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They've Got Next: the 40 under 40

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## Sabria McElroy

**Age:** 39

**Law Firm:** Boies Schiller Flexner

**Practice Area:** Antitrust

**Title:** Partner

**Location:** Fort Lauderdale, Florida

**Law School:** Yale Law School



# Sabria McElroy of Boies Schiller

By Lisa Helem and Kibkabe Araya | July 28, 2022

### **Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.**

One of my most meaningful antitrust wins came in a class action suit on behalf of au pairs. We alleged that the au pair sponsor agencies colluded to pay au pairs below market. Our team secured a \$65.5 million settlement that also required the agencies to inform au pairs of their right to negotiate wages. At Boies Schiller, we pride ourselves on our diverse practices, and outside of my antitrust work, I represent a large public school board. I love this work because it draws on my education experience as a teacher. Recently, I successfully defended the board against a demand for \$45 million in damages by a group of charter schools seeking a portion of tax revenues that the board used to address funding shortages in traditional public schools.

### **What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?**

During my first year as an associate, I learned a key lesson on recognizing my value. While handling an insurance coverage dispute for a flight school, I signed the name of the supervising partner to a demand letter and sent it to opposing counsel on his behalf. Afterward, the partner told me that my email made me sound like his assistant, instead of his colleague, and I should sign and send letters under my own name. His feedback on this small matter has stayed with me as a larger lesson on countering self-doubt, something with which many young lawyers, especially women, struggle. On reflection, I realized that I signed the partner's name because I was afraid opposing counsel would take a letter from me less seriously than a letter from the partner. I worried my own name would not carry enough authority, even though the arguments were my own and I had been managing all aspects of the case. Since then, I have been cognizant of any tendency to minimize my role or silence my own voice. Whenever I experience insecurity or feel out of my depth, I force myself to evaluate and acknowledge my true capabilities.

### **How do you define success in your practice?**

To define success, I ask myself if I can answer yes to three questions. First, am I meeting my clients' needs? This requires zealous advocacy and clear communication, as well as an understanding of the client's business, concerns, pain points, and expectations. Second, am I engaged in intellectually challenging work? I was drawn to the practice

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**Sabria McElroy** serves as co-chair of Boies Schiller's diversity committee. She also leads her office's partnership with the University of Miami Law School's Professional Opportunities Program, helping high-achieving underrepresented minority law students secure internships with law firms and other legal organizations. McElroy formerly taught seventh grade in Philadelphia through the Teach for America program.

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of law, and specifically litigation, because I love learning about new subjects and I enjoy coming up with creative solutions. Therefore, these characteristics are an important part of how I personally define success. Finally, do I have balance between my work life and personal life? In addition to being a lawyer, I am a mother and partner with many interests that have nothing to do with the law. The right balance helps me appreciate all aspects of my life and gives me the energy to be creative and thoughtful in my practice.

### **What are you most proud of as a lawyer?**

Several years ago, I defended the deposition of a named plaintiff in a class action suit on behalf of au pairs. Although it was just one deposition, it was my proudest moment as a lawyer because my advocacy made a tangible and immediate difference for my client under difficult circumstances. My client was a young woman from Colombia who was very nervous about discussing her experience as an au pair, which had not been positive. I was the only lawyer for plaintiffs in the room with about 15 lawyers for the defendants, several of whom did their best to intimidate my client and me. On top of that, there were translation issues since the official translator did not speak Colombian Spanish. Over the course of the day, I had to object to the attempts to harass my client, shut down lines of questioning that inappropriately pushed the bounds of a protective order, and work through the translation issues. In the end, I succeeded in making my client feel comfortable enough to tell her story and her testimony was authentic and impactful. The case went on to settle for one of the largest wage-and-hour class settlements in years.

### **Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?**

My greatest mentor is Stuart Singer, the head of my office and a phenomenally accomplished lawyer. Stuart has taught me a lot about great lawyering, but two things stand out. First, being an effective lawyer requires careful listening and flexibility. As lawyers, we are often in situations where we need to articulate how a decision will impact a client, understand the concerns animating a judge's question, or ask a witness the right questions to get the information we need. By watching Stuart, I have learned that success in these areas requires attentive listening and a willingness to go beyond prepared remarks or an outline. Second, Stuart has demonstrated the value of trust and collaboration. He has never shied away from handing off significant responsibilities on key cases to much younger, but very capable, lawyers. This approach to leadership has consistently produced excellent results and creative solutions to thorny problems.

### **Just for fun, tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.**

My kids usually control the music in my house, and they've been into the Kidz Bop 2022 album lately. My favorite from the album is the Kidz Bop version of "Astronaut in the Ocean," in part because my 5-year-old son has choreographed a hilarious dance to it. When I'm not listening with the kids, I've been enjoying "Freedom" by Jon Batiste.