

# Hard Fought Legislative Victories: How Did They Get There?

## Meet Our Presenters

### BRENDA SMEETON



Brenda Smeeton is the Legal Director of the Georgia Justice Project (GJP). For 35 years GJP has worked to reduce the number of Georgians under correctional control and reduce barriers to reentry through a combination of direct legal representation, education, and policy advocacy.

Brenda has represented hundreds of clients who have been denied employment, housing, or benefits as a result of their criminal history. She also provides training around Georgia to people with a criminal history, service providers, attorneys, and judges about barriers to reentry and criminal records, and is the co-author of *A Guide to Understanding and Correcting Criminal Records in Georgia*. Brenda has filed numerous appeals related to criminal records issues and successfully argued a case challenging the constitutionality of Georgia's expungement law in front of the Georgia Supreme Court.

Brenda has been the Legal Director of GJP since 2017. She has worked on criminal justice reform issues for over 20 years. Prior to coming to GJP as an attorney she worked for an anti-death penalty advocacy organization and a drug policy reform group. Brenda is a graduate of Bucknell University and the Georgia State University College of Law.

### DANIEL BOWES



Daniel Bowes joined the Justice Center as an Equal Justice Works Fellow in 2011 and now serves as director of the Fair Chance Criminal Justice Project. He advocates on behalf of individuals, families, and communities isolated from opportunities to prosper by the collateral consequences of criminal records.

On March 1, 2021, Daniel will begin serving as the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the ACLU of North Carolina. He previously served as an Autry Fellow at MDC, Inc., and supervising attorney of Legal Aid of North Carolina's Second Chance Employment and Housing Project.

As the son of justice-involved parents, Daniel is a member of the NC Second Chance Alliance ([ncsecondchance.org](http://ncsecondchance.org)) and proudly serves on the advisory board of Our Children's Place, a nonprofit program committed to the well-being of the 30,000 children in North Carolina with an incarcerated parent.

Daniel is a native of Alamance County, N.C. He is a graduate of Duke University and the New York University School of Law, where he was a Root-Tilden-Kern Public Interest Scholar.

## HAKIM CRAMPTON



Hakim Nathaniel Crampton is serving a four year term as Commissioner on the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission appointed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2019, making Crampton the first formerly incarcerated person appointed to a State Commission. Proudly representing the Public's interest on this Commission, Hakim has spent the last 15 years advocating for juvenile and education justice, mentoring thousands of Michigan students across the State, teaching English Language Arts through an innovative textbook curriculum series of Hip Hop Based Pedagogy called S.L.A.M. Lyrical Education.

Hakim Crampton serves as the Movement & Capacity Building Specialist for JustLeadershipUSA, a national criminal justice leadership development organization focusing on empowering persons with past criminal court involvement to advocate for systems and policy change within the criminal legal system. HakimCrampton also works collaboratively with community based organizations to improve the quality of life for Jackson's southside residents experiencing poverty, gun violence and disenfranchisement.

As a community organizer and education advocate, Hakim Crampton has received over two dozen local, state and national awards for his service to schools, communities and organizations. His term on the Commission expires April 2023.

## JOHN COOPER



John S. Cooper is the Executive Director of Safe & Just Michigan, a criminal justice policy and research organization based in Lansing, MI. He joined Safe & Just Michigan in 2017 as its Policy Director after serving as a criminal justice policy advisor to State Representative David LaGrand (D - 75th, Grand Rapids).

Cooper's research and advocacy is focused on Michigan's adult criminal legal system, with an emphasis on strategies to reduce Michigan's prison population, remove barriers to successful reentry, and increase the use of effective alternatives to incarceration.

During his tenure at Safe & Just Michigan, Cooper has led several legislative campaigns to reform Michigan's criminal legal system, including the campaign to enact "objective parole," 2018 PA 339, and the Michigan Clean Slate campaign (2020 PA 187-93).

Before he joined Rep. LaGrand's office, Cooper spent seven years as a litigator in the Washington, D.C. office of Latham & Watkins LLP. He also served as a law clerk to Hon. Boyce F. Martin, Jr., of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit.

Cooper obtained his juris doctorate from the University of Virginia School of Law after graduating with honors from Calvin College. He lives in his hometown of Grand Rapids with his wife, Julia, and son Ben.

## MARILYNN WINN



Marilynn Winn is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Women on the Rise. She has been organizing for abolitionist reforms to the criminal legal system in Georgia for the past decade, soon after her own release from prison. Ms. Winn has gained national attention for her work to ban the box on employment applications in Georgia and her vision to close the Atlanta City Detention Center, replacing it with a Center for Wellness and Freedom.

She received the first Lilly Ledbetter Award from 9to5 Georgia in 2013, was recognized by President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Roselynn Carter for her work to end employment discrimination in 2014, received the Inspire Award from First Step Staffing, and received the Champion for Change Award in 2019. She was a JustLeadership USA 2016 Fellow and is a current fellow with the Center for Civic Innovation.

Ms. Winn served as the Co-Chair of the Reimagining Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) Taskforce alongside the City of Atlanta in 2019 after co-leading efforts to move the Mayor to sign legislation to close and repurpose the city jail, reallocating millions of dollars back into communities most harmed by the jail's operation.

Ms. Winn is also the co-founder of a small women's re-entry organization, Reverse the Cycle of Incarceration. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Southern Center for Human Rights and First Step Staffing. She previously served as the Board Chair for 9to5 National Association of Working Women.

Instrumental in President Obama issuing an Executive Order to Ban the Box on federal employment applications, Ms. Winn was a nominee to the United States of Women Summit at White House in 2016. She also served as a Justice Votes Presidential Townhall delegate in 2020 and later was invited to participate in conversation with members of the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force on Criminal Justice Reform. Ms. Winn lives in Atlanta, GA with her rottweiler, Sassy.

## WHITLEY CARPENTER



Whitley Carpenter is a Staff Attorney at Forward Justice, a law, policy, and strategy center dedicated to advancing racial, social, and economic justice in the US South. Her work regularly reflects her strong commitment to advocating for and uplifting the voices of oppressed and systemically disenfranchised communities.

Whitley is originally from Winston-Salem, NC. She attended NC State University where she helped recruit underrepresented groups of students and coordinated college visits for middle and high school students of color. She graduated in 2012 with a B.A. in Psychology and a B.A. in Political Science. Whitley received her J.D. from the University of North Carolina School of Law in 2015.

During law school, she worked with the UNC Center of Poverty, Work, and Opportunity where she focused on bringing attention to issues impacted North

Carolina's poor communities and with the UNC Civil Legal Assistance Clinic representing clients in housing and education cases. She also worked with the Southern Coalition for Social Justice doing Second Chance advocacy and direct-services work, which has been a large part of her focus since.

Since law school, Whitley has focused her work on developing the necessary tools and strategies to fight against racism and to liberate and empower oppressed communities. She has participated in the planning and implementation of more than twelve Clean Slate Clinics across North Carolina and filed thousands of expungement petitions across the state. She also has worked with grassroots organizations and community members to advocate for Second Chance policy changes at the state and local level.

She currently serves on the advisory board of the Durham Expunction and Restoration Program, is an active member of the NC Second Chance Alliance, leads the NC Fines and Fees Coalition, and sits on the National Board of Directors for the National Conference of Black Lawyers while also serving as the Vice President of the NC Chapter. Whitley brings a tireless commitment and a determined passion to her work on behalf of those who have often been silenced.