



Jimmie B. Hicks, Jr., Esq.
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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Administrative Law
Government Law
Land Use and Code Enforcement Prosecution and Defense
Public Entities
Public Procurement

BAR & COURT ADMISSION

Florida Bar
All State Court Florida
North Carolina Bar
North Carolina Bar Association
American Bar Association
All States Court North Carolina
United States District Court for the Eastern District Of North
Carolina
The United States Court of Appeals - Fourth Circuit
The United States Supreme Court

EDUCATION

Graduate:
University of North Carolina School of Law, J.D
Imperial College Business School, MBA
Undergraduate:
North Carolina State University, B.Sc., Computer Science



Jimmie B. Hicks, Jr., was born in New Bern, North Carolina. He graduated from North Carolina State University, where he obtained his B.Sc. in Computer Science. He then obtained his law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During undergraduate and graduate studies, he worked part-time as a Supplemental General Programmer for I.B.M. in the Research Triangle Park, NC.

After a 27-year career in North Carolina, primarily in the field of local government law, Mr. Hicks went on a multi-year professional and educational break abroad. During that time, he obtained his M.B.A. from Imperial College Business School in London, U.K., and pursued further courses of study at other educational institutions including the London School of Economics and Politics. Having now fully returned to the U.S., he has relocated to the Florida Keys.

Mr. Hicks' practice is concentrated in City, County and Local Government Law. While in North Carolina, he served as the County Attorney for three counties, the Town Attorney for seven towns, and as general counsel for other local government entities including governmental Authorities and Districts.

His service to local governments is comprehensive, providing legal advice and counsel on virtually all legal matters touching upon this practice area. Matters include board representation, eminent domain, property tax appeals, ordinance and resolution drafting, ordinance enforcement, land use and planning, public finance, public construction and real estate, ethics, Sunshine Laws and public records, and economic development.

Mr. Hicks has previously served on numerous boards, including the Wells Fargo Regional Advisory Board, the New Bern Area Chamber of Commerce (past Chairman), the UNC School of Government Foundation Board of Trustees, the United Methodist Church-New Bern District Board of Trustees (past Chairman), the Craven County Committee of 100, and the Swiss Bear Downtown Redevelopment Board.

Mr. Hicks believes that the most rewarding aspect of working in

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local government law is the opportunity and ability to serve his community, and those that live and work therein. Outside of work, Mr. Hicks will most likely be found on a boat, beach, paddleboard or airplane.

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Michelle J. Kane started practicing law in 2011 in South Florida . She attended law school at Nova Southeastern University's Shepard Broad Law Center where she received her Juris Doctorate degree. In 2016, she moved to Monroe County, Florida and opened her law practice in Islamorada, Florida.

Michelle practiced commercial insurance litigation in Boca Raton, Florida for several years. Once she moved to the Keys, she saw an opportunity to help people in the community and started accepting new marital and family law cases. Being a mother of twins, and recently divorced herself, Michelle found her calling as she recognized the challenges of divorce, co-parenting and timesharing between two different households. She strives to help parents navigate through these difficult times compassionately and professionally.

Whether it is negotiating a settlement agreement, drafting prenuptial or postnuptial agreements, filing a dissolution of marriage action, equitable distribution and division of marital assets and liabilities, business valuations, determinations of support obligations such as alimony and child support, enforcing or modifying existing court orders, Michelle advocates confidently for her client's rights whole heartedly and is determined to help them reach their goals with success.

Additionally, Michelle is a Florida Supreme Court Certified Family Law and Elder Law Mediator. She is available to conduct pre-suit mediations for pro se individuals and is also listed on the Alternative Dispute Resolution website as a mediator in Monroe County as well as on the Plantation Key, Tavernier , Florida Court

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roster of mediators.

Michelle joined Vernis and Bowling of the Florida Keys, P.A. to create their Family Law and Estate Planning Department. She is an experienced local attorney who is passionate and committed to helping members of the community and families with their family law and estate planning needs, such as creating revocable living trusts to protect their assets and avoid probate. While Michelle additionally practices general liability, she is dedicated to her family law and estate planning clients equally and is heavily involved in all aspects of her client's cases to ensure the highest level of communication and services are being met.

