

Amber J. Bighorse
BIGHORSE & ASSOCIATES, PLLC

Professional Experience

Bighorse & Associates, PLLC 2016 – Present
Tacoma, Washington
Owner/Managing Attorney

Bighorse & Associates provides representation in family law, domestic violence, and child welfare cases. I am the owner and Managing Attorney for the practice, which includes five attorneys and six support staff members. The firm provides services in Pierce, Thurston, Kitsap, and King counties as well as multiple tribal jurisdictions. Bighorse & Associates provides low-cost legal services to tribal members across the State of Washington from the Western coastal tribes to the Yakama Nation in South Central Washington State.

Pierce County Superior Court 2022 – Present
Tacoma, Washington
Pro Tem Commissioner

I have been serving on the Pro Tem Commissioner panel since January 2022. In my position as Pro Tem Commissioner, I assist Pierce County's full-time Commissioners by providing coverage for dockets as needed and requested. I presently preside over the family law, domestic violence, state child support and parentage, and other civil dockets.

Mayo & Bighorse Attorneys at Law 2011 – 2015
Edmond, Oklahoma
Owner/Managing Partner

Mayo & Bighorse offered a wide range of legal services to Native Tribes and individuals in Native communities across Oklahoma. The firm's mission was to provide low-cost and reduced-fee legal services to individuals and families in need of representation. Bighorse also continued to provide tribal public interest legal services for various branches of tribal government and tribal entities. The firm's areas of private practice included family law, criminal defense, and dependency.

Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma May 2012 – January 2014
Lieutenant Governor

As Lieutenant Governor of the tribe, I served as second in command of the Executive Branch of tribal government, serving all departments & programs within tribal government and a tribal population of over 12,000 citizens. While in office, I engaged in frequent public speaking events, represented the Tribes in various capacities in Washington, D.C., and served as a senior advisor to the Governor. I also hosted community events for our tribal elders and citizens.

Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma September 2008 – June 2014
Concho, Oklahoma
Tribal Public Interest Attorney

During my years with the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes, I served in various capacities, including: Lead In-House Attorney for the Office of Legislative Counsel; Chief In-House Counsel for the Executive Branch; Tribal Council General Counsel; Election Commission Attorney; and Tax Commission Attorney.

Hobbs, Straus, Dean, & Walker, LLP
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Associate Attorney

April 2010 – April 2011

Hobbs, Straus, Dean & Walker, LLP is a national Indian law firm providing legal services and representation to many tribes across the United States. While there, I provided legal services in the following areas: Land-into-Trust applications; contracts review and drafting; legal research; business and public interest law for tribal entities; litigation and arbitration.

Cape Immigration Compass Law Firm
Cape Town, South Africa
Legal Intern

June 2006 - July 2006

Cape Immigration Compass is a South African business immigration law firm that specialized primarily in assisting international businesses invest in South Africa. While there, I researched and applied South African and international business and tax laws, performed South African immigration legal research, and assisted with international adoption and international child support enforcement cases.

Pro Bono Experience

Over the years, I have offered pro bono legal services to those in need. My pro bono practice has been primarily focused on providing extremely low cost or no cost legal services to under-served Native communities. I have provided free legal and reduced-cost representation in the following areas: Criminal Defense; Forcible Entry and Detainer Defense; Family Law; Child Welfare/CPS and Dependency Cases.

Honors & Awards

Oklahoma Human Rights Commission 2013 Human Rights Award for Outstanding Human Rights Achievement – Advocating for Marriage Equality

Legal Education & Training

Oklahoma City University School of Law

Juris Doctor May 2008 with Certificate in Alternative Dispute Resolution

- OCU Merit Scholar
- American Constitution Society
- Chancellor's List
- OCU School of Law Dean's List
- OCU Mediation Competition Team – Regional Finalist 2008
- American Indian Graduate Fellow
- Native American Law Student Association
- William J. Holloway American Inn of Courts Member
- OCU Chapter National Lawyers Guild, Vice-President
- OCU Student Ambassador, Nankai China Summer Exchange Law Program

2008 International Human Rights Clinic – Santa Clara Law School

Certificate, ICRC International Humanitarian Law Immersion Workshop

Muckleshoot Tribe 2015 Guardian Ad Litem Training

Amber J. Bighorse, Managing Attorney



FAMILY LAW ATTORNEYS

May 9, 2023

TO: WSBA Family Law Executive Committee

Re: Letter of Interest – Family Law Executive Committee At-Large Member Position

Dear Committee Members:

The Family Law Executive Committee is known for its dedication to improving the practice of family law for our practitioners and members of the judiciary. In addition, the Committee has a long history of working to improve professional and court services for individuals and families in need of those services. This is why I am interested in a position as a member at-large on the Family Law Executive Committee.

The practice of family law is very unique because it is the only area of the law that has to balance the intricacies of a complex legal system with the extraordinarily personal and emotional aspects of a person's family life and relationship history. As family law practitioners, we do not deal strictly with law and procedure when it comes to approaching our clients' issues. I always caution my clients that every aspect of how they live their lives is under a microscope: how they choose to spend their money; who they socialize with; how they engage on social media; whether and how much they consume of any substance, legal or not; how much they work; even how their culture has shaped their personal practices and values. As their attorneys, we must be prepared to give guidance on how to manage this phase in their lives when so many of their actions, words, opinions, and beliefs are scrutinized. And, every family law practitioner knows we are often tasked with helping to manage a range of emotions, from sadness to fear, anger and anxiety. In addition, family law is also one of the only areas of the law where we are dealing with constantly moving targets. Family law litigation is rarely focused on a single event or events that have already happened. The issues we must resolve are constantly developing throughout the life of a case.

Family law is extremely challenging – not just for the litigants, but for the practitioners and judicial officers who must help families as they address very personal and emotional issues in a complex and sometimes highly stressful legal system. *The stakes always feel so high.* It is vastly important to families and to the legal professionals who are engaged in this area of practice for the WSBA to continually be looking for ways to shape the practice of family law and legal procedure around the needs of families and children.

I would be an asset to the Family Law Executive Committee because I am very passionate about this area of practice. I have extensive experience as a family law trial attorney. I have had the honor and pleasure of experiencing the practice from the perspective of an attorney advocating for clients and their families as well as from the bench as a Pro Tem Commissioner. Perhaps the most significant way I could contribute to the Committee is that I also have many years of experience representing Native families and working in Native communities. My perspective as an Indigenous practitioner is one that is underrepresented in the legal profession, but it is one that is extremely important in a state with one of the Nation's largest Native populations. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amber J. Bighorse", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Amber J. Bighorse