

Hi! I'm Alex Pilla!

It has been an honor to serve as the Seton Hall Law Student Bar Association President this year. I am proud, that in a few moments, my final act will be to introduce our 2024 commencement speaker: United States District Court Judge for the District of New Jersey, the Honorable Michael A. Shipp.

I first met Judge Shipp in the fall semester of my 2L year in his Advanced Negotiations class. And I was intimidated... I had heard other students sing his praises and his reputation in the legal community certainly preceded him.

Judge Shipp was appointed to be a district court judge in 2012, after serving as a magistrate judge for five years. Prior to the federal bench, Judge Shipp's commitment to public service led him to be the Assistant Attorney General in-charge-of New Jersey's Consumer Protection Practice Group and later to be named Counsel to the Attorney General.

On the other side of the podium in the DeCotiis Moot Court Room, I had all of two semesters of law school experience. But he made learning accessible, pushed us outside our comfort zones, and imparted his wisdom along the way.

I didn't know it at the time, but as it turns out, Judge Shipp and I have learned the very same lesson. As he put it to me recently: Seton Hall Law has prepared each of us to **step into the arena with the best of them.**

Like many of you, my internships and jobs over these past three years brought up fears of how my abilities or education would measure up to fellow associates from top schools around the country. Would the firm partners like my work? Could I write a memo that would actually help the judge? Eventually, I discovered that Seton Hall gave me the tools I needed to succeed. And graduating today, I'm confident we are ready for every new challenge.

Upon his *own* graduation from Seton Hall Law, Judge Shipp secured a clerkship at the New Jersey Supreme Court at a time when Seton Hall was still trying to make inroads at the highest court in our state and the other clerks were all from the ivy league. He also spent eight years working at Skadden, when very few Seton Hall graduates made the jump to work at a big firm in New York City, once again surrounded by the nation's top talent. Each time, he surpassed expectations and earned respect from his peers.

Judge Shipp's clerkship instilled in him a passion for the administration of justice, which motivated him to become a judge, and a dedication to equitable outcomes that marks his decisions today. Then, his experience at a big law firm taught Judge Shipp to be meticulous in his work. Most importantly, Judge Shipp laid the foundation for his impressive journey here at Seton Hall.

We will soon have the privilege of calling Judge Shipp "a fellow alumnus." He is living proof that we are leaving Seton Hall Law prepared for the road ahead. Not only has Judge Shipp shown us how to step into the arena, but he also now **defines** what means to **be the best of them**.