

OUTREACH

Women's Law & Public Policy Fellowship Program
at Georgetown Law

2025-2026

FALL | WINTER



Medicaid Matters

Turn to page 2 and read from three fellowship alumnae about why Medicaid matters and why you should fight cuts to health care. And meet the new Fellows on page 6!

Medicaid Matters!



Jill C. Morrison
Executive Director (US 1998-1999)

If you've tuned in to the news lately, then you know that this is a very tough time for low-income Americans. This is why I thought it was important to highlight the work of our former fellows: fighting to protect Medicaid. Cuts to this program will be devastating for millions, but all hope is not lost. The very same things they are doing at work - weighing in on implementation at the state level, attending rallies, submitting public comments, and educating the public on the impact of the cuts - are things we can all do in our own communities. I hope you are inspired to take action.



Rolonda Donelson,
WLPPFP 2023-2024

After my year as a WLP-PFP Fellow, I was the Huber Reproductive Health Equity Legal Fellow at the National Partnership for Women & Families. There, I got to co-lead the organization's Medicaid defense strategy. Through this experience, I helped launch a storytelling campaign that explained the importance of Medicaid to the lives of Partnership staff and their loved ones, assisted in drafting action alerts that helped people contact their Congresspeople to explain

why Medicaid was important to them, and helped craft countless fact sheets and reports to explain the importance of Medicaid to women and families worldwide.

Medicaid is a lifeline for over 70 million people in the country, and cuts to Medicaid threaten access to this health care that millions rely on. The Medicaid Defense work exposed me to a variety of coalitions across issue areas, including food security, environmental justice, and reproductive justice. It also allowed me to participate in various rallies and events, including a 60-hour vigil planned around the 60th anniversary of Medicaid and Medicare. At the vigil, we shared stories of those who receive their health insurance through these programs and how cuts and changes would affect them.

It was an honor to be trusted with these stories and to share them on the steps of the Capitol. Medicaid allows people to access quality health care, reduces the amount of uncompensated care hospitals provide, and helps keep insurance premiums lower for everyone. Medicaid helps women and families thrive, and it was a privilege to work in coalition with such amazing advocates to protect this program.

Medicaid Matters, continued

Ally Crays, WLPPFP 2024-2025, NHeLP and the O'Neill Institute

In the wake of unprecedented and drastic changes made to Medicaid structuring in the "One Big Beautiful Bill" Act that Congress recently passed, advocacy to protect Medicaid is more important now than ever. Medicaid is an essential health insurance program that helps provide access to healthcare for some of the most underserved and under-resourced communities, such as children, seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income families. Medicaid covers roughly 40% of all births in the United States, making access to coverage a vital reproductive rights and justice issue.

Not only does Medicaid improve the health and livelihood of the individuals who directly receive it, but it also improves community health, fuels employment growth, stabilizes hospitals, and helps strengthen state and local economies. When people lose Medicaid coverage, the harm and ripple effects are felt well beyond the individual who loses access.

Advocacy to protect Medicaid must include insights from beneficiaries and uplift their lived experience in accessing care or having access stripped from them. Too often, the experiences of people who actually access Medicaid and are directly harmed by these cuts are lost in the political messaging and advocacy. Advocacy efforts truly rooted in equity and justice will center the voices of Medicaid beneficiaries who are directly harmed when coverage is stripped away while engaging diverse coalitions of stakeholders to show that Medicaid cuts harm everyone.

Claire Shennan, US 2024-2025, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law



For many with mental health disabilities, Medicaid is a lifeline. It is the largest provider of health care to people with disabilities, including those with mental health disabilities, in the United States. Nearly 40% of nonelderly adult Medicaid recipients have a mental health or substance use disorder. Women are more likely to be in this group than are men. Medicaid is the primary source of funding for key health care services for people with significant mental health disabilities. They need these services to live independently in their own homes and participate in their communities.

Despite its necessity and overwhelming popularity, Medicaid was significantly cut when Congress passed H.R.1, or the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, earlier this year. One of the ways the law will cut Medicaid benefits is through the imposition of "work requirements" or "community engagement requirements." These require beneficiaries to prove they are working or engaging in other approved activities for at least 80 hours per month to maintain eligibility for Medicaid. Prior to the passage of H.R.1, we

at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law issued an explainer on how work requirements harm people with mental health disabilities. We emphasized that people with mental health disabilities rely on Medicaid to receive crucial supports and services, which help prevent unnecessary institutionalization. Further, rather than accomplishing the stated goal of increasing employment, work requirements will instead make it harder for people with mental health disabilities to work.

We also advocated against work requirements at the state level. In the Spring, several states applied to impose work requirements in their Medicaid programs, even before they were mandated to do so by H.R.1. The Bazelon Center submitted public comments on such proposals from Ohio, Arkansas, and Georgia. In each one, we urged the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to reject the state's proposal, arguing that past experience with Medicaid work requirements demonstrates they have consistently caused thousands of people to lose needed health care coverage inappropriately and harmed people with disabilities.

