

# Inajo Davis Chappell

Partner | Group Leader, Nonprofit | Group Leader, School Law



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## Practices/Industries

- Nonprofit
- School Law
- Real Estate
- Employment & Labor

## Education

Yale University  
(B.A., 1982)  
Columbia Law School  
(J.D., 1985)

## Overview

Inajo is the Group Leader of the firm's Nonprofit Group, which represents more than 100 exempt organizations, ranging from social service agencies to arts groups, health organizations, foundations, community development corporations, educational, and governmental institutions. In addition to her work representing nonprofit organizations and public institutions, Inajo handles a variety of legal matters for for-profit businesses. Her legal practice focuses on various aspects of corporate law and governance, general business transactions, and commercial real estate acquisition, development, construction, and financing. She has served as bond and company counsel to a variety of governmental and corporate clients. Inajo has particular expertise representing school districts in the provision and delivery of educational programming and services to disabled students. An active civic and community volunteer, Inajo serves on the boards of several nonprofits and was recently recognized for the positive impact she has had on her community by being named to *Savoy Magazine's* Most Influential Black Lawyers list.

## Experience

### Public Law/School Law and Special Education Law

- Experience representing school districts in the provision of educational programming and services to disabled students, providing counsel on a variety of legal issues related to the education of individuals with disabilities, defending placement and programming decisions of school districts, counseling clients relative to disciplinary and other issues impacting disabled students, participating in mediation, administrative hearings, and judicial proceedings relative to compliance with the federal statutes governing the education of disabled children, including the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the ADA of 1990, as amended by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA).
- Experience handling Ohio Sunshine Law compliance, including public records request disputes, bidding requirements and bid protest matters, and a variety of public and school law issues.

### Nonprofit

- Handles a variety of nonprofit matters, including: grantmaking and grant agreements; strategic collaboration, merger, and affiliation agreements; nonprofit director and trustee liability; tax aspects of charitable contributions; establishing and maintaining for-profit subsidiaries; nonprofit executive compensation issues; administration of endowment funds and other restricted gifts; private inurement and intermediate sanctions; self-dealing; charitable sales tax and property tax exemptions; conflict of interest policies; incorporating and obtaining exempt and "public charity" status for new charities; and limits on lobbying and participation in political campaigns.
- Provides training workshops to board members on governance issues and fiduciary obligations.

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## Experience (Cont)

### Nonprofit (Cont)

- Handled and documented tax-exempt financing projects for real estate/facility expansion projects for exempt organizations.
- Guided an entrepreneur and nonprofit as it grew from one school and two employees to nine schools and over 250 employees.

### General Business

- Handles a variety of transactions for business owners, including sale and purchase of ownership interests.
- Prepares and negotiates a variety of business and employment agreements, including collective bargaining agreements.
- Counsels clients regarding competitive bidding compliance, tax and collection workouts, and general business matters.
- Prepares and negotiates license and lease agreements for use, sale, or other disposition of real estate, proprietary information, and personal property.

### Real Estate & Commercial Lending

- Experienced in documenting real estate construction loans for lending institutions and borrowers.
- Represented owners and developers in securing acquisition and development loans and financing for both new construction and extensive rehabilitation/renovation projects, including residential, commercial, and recreational facilities.
- Documented and closed numerous real estate transactions, construction loans, and credit lines for acquisition, development, and construction of commercial real estate facilities (a big chain drugstore and strip mall facilities with national retail and restaurant tenants) in Florida, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, as counsel to a national banking association.

### Capital Markets/Municipal Securities

- Served as bond counsel, company counsel, trustee counsel, and underwriter/placement agent counsel to governmental, corporate, and bank clients, documenting a variety of bond financing transactions, including Industrial Revenue Bonds (IRBs) and Tax-Exempt Private Activity Bond issues.
- Drafted all bond documents, legislation, and legal opinions, and reviewed and revised, as necessary or required, Bank and Underwriter counsel documents on letter of credit-enhanced bond financing transactions, where the proceeds from these tax-exempt 501(c)(3) bonds were used to acquire, develop, and construct office buildings, warehouse, and other facilities.

### Middle Market Equipment Leasing

- Documented and closed tax-exempt municipal lease transactions for a local community college district, involving the acquisition and installation of telecommunications equipment.
- Documented and closed a tax-exempt municipal lease transaction for the largest school district in the State of Ohio that funded the acquisition of heating, cooling, lighting, and other equipment and improvements.
- Prepared and negotiated lease and equipment purchase agreements, legal opinions, and drafted or reviewed all ancillary documents required.

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## Experience (Cont)

### Employment & Labor

- Prepared separation and severance agreements, employment agreements, mediation agreements, and EEOC/OCRC position statements.
- Conducted and prepared numerous investigation reports.
- Represented clients in mediations, arbitrations, and grievance hearings.
- Appeared in numerous administrative hearings and defended clients against gender, race, disability, age discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and other employment claims.

