

Meet Caleb Alexander-McKinzie – a law student with a passion for Arkansas’s unsheltered communities



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Caleb Alexander-McKinzie is afraid of one thing – free time. He copes by making sure he doesn’t have any.

Caleb grew up in DeValls Bluff, graduated from high school in Des Arc, and started college at UCA immediately after graduation. But soon after starting, he realized he needed a break. That break turned into a 10-year hiatus.

During that time, Caleb worked in industrial construction. The job meant wide travel, good pay, and four months off each year. During his time off, he began volunteering with The Van, a non-profit that serves the unsheltered community, building relationships and helping them where they are with what they need. As Caleb built relationships, he found a continuing thread through each story – many people were homeless due to a bad experience in some way with the legal system.

These stories led him to law, and the passion for telling them led him to law school.

“My goal was always law school after I met the unsheltered community,” Caleb said. “The law has to be punitive, but it doesn’t need to be debilitating.”

That realization led him back to college at UA Little Rock to finish his undergraduate degree and then to Bowen for law school.

Caleb is now a 3L in Bowen’s full-time program. His favorite class so far has been constitutional law.

“I fell in love with con law,” he explains. “So much of what I want to do is affected by how the constitution is interpreted. Both with the unsheltered community and as a gay man who lives in the south.”

Caleb is a past-president of Bowen’s OutLaw Legal Society, having served in this role during his 2L year. He decided not to serve a second term because he believes the group is stronger if they can provide leadership growth for 1L and 2L members. “I ran for secretary, and I’m still very much involved with the organization.”

That involvement has led to one of Caleb’s favorite law school experiences. Due in part to the virtual meeting format required by Covid, OutLaw was able to host a discussion on proposed hate-crime legislation in Arkansas and how, at that time, Arkansas was one



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of three states that didn't have any such legislation. Panelists including historians, human rights campaigners, constitutional law scholars, and a bipartisan group of Arkansas legislators. Attendees were able to give input to legislators about the legislation they were drafting.

In addition to his work with OutLaw, Caleb clerked at the Arkansas Municipal League this summer. He served as an inquiry clerk, fielding legal questions from cities/towns in Arkansas and researching answers to those questions. He also helped counsel draft and craft legislation and spoke with all levels of government about the impact of legislation.

"I loved helping the League further their mission of making sure Arkansas municipal bodies have a voice in legislation," Caleb said. "For me, positive change starts with good policy."

Over the past year, he also helped found and continues to serve on the board of directors of Arkansans for Stronger Communities, a non-profit organization advocating for and helping to craft legislation to change the landlord-tenant laws in Arkansas. The group's efforts were influential in a piece of legislation that serves as a foundation for change in Arkansas landlord-tenant law. "We are closer now than ever before in joining 49 other states who protect tenants with a functional Warranty of Habitability."

"It's a good start," Caleb said. "It's more than what we had in the past."

This fall, he's completing a public policy externship with the Arkansas office of the ACLU.

He's also still heavily involved with The Van. He drives to the unsheltered communities most weekends, taking them clothing, hygiene items, and camping supplies.

"Law students will sometimes see me in the park talking with community members who happen to be unsheltered," Caleb said, smiling. "They always look worried until I tell them, 'It's good. I know that guy. I was just taking him a pair of pants.'"

In addition to his law school studies and his work, Caleb and a panel of friends host a podcast—Southern Fried Geekery. The group of professionals talk about comics and graphic novels. It's a life-long passion for Caleb.

"My obsession started with superheroes, as most collectors do, but it grew from there, again as most do," he explains.

"Comics are a story-telling medium. It's not a genre--it encompasses all genres. It's a different way of telling a story and presenting a theme that may, at times, be easier to understand. That doesn't make it any less serious as a critique."

Caleb's post-graduation plan is to stay in Little Rock. His husband has a career here as an RN. They met in 2011 and were married in 2016.

"When I met Roger, I was a Harley-riding, tattooed, construction worker. Now I'm a comic book nerd/law student who talks a lot about bell hooks," Caleb joked.

In addition to Roger and their three dogs, the people The Van helps are here.

"I want to stay local and help those people overcome extreme poverty and homelessness," he said. "I don't want to leave LGBTQ kids who can't leave the state behind. There is a lot of work to do here, and I'm hoping to stay focused on policy that deals with poverty and discrimination."

"I don't know if I can make a dent in it, but I'm damn sure going to try."