

Conference Collaboration Gives Minority High School Students a Peek at a Career in Law

by Jackie Kruszewski

Thirty-four aspiring members of the bar attended the **2018 Oliver Hill/Samuel Tucker Pre-Law Institute** in July. The weeklong institute had minority high school students living on campus at the University of Richmond, attending mock law classes, meeting law professors and judges, and learning about legal careers.

The week ended with a mock trial where students argued before a volunteer judge a case where a fraternity member stood accused of murdering a young pledge by infesting a wooden balcony that later collapsed with termites.

“I’ve wanted to be an attorney since middle school,” says Taiwo Adepoju, a rising junior at Meadowbrook High School in Chesterfield County. “I like how the institute promotes diversity because you don’t really see a lot of minorities in the legal profession still. It’s good for different perspectives to come learn about the law together.”

Named for legendary civil rights attorneys Oliver Hill and Samuel Tucker, the institute reaches potential future minority lawyers at an early age to provide them with exposure and opportunity to explore the legal profession. The week included trips to the Supreme Court of Virginia, the Richmond jail, the State Capitol, and Richmond Circuit Court, where they sat in on a real trial.

“It’s a lot of work, but it’s rewarding,” says Courtney Frazier, co-director of the institute and a lawyer at The Cooper Law Firm in Virginia Beach.

Started in 2001, the institute is free for participants, who apply to attend, and co-sponsored by the Virginia State Bar’s Diversity Conference and Young Lawyers Conference — with help from a generous grant by the Virginia Law Foundation. Email hilltuckerinstitute@gmail.com if you’re interested in being involved.



1. Ebaide Akhigbe, a rising junior from Rockville, MD, gives her opening statement in the mock trial, while the defense looks on.

2. A “witness” is sworn in to testify before the “judge” at the mock trial. Doug Smith, a lawyer at Capital One who volunteered to play judge, found in favor of the prosecution.

3. Institute attendees Zachary Dobson, a rising junior at Clover Hill High School in Chesterfield County, and Taiwo Adepoju.

4. Julia Clark questions Gabriel Taylor, a history professor at Virginia State University, who is playing a witness in the mock trial.

“I am very passionate about civil rights and that is basically what Oliver Hill and Samuel Tucker embodied. Being in a place where other minority students can work with one another and explore the field of law is very powerful. Lawyers are the ones who are going to need to solve the injustices in our society and change the laws, so I think having a diverse field is crucial.”

— Julia Clark, a rising senior in Justice High School in Falls Church