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Michelle was born in Toronto, Canada but has called Florida home since she moved to South Florida in 2002. In 2005 she graduated from Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida with a Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Journalism and a minor in Political Science. She later attended Nova Southeastern University's Shepard Broad Law Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and earned her *Juris Doctorate* in 2009. During law school, Michelle was recognized by the *Pro Bono* Honor Society for exemplary service within the legal community.

Since being admitted to the Bar in 2011, Michelle handled First Pary Plaintiff no-fault litigation cases representing multiple providers across South Florida. Since joining Vernis & Bowling of the Florida Keys, she represents insurance companies, governmental entities and individuals in areas of commercial litigation, family law, probate law and estate planning. Michelle is a Florida Supreme Court Certified Circuit Civil, County, and Family

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Mediator. Additionally, Michelle has also received her certification in Elder Law Mediation Training.



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Mackenzie "Mac" L. Lambert was born and raised in Southern New Jersey where he graduated from Cherokee High School in Burlington County. Soon after graduation he relocated to South Florida and later moved to the Florida Keys.

Mac earned a Bachelor's Degree in English from Florida International University. He later decided to pursue law school in order to aid his community and provide the best possible life for his family that he could, believing that dedication and sacrifice are pillars on which the strongest bonds are built. Mac went on to achieve a *Juris Doctorate* from the Florida International University College of Law where he made Dean's list. During Law school he aided FIU's family law clinic and assisted an independent attorney with a *pro bono* Veteran's Appeals case.

Since joining Vernis & Bowling, Mac focuses primarily on first party property law. When not practicing, he enjoys traveling with his wife and two children and being a part of the Florida Keys community.

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Ryan Benninger was born in Morgantown, West Virginia. Before joining Vernis & Bowling, he worked for a maritime defense firm located in Miami, Florida, where he focused much of his practice assisting in the defense of cruise lines in crewmember personal injury claims before the ICDR. Mr. Benninger also assisted in the defense of maritime-related personal injury, wrongful death, and limitation of liability civil actions in Florida state and federal courts.

Previously, Mr. Benninger had served as an Assistant District Attorney under Richard E. Bower at the Fayette County District Attorney's Office located in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. He successfully prosecuted felony, misdemeanor, and juvenile criminal matters in one of the most active county-level district attorney's offices in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Mr. Benninger also has considerable appellate experience litigating matters in the Pennsylvania Superior and Supreme Courts. Prior to working as an ADA, Mr. Benninger served as judicial law clerk to the Honorable Judge Joseph M. George, Jr., in the Court of Common Pleas of Fayette County, Pennsylvania. He also served as a court-appointed member of the Fayette County Compulsory Arbitration Panel. He also spent time working alongside his

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lawyer-parents who operate a personal injury/medical malpractice Plaintiff's firm in Morgantown, West Virginia. Mr. Benninger utilizes his broad range of experience, skills, and experience to effectively represent his clients' interests. He is compassionate and cares about his client's outcome and performs his due diligence in researching to offer them solutions.

Mr. Benninger began his academic studies at West Virginia University, located in Morgantown, West Virginia, where he obtained his B.S. in Biology. He worked for a year as an Orvis-Endorsed fly-fishing guide for an outfitter and lodge located in Western Maryland. He returned to WVU to complete his M.S. in Agriculture Resource Economics. During his tenure in graduate school, Mr. Benninger was asked to participate in research projects funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Energy, which required that he undertake extensive legal research and perform lobbying activities, leading to his interest in pursuing a law degree. Mr. Benninger later completed law school at WVU College of Law in 2015, graduating in the top third of his class and excelling in the areas, of trial litigation, trial advocacy, and alternative dispute resolution. During law school, Mr. Benninger served as a Magistrate Court-appointed mediator and received *Pro Bono* recognition at graduation. He then graduated from the University of Miami School of Law, located in Coral Gables, Florida, with an L.L.M. focused in Admiralty and Maritime law.

At Vernis & Bowling, Mr. Benninger's multi-discipline practice focuses on insurance defense, admiralty and maritime matters, personal injury and wrongful death, premises liability, recreational dive/snorkeling accidents, municipal code enforcement, and school board litigation. He utilizes his broad range of experience and skills to effectively represent his client's interests. He is compassionate and cares about the case outcome and performs his due diligence in researching to offer them solutions.

Mr. Benninger enjoys spending time with his wife and raising their two sons and can frequently be found chasing tarpon, sharks, and bonefish in the backcountry waters of the Florida Keys when he is not working to assist his clients.