



# 2019 NEWSLETTER

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## BLF Welcomes Post-Graduate Fellow Ismaail Qayim



This fall, **Ismaail Qayim**, in partnership with the Latin American Coalition, is launching the “Eastside-Westside Community Empowerment and Economic Development Initiative” in Charlotte, North Carolina. This project will provide legal services and community-based legal education for the purpose of empowering communities to advocate for affordable housing and anti-displacement efforts at the municipal level. Ismaail’s project aims to assist communities vulnerable to displacement in the historically African-American Westside and increasingly Spanish-speaking Eastside neighborhoods of Charlotte.

Displacement in Charlotte is linked to decades of divestment from predominantly African-American neighborhoods that have recently become desirable places for professionals to live. These areas remain segregated zones where many residents are impoverished and do not have upward economic mobility. Several studies have shown that Charlotte is one of the most economically unequal cities in the United States and one of the worst for upward economic mobility.

This project will provide concrete legal services to homeowners and tenants in older, economically marginalized neighborhoods while helping these populations strategically organize. Ismaail will help with limited estate planning for elderly homeowners in distressed neighborhoods, provide counseling and document review for homeowners from these neighborhoods in danger of facing foreclosure, and provide strategic support to tenants that wish to form tenant associations. He will also offer clinics and seminars to these populations that will inform them of their rights, link these populations to existing legal services in the area, and provide shared spaces for constructive dialogue where people can form social ties and networks of support for addressing displacement. This model is intended to create an environment where all recipients of legal services build power and affect policy.

Ismaail believes that legal advocacy is most effective when married to grassroots mobilization. He is informed by his formal education and experiences working in West Africa as a researcher and advocate for Friends of the Earth Liberia (SDI Liberia). His time spent assisting and working alongside tenants fighting for their rights in NYC through various internships and his legal clinic showed him the centrality of community-based empowerment in pushing for rights and societal transformation. The culmination of these experiences has led him to conclude that legal services should truly serve the people. Ismaail is a recent graduate of CUNY School of Law, and also holds an MSc in Violence, Conflict and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Ismaail looks forward to serving the communities in his home city of Charlotte, NC.

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## Two New Phoenix Fellows Arrive at Berkeley Law

*BLF is proud to announce our new Phoenix Fellows, who entered Berkeley Law this fall as part of the Class of 2022. BLF's Phoenix Fellowship provides tuition support to outstanding students of color who are committed to social justice work.*



**THE PHOENIX FELLOWSHIP**



**Isabel Cortes** was born and raised in Oaxaca, Mexico and moved to California at the age of nine. Growing up in rural Humboldt County, Isabel witnessed firsthand the educational and economic disparities among her family and her community. In 2008, Isabel moved to the Bay Area to attend Mills College, where she learned about the value of sisterhood and femtorship. Isabel graduated in 2012 with Honors and received a double bachelor's degree in Political, Legal, and Economic Analysis and Ethnic Studies. She received the Spirit of Dolores Huerta Award, an academic and community award presented to the graduating senior who exemplifies the values of service and justice as evidenced in the person of Dolores Huerta. In 2013, Isabel graduated with a master's in Public Policy and received the Mills College

Community Engagement Award as the Graduate Leader of the Year. In 2014, as a DACA recipient, Isabel went on to work at the California State Senate focusing on environmental policy and environmental justice. She subsequently joined Energy Foundation as a Senior Associate and worked on Energy Efficiency for All, a national program in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council and the National Housing Trust. As Isabel enters Berkeley Law, she hopes to engage in learning that includes policy and legal solutions to issues affecting women and communities of color.

**Ariel Flores Mena** was born and raised in Mexico City, Mexico. His family immigrated to Utah when he was twelve. He graduated from the University of Utah in 2018 with an Honors Degree in Business Management and a Minor in Ethnic Studies, where he also received the Student Leader of the Year award and was the management department's Graduating Student of the Year. Ariel wrote a thesis on identity navigation in the school of business to raise awareness of the experiences of students of color to administrators and professors and make the school a safer and more inclusive space.

During his undergraduate studies, Ariel was involved with student activist organizations, including the Black Student Union, SOMOS Dreamers, and MEChA. Ariel was appointed to the school's Anti-Racism Task Force and the university's Presidential Search Committee, and served as the student government's Chief Supreme Court Justice. Ariel interned in Washington, D.C. for two summers, with the non-profit Voto Latino, which aims to increase Latinx civic engagement, and in the U.S. House of Representatives. This experience heavily influenced his decision to attend law school as he seeks to create instructional change through policy making. Ariel hopes to continue to be an ally and advocate for marginalized communities all across the board. He aims to implement policies that will work from the margins and will encompass and empower those inside of them.

