

Talking Points: Kenny Peralta

2021 CHARLES J. BEARD, II DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

Law student and former Marine Kenny Peralta has been selected as one of Foley Hoag's 2021 Charles J. Beard, II Diversity Fellowship recipients. Kenny graduated cum laude from the University of New Haven with a major in Liberal Studies in 2016, after serving in Africa and Afghanistan with the United States Marine Corps. He currently attends the University of Connecticut School of Law. In this interview, Kenny delves into how his childhood and his experiences in the military helped him become the aspiring lawyer he is today.

What piqued your interest in law?

My mother is a survivor of domestic violence. When I was 8 or 9 years old, I was taken away from my family and put into the foster care system for a year. After that, the only reason I was able to reconnect with my family was through a lawyer who helped us, pro bono. That lawyer inspired me to help others and make an impact in the same way. That experience changed my trajectory. I went on a personal mission to escape poverty and make a difference in the world. I was the first person in my family to graduate high school, let alone go to college. To pay for it, I joined the Marine Corps at age 17 and traveled the world, with deployments to Africa and Afghanistan, and spent time living in Japan. With no previous experience in law, I was hired as a legal assistant for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Connecticut. I fell in love with the law, and decided to go to law school.

How will your time in the military and at the U.S. Attorney's Office help you during your time at Foley Hoag?

The military taught me how to deal with adversity and high-pressure situations. It was the best thing I could have done; those experiences have helped me gain life experience and maturity. I work hard, because I've seen how hard life can be and I don't take anything for



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granted. The Marines taught me to deal with extreme pressure, manage my time efficiently and prioritize the important things.

I fell in love with law during my four and-a-half years at the U.S. Attorney's Office. There, I realized that litigation is what I wanted to spend my life doing. I saw the prosecutorial side – what it's like to see the victims and people who are affected. I learned how to work in team environments; work with investigators; and see how the agencies work together and the paperwork involved. Now, I'm experiencing working on the defensive side, and I'm gaining a well-rounded professional view of each aspect. Despite all the obstacles I faced, I pushed through and am extremely proud of everything I've overcome to get where I am today. I'm forever grateful to the U.S. Attorney's Office for taking a chance on me without any prior legal experience.

During your time at Foley Hoag, what do you want to achieve?

In the Marines, there's a saying: "iron sharpens iron." I live by that saying. Foley Hoag is the perfect place to grow as a person and as a professional. Foley Hoag is the "iron" that will continue to sharpen me, so I can give back to families in need. I feel blessed and humbled to be at Foley Hoag, and I'm excited for this opportunity to grow, connect with the associates and partners and give back to the community. During this summer program, I aim to gain as much experience and meet as many attorneys as possible. I'd like to learn more about the day-to-day of working at a law firm,

and eventually do litigation and stand up in court. My first assignment here was to join a trial – Foley Hoag cares about our development and participation. Everyone at the firm has been so helpful and there are no limitations put on what we can get involved in. In six weeks, I've already participated in citizenship law and pro bono situations. It's an amazing feeling.

Where do you think your career in law will take you?

Foley Hoag has helped me verify that I want to be involved in criminal law and litigation. Everything in my life was kickstarted by pro bono law, and Foley Hoag's unlimited time dedication to that, without caps, including DE&I, really demonstrates what matters to the firm. In my career, I want to give back to the community and lift up as many others as I possibly can.

What about Foley Hoag drew you in?

There aren't many opportunities for minorities in this industry, and it can be discouraging. In law school, I was the only Hispanic person in my section, and I didn't see partners or senior associates that looked like me. However, at Foley Hoag, it's incredible to see the efforts of diversity being done. It's motivating, and completely different from what I saw in law school. I'm excited for the future.