

# Miami Herald

## Miami Gardens law school partners with Benjamin Crump to train social justice attorneys

BY JESSE LIEBERMAN

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Social justice attorney Ben Crump speaks at St. Thomas University School of Law in Miami Gardens on Dec. 2, 2021, where an announcement was made about the new Benjamin L. Crump Center for Social Justice. The center is initially being funded by a \$1 million leadership grant from Truist Financial Corporation's charitable arm. Thursday marked the opening of a \$35 million campaign by the College of Law 'to train and support a new and diverse generation of lawyers fighting for justice.' EMILY MICHOT EMICHOT@MIAMIHERALD.COM

St. Thomas University College of Law and prominent social justice attorney Benjamin Crump announced Thursday the Benjamin L. Crump Center for Social Justice at the Miami Gardens law school.

The center will provide mentoring, data resources and training to educate the next generation of social justice and civil rights attorneys. The center will also

provide scholarships to law students of color, and it will be the first step in a \$35 million campaign to develop these programs.

“We need to have an army of social justice warriors to fight the enemies of equality,” Crump, 52, said after the announcement.

Described as “Black America’s attorney general” over the past decade, Crump, a graduate of Florida State University College of Law, has become one of the top civil rights attorneys in the country.

He has represented the families of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black student from Miami Gardens who was shot to death by George Zimmerman, a white neighborhood watch captain in Sanford in 2012; Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man shot to death by white Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson in 2014; Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman who was shot to death when white police officers raided her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment in 2020; and George Floyd who was murdered by white police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis in 2020.

The center’s initial funding came from a \$1 million leadership grant from the Truist Financial Corp.’s Truist Charitable Fund, a donor-advised fund at the Winston-Salem Foundation. The Truist Fund invests in underserved communities to support wealth building. Crump, who met Truist through his work with George Floyd’s family, facilitated the grant.

“To get a leading corporation to say, ‘We, too, share the vision,’ can never be taken lightly,” Crump said. “Many corporations made commitments to social justice...and a lot of them have not honored their commitments...Truist is putting their money where their mouth is.”



Attorney Ben Crump shakes hands with Herman Russomano, chair emeritus of St. Thomas University's School of Law Board of Advisors, while holding a \$1 million check representing a leadership grant from Truist Financial Corporation's charitable arm on Dec. 2, 2021. Truist made the initial funding for the newly announced Benjamin L. Crump Center for Social Justice at St. Thomas University. Emily Michot [EMICHOT@MIAMIHERALD.COM](mailto:EMICHOT@MIAMIHERALD.COM)

The partnership between Crump, Truist and St. Thomas came together through St. Thomas University College of Law Dean Tamara Lawson.

"We will be the incubator for the next generation of social change," Lawson said.

Lawson, who knows Crump through her work with the National Bar Association, a network of predominantly Black lawyers, said one of the resources the center will provide is need-based scholarships.

"We give opportunities to students who otherwise might not have an opportunity to be a lawyer," she said.

Lawson worked closely with Truist to understand both the college and foundation's goals and then developed the grant, which will serve as the starting point for the university's \$35 million campaign to "train and support a new and diverse generation of lawyers fighting for justice



A photo of social justice attorney Ben Crump is displayed on a screen at St. Thomas University School of Law in Miami Gardens, Thursday Dec. 2, 2021, where an announcement was made about the new Benjamin L. Crump Center for Social Justice. Emily Michot [EMICHOT@MIAMIHERALD.COM](mailto:EMICHOT@MIAMIHERALD.COM)

Lawson said the law school is known for educating first-generation college attendees and its diversity. Over 80% of the law school's students are non-white. It was this diversity that led Crump to believe a center for social justice at the law school would be impactful.

"It will be a physical presence where young marginalized students, who would otherwise be denied an education, will have an opportunity."

St. Thomas University President David Armstrong echoed those feelings. "We can have more students who will become social justice warriors, preferably a lot of students who maybe didn't have access before, especially students of color, to have access to a law degree," he said. "This puts us on the global map for social justice in this world."