As federal work requirements for Medicaid recipients are implemented, the Bazelon Center continues to advocate against the potential loss of health care coverage for millions of people. In particular, our work is now focused on ensuring that states are complying with the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act when implementing and administering work requirements, and that people with mental health disabilities are not wrongfully disenrolled.

Alumnae Updates!

The work continues! Despite an increasingly challenging environment for those committed to equity and progress, our alumnae here in the US and throughout the world relentlessly work to defend and advance gender justice and the spectrum of civil and human rights. As the saying goes, “No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.” WLPPFPs and LAWAs are doing something!

Asees Bhasin (US 2020-2021) has published her article, *Bias and the “Low Bar” of Relevance* in Volume 114 of the *California Law Review*. She is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Law and Donald Gaines Murray Fellow at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.



Consolata Chikoti (LAWA 2023-2024) is the new Executive Director of the Msichana Initiative in Tanzania. As a passionate and fearless advocate of girls' education, there is no better leader than Consolata. Sending our warmest congratulations!



Gretchen Borchelt (2002-2003) joined **Amanda Allen (US 2009-2010)** and **Diana Salgado (US 2006-2007)** at the launch event for the Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights Bar Association.

Bwalya Chisanga (LAWA 2024-2025) has been accepted as a member of the Africa Policy Accelerator, an initiative to foster leadership among African policy-makers in Washington, D.C.

Ally Crays (US 2024-2025) is the new Public Health Law and Policy Analyst in the Department of Health Policy & Management at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. She is working on the Public Health Deans and Scholars Amicus Brief and Public Comment Project.

Liliana Garces (US 1998-1999) co-authored a piece in *US News & World Report* advocating for academic freedom as a cornerstone of democracy, entitled *All Colleges Must Reject the White House Compact*.

Congratulations to **Myka Held (US 2023-2024)** on the publication of her article in the *Women's Rights Law Reporter* Spring/Summer, 2025, *Myth Making and Spirit Breaking: How Conventional Rape Narratives Aversely Shape Judicial Language*.



Jenny Hunter (US 2004-2005) wrote for People's Parity Project called *No Kings: The Urgent Need for Court Reform*, examining the 389 cases challenging actions by the Trump Administration and the

need for progressive courts to fight autocracy.

Ngenarr-Yassin Jeng (LAWA 2021-2022) was appointed as the Deputy Executive Secretary of the Reparations Commission of The Gambia.

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Debra Katz (US 1985-1986) is representing a group of whistleblowers who were fired for exposing wrongdoing within the US Department of Health and Human Services, including politically-based attacks on scientific research and ignoring evidence of vaccine safety and effectiveness.

Ashlynn Kendzior (US 2023-2024) published a piece called *Remaining Barriers to Abortion Access in Post-Repeal Ireland* in the *Creighton International and Comparative Law Journal*. She is working as a staff attorney at the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, primarily focusing on mining and environmental justice work.



Maria Kisumbi (Jurua) (LAWA 2013-2014) (third from left, with 2025-2026 LAWA Fellows) and **Mooya Nyaundi (2012-2013)** collaborated to host the 3rd Annual US-Africa Futures Summit at Howard University.

Thanaa Mahmoudi (US 2024-2025) joined the Center for Family Representation as a Staff Attorney, providing legal support to families facing the risk of separation.

Lily Milwit (2021-2022) joined the fellows for a "mind-blowing" (in the words of one LAWA) seminar on Race and Poverty in the United States.

Mary Musoni (LAWA 2024-2025) reports, "I began my post-graduate position with AE-QUITAS. My work focuses on research related to image-based sexual abuse and the related crimes of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, and human trafficking."

Prudence Mutiso (2017-2018) is now a Fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers in Kenya.

Our Kenyan LAWAs are very, very busy!



Beverline Ongaro (LAWA 2012-2013) continues to captivate audiences with her poetry, calling for a more just world for women and girls. Her most recent appearances were at the Inaugural Men's Conference of the Law Society of Kenya and the Law Society of Kenya's annual meeting. **Leah Kiguatha (LAWA 2007-2008)** recently presented on the panel *Novel and Hot Topics in Child Law* at the International Association of Family Lawyers in Nairobi. Beverline and Leah (pictured above) participated in Transparency International's Integrity Walk, calling for the end of government corruption.



Beverly Mumbo-Otieno (LAWA 2019-2020) was nominated for the In-House Lawyer of the Year Award, Civil Society.



Finally, Beverline, Beverly, and Leah joined **Teresa Omondi (LAWA 2016-2017)** in celebrating FIDA-Kenya's 40th anniversary! Congratulations and thank you for all you do to advance gender justice.

The Fellowship was honored to have the brilliant **Lynn Paltrow (US 1984-1985)** as the keynote speaker at this year's welcome lunch. She was just the dose of hope we needed in these turbulent times. Lynn was also featured in a CBS *Sunday Morning* news story, *Investigating the Controversial Practice of Drug Testing Pregnant Patients in Hospitals*.