### Presentations

- “Duties of Nonprofit Board Members,” Business Volunteers Unlimited (BVU) (April 2021)
- “Legal Requirements for Voting, Protesting, and Administering the 2020 Election,” Ulmer & Berne LLP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (October 2020)
- “Your Vote Matters: Historical Perspectives on the Impact of Civil Unrest and Voting,” Panelist, Women V.O.T.E, WKYC, and Karamu House (September 2020)
- “Decision 2020: Running Elections During a Pandemic,” Panelist, Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (August 2020)
- United States House of Representatives Committee on House Administration Subcommittee on Elections, Ohio Field Hearing on Voting Rights and Election Administration, Witness (April 2019)
- “Duties of Nonprofit Board Members,” Business Volunteers Unlimited (BVU) (September 2018)
- “Ask, Get, Give, Serve-(Cha-Ching): It’s all about the Fundraising,” 2017 Caritas Financial Nonprofit Summit (May 2017)
- “The Past, Present, and Future of Public Education,” moderator, The Cleveland Foundation donor panel discussion (October 2016)
- “Grant-making for Private Foundations,” St. Paul, Minnesota (June 2016)
- “Ohio Sunshine Laws,” Client In-Service Training (February 2014)
- “Social Impact: Leading in Non-profit, Government and Judicial Arenas,” Panelist, Case Western Reserve University School of Law’s Women’s Law & Leadership Conference (November 2013)
- “School Tax Levies,” Client In-Service Training (May 2013)
- “Election Law Update,” Norman S. Minor Bar Association Seminar (November 2012)
- “Duties of Non-Profit Directors,” Greater Cleveland Dental Society (September 2012)
- “Managing the Delivery of FAPE and Challenging Student Behaviors: Review of MDRs/FBAs/BIPs,” Client Training (August 2012)
- “Managing the Delivery of FAPE/Avoiding Disability Discrimination: Review of Section 504, Title II and Students with Disabilities in Public Schools,” Client Training (August 2012)

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## Presentations (Cont)

- “Duties of Nonprofit Directors,” SS&G Nonprofit Breakfast Series (September 2011)
- “Back to Basics: IDEIA Compliance,” Client In-Service Training (May 2011)
- “Managing the Delivery of FAPE (Special Education Programming and Services) and Challenging Student Behaviors,” BASA New Superintendents In-Service (February 2010)
- “Legal and Legislative Update: Change and Solutions for Nonprofits,” Ohio Society of CPAs 21st Annual Nonprofit Leadership Symposium (October 2008)
- Not-For-Profit Leadership Symposium, Ohio Society of CPAs and United Way Annual Not-For-Profit Conference (October 2008)
- “Policy Delivery: The Movers & Shakers,” The Center for the Advancement of Women in Public Service (October 2008)
- “‘Women Make Your Mark’ The Voting Process,” panelist, Sponsored by the Flora Stone Mather Center for Woman and Case Western Reserve University (September 2008)
- “Planting the Seeds for Success: The Journey Toward Election Reform in Cuyahoga County,” Yale Alumni Association of Cleveland (September 2008)
- “The Role of the Board,” Business Volunteers Unlimited and Minority Board Member Pipeline Initiative (June 2008)
- “Why Northeast Ohio is a Great Environment for Professional Growth and Development,” Cleveland Professional 20/30 Club (March 2008)
- “We Object! The Successes and Struggles of Female Attorneys,” The City Club of Cleveland (August 2007)
- “Sister2Sister: How Powerful Women Get Their Way,” YWCA Room Full of Sisters (June 2007)
- “How Powerful Women Get Their Way: Secrets for Negotiating – and Getting – What You Want,” CCC Corporate College Bootcamp (February 2007)
- “Best Practices for Non-Profit Organizations in an Environment of Heightened Scrutiny, Distrust and Regulation,” Key Note Speaker, 19th Annual Not-For-Profit Accounting and Financial Seminar (October 2006)
- “Grooming Another Generation of Women Leaders... Preparing our Community for Change!” panelist, Executive Women’s Panel, 4th Annual Personal and Professional Development Retreat, Women of Color Foundation (April 2006)
- “The Accountability Movement Continues-Legislative Initiatives Impacting Nonprofits,” Cincinnati Nonprofit Workshop (October 2005)
- “The Accountability Movement Continues for Not-For-Profit Organizations,” Cohen & Company, Not-For-Profit Management Summit (September 2005)
- “Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) 2004: (Reconciling NCLB and IDEA),” Client In-Service (August 2005)
- “The Accountability Movement Impacts Not-For-Profit Organizations,” Ohio Society of CPA’s 17th Annual Not-For-Profit Accounting and Financial Seminar (November 2004)

