

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

VOLUME 167, NO. 3

LAW BULLETIN MEDIA

Schiller alumna Cook starts family law mediation business

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After a year grinding through a global pandemic and running a family law practice, Kimberly A. Cook realized her head was spinning.

She couldn't turn the switch off and separate home and work life, she said.

"(I was) just waking up one morning and feeling like I don't know who I am anymore," Cook said. "And that's not OK. I needed to get back to center."

As COVID-19 continues to limit court operations, Cook decided it was the right time to flip the script. After 13 years at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP, she is opening Dovetail Conflict Resolution on Jan. 19.

"Times are changing ... families are looking for more alternatives to figuring out their issues and in ways that litigation just doesn't allow," Cook said. "I think 2020 just turned everything and everyone's life upside-down, but it opened up the opportunity different perspectives."

Cook, who earned her J.D. in 2006 from the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law, said she is inspired to start Dovetail because of various issues that come with court proceedings — notably scheduling. Cook said she had multiple cases taking five years to be resolved.

"That's, unfortunately, not a rare thing," she said. "People don't have

two, three, five years to get through this process. Mediation allows for getting in and trying to find a solution in a shorter amount of time. When two parties are coming to mediate, realistically it's when are (they) available, when is the mediator available and let us sit down."

Cook said her new firm's mediations will take place over Zoom for the time being, but she has an office space downtown ready for in-person meetings.

"Anyone would say, starting a new venture ... there's never a good time," she said. "But you do it because you believe in it and you believe in yourself. That is where I am at. The timing, for me, stems from starting a new year in a new place and new mindset as to how I can best serve people and use the skills I have refined over the years."

Dovetail will provide mediation for divorce and related issues — financial and co-parenting conflicts and premarital and postmarital agreements.

Cook said the new role can showcase her ability to listen and allow other participants to open up — something a courtroom can stymie.

"In a situation where it's so difficult now in the litigation space for people to actually tell their story and to feel like their being heard," she said, "I am excited about being able to help people say what they need to say so they can then move on to a resolution."



Kimberly A. Cook

Cook was Schiller's first African-American lawyer and partner and is the first Black attorney ever admitted to the Illinois chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. She said she reflects fondly on her time with the firm.

"Honestly, if you have to work at a family law firm ... then I had truly the place you want to be and work at," she said. "Schiller is a fantastic place to work, but divorce practice is very difficult because it's emotionally charged. There's a lot at stake, whether it's finances or children."

To Cook, the creation of Dovetail is not a sudden shift in her approach to her work.

"This is 15 years in the making," she said. "While Dovetail Conflict Resolution is new, my experience ... and my dedication to the service of families isn't."