Shanta Trivedi (US 2020-2021) authored an opinion piece for the *Baltimore Sun* titled, *Time to Reject Status Quo that Fails Maryland's Foster Kids* calling for increased resources for the state's low-income families.

Brian Tronic (US 2016-2017) wrote on the misuse of pretrial detention in political prisoner cases for the *Freedom House Blog*.

Meet the 2025-2026 Women's Law & Public Policy Fellows!



Elizabeth Atori is a human rights lawyer who joins the LAWA Program from Uganda, where she obtained her LL.B. from Makerere University in 2015 and a Postgraduate

Diploma in Legal Practice from the Law Development Centre. She most recently served as a program manager for the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights. There, she led efforts to challenge the detention of women and girls in hospitals for unpaid healthcare bills, as well as the exclusionary effects of the national digital identification system, especially on women. She has contributed to alternative reports to the Universal Periodic Review and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. She has also worked with the Center for Reproductive Rights on strategic litigation addressing obstetric violence, and school expulsions due to pregnancy. Elizabeth has also consulted with the MUYI Group, supporting women-led enterprises in securing over USD \$200,000 in program funding.



Joy Awich is a passionate feminist lawyer from Kenya who aims to use the skills gained from the LAWA Program to drive bold, transformative advocacy for gender

justice across Africa. Joy graduated with an LL.B. from Strathmore Law School in 2018 and has a Postgraduate Diploma in Legal

Practice from the Kenya School of Law. She has worked with FIDA Kenya on gender-sensitive approaches in legal enforcement and with Equality Now, where she organized the Africa Gender Equality Moot Court Competitions and advanced campaigns against child marriage and FGM. At One Billion Rising, she led a campaign against intimate partner violence and femicide. Fluent in English and French, Joy served as Francophone Legal Officer at ISLA, where she expanded the organization's presence in West Africa, fostered regional partnerships, and promoted language justice through translation of feminist legal resources.



Sydnee Fielkow joins the Georgetown Domestic Violence Clinic from the U.S. Sentencing Commission, where she served as a Staff Attorney in the

Office of General Counsel and contributed to the development of federal sentencing policy. She previously clerked for the Honorable Carolyn N. Lerner on the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. At the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, Sydnee prosecuted domestic violence and sexual assault cases. Sydnee obtained her J.D. from Northwestern Pritzker School of Law in 2019, where she was Managing Production Editor of the *Northwestern Journal of Law & Social Policy* and earned the school's highest recognition for public service. While at Northwestern, she led a successful student initiative to establish a

permanent Day of Civic Service on Election Day, which has since served as a national model. She holds a B.A. in Psychology, with a minor in Criminal Justice, from The George Washington University.



Payton Small Gannon joins the National Women's Law Center Reproductive Rights and Health Litigation group as the Small Webber Spencer Fellow. She is a

2025 graduate of Georgetown Law, where she was Editor-in-Chief of the *Annual Review of the Georgetown Journal of Gender & the Law*. Payton was also a board member of If/When/How, and a student attorney in the Appellate Courts Immersion Clinic. As a research assistant to Professor Michele Goodwin, she contributed to a Constitutional law textbook and authored papers on reproductive autonomy. She has also interned with AEquitas, Planned Parenthood, and the Center for Reproductive Rights, drafting reports on sexual violence laws, and the criminalization of miscarriages. As a Fulbright Scholar in Milan, her work focused on abortion and Catholicism in Italy. She was a field organizer for the Democratic Party of Georgia in 2020 and holds a B.A. in Political Science and Gender and Sexuality Studies from Brown University.



Fraciah Kagu joins the LAWA program from Kenya, where she has worked for over a decade to advance gender equity and human rights across Africa. She most recently

served as Advocacy and Partnerships Officer at the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), where she led Pan-African, multi-country programs promoting evidence-based, gender-responsive education. She coordinated advocacy efforts, built partnerships with global and regional actors, and strengthened the FAWE network's capacity to serve marginalized girls and women. Previously, Fraciah worked as a Legal Officer at the CRADLE Children's Foundation, providing legal aid to children and driving systemic reform for access to justice. At the Eastern Africa Child Rights Network, she led a regional counter-trafficking initiative and promoted child rights in governance. She earned an LL.B. from the University of Nairobi in 2012. Fraciah also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Law from the Kenya School of Law, and an MA in Project Planning and Management.



The LAWA Program welcomes **Juliet Mamawa Kaikai**, a seasoned African Feminist Lawyer from Sierra Leone. She earned her LL.B. from the

University of Sierra Leone in 2017 and was then admitted to the Bar in 2020. She served as Deputy Secretary General with LAWYERS, contributing to legislative reforms, including the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act. Previously, she was the Legal Manager for AdvocAid, leading strategic litigation cases before the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice on an effort to secure justice for a girl who was a victim of child marriage and on the campaign to decriminalize poverty and status. She was also part of the Feminist Litigation Network at ISLA,

contributing to cross-regional legal strategies on gender justice. She most recently served as a Policy Advocacy Consultