireless public servant, and cherished Maryland Carey Law alumnus the Hon. Elijah E. Cummings '76 died in October 2019.

A Baltimore-born son of sharecroppers, Cummings began his career fighting for justice when he was 11, organizing protests, which led to the integration of a Baltimore City swimming pool.

He attended Baltimore City College and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Howard University before completing his JD at the University of Maryland School of Law in 1976.

Dedicating his life to public service, Cummings spent his early career in the Maryland House of Delegates where he was the first African American in the state's history to be named speaker pro tem.

In 1996, he won a seat in Congress representing Maryland's 7th District in a special election when Rep. Kweisi Mfume vacated his seat to lead the NAACP. In his 13th term, Cummings had risen to the powerful position of chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, the main investigative committee in the House of Representatives.

Throughout his career, Cummings remained rooted in Baltimore and stayed deeply connected to the law school as a longstanding member of the Board of Visitors and a highly engaged mentor to students.

Cummings is the posthumous recipient of Maryland Carey Law's 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award.