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## Presentations (Cont)

- “Trusteeship: The Key to Nonprofit Governance,” Nonprofit Practice Group Summer Workshop Series (June 2004)
- “A Guide to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 in Ohio,” Lorman Education Services (October 2003)

## Publications

- “H.B. 153 Community School Summary,” Ulmer & Berne LLP *White Paper* (October 2011)

## Involvement

### Professional Affiliations

- Cuyahoga County Economic-Inclusion Task Force (*Co-Chair, appointed by County Executive 2012*)
- Ohio State Bar Association
- Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association
- In Counsel With Women
- Society of Benchers, Case Western Reserve University Law School (*Public Member, 2004-present*)
- Cleveland Bar Association (*Former Board Member and Executive Committee Member*)

### Community Involvement

- The MetroHealth System (*Board of Trustees*)
- The Cleveland Foundation (*Former Chair, Grantmaking and Community Engagement Committee; Former Vice Chair of the Board of Directors; Former Chair, Governance and Audit Committees*)
- ERIEBANK Ohio Advisory Board (*Board Member*)
- Say Yes Cleveland Scholarship, Inc. (“*Say Yes to Cleveland Scholarship Board*”) (*Secretary and Chair of Governance Committee*)
- Medical Mutual of Ohio Charitable Foundation (MMOCF) (*Former Board Member*)
- Cuyahoga County Board of Elections (*Board Member; Former Chair*)
- Ohio Board of Voting Machine Examiners (*Former Member and Board Chair*)
- Barbara Byrd-Bennett Foundation for Cleveland’s Children (*Former Board Member and Secretary*)
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (*Former Board Chair and Board Member Emeritus*)
- American Red Cross Greater Cleveland Chapter (*Former Board Member and Secretary*)
- Hitchcock Center for Women, Inc. (*Former Board Member and Secretary*)
- Cleveland Leadership Center (*Former Board Member and Co-Chair, Selection Committee*)
- Hathaway Brown School (*Former Board Member; Chair, Trustee/Governance Committee*)
- Vocational Guidance Services of Cleveland (VGS) (*Former Board Member and Secretary*)
- Center for Community Solutions (CCS) (*Former Board Member*)

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## Involvement (Cont)

### Community Involvement (Cont)

- United Black Fund (*Former Board Member*)
- Shoes & Clothes for Kids (*Former Board Member*)
- Collaborative To Organize Mount Pleasant (COMP) (*Former Board Member*)
- Alcoholism Services of Cleveland, Inc. (Recovery Resources, Inc.) (*Former Board Member*)
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. – Greater Cleveland Alumnae Chapter (*Member*)
- United Way of Greater Cleveland Risk Management Committee (*Former Member*)
- Greater Cleveland Sports Commission (*Former Board Member*)

### Firm Involvement

- Nonprofit Group, Group Leader
- School Law Group, Group Leader
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Chair
- Finance Committee, Member

## Honors & Distinctions

- Named to *The Best Lawyers in America*<sup>®</sup>, Nonprofit/Charities Law (2011-2022)
- Designated Best Lawyers Nonprofit / Charities Law “Lawyer of the Year” in Cleveland (2015; 2022)
- Named to the Ohio Super Lawyers list (2007; 2016-2022)
- Smart Business Magazine Smart Women Award in the Progressive Woman category (2021)
- AV Preeminent<sup>®</sup> Peer Review Rated – Martindale-Hubbell<sup>®</sup>
- Named a “Black Leader Worth Watching” by Profiles in Diversity Journal (2020)
- “Notable Women in Law,” *Crain’s Cleveland Business* (2018)
- Named one of the Most Influential Women in Corporate America by *Savoy Magazine* (2019)
- Named one of the Most Influential Black Lawyers in America by *Savoy Magazine* (2015, 2018)
- Named a “Woman Worth Watching” by Profiles in Diversity Journal (2015)
- Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Women in Law Making a Difference Award (2014)
- Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Diversity & Inclusion Innovation Award (2014)
- Honored to be among the contributors featured in The Stephanie Tubbs Jones Art Gallery at Cleveland Hopkins Airport and the “*Reflections – The Many Facets of Stephanie Tubbs Jones*” tribute book
- *Crain’s Cleveland Business* “Women of Note” (2010)
- Helen K. Jones Woman of Strength Memorial Award (2009)

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## Honors & Distinctions (Cont)

- Hathaway Brown School Alumnae Achievement Award (2008)
- *Northern Ohio Live* Rainmaker (Law) (2005)
- YWCA Women of Achievement Award (2001)
- Leadership Cleveland (Member, Class of 2001)

## Admissions

- State of Ohio
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit
- U.S. District Court, Northern District of Ohio
- U.S. District Court, Southern District of Ohio
- Supreme Court of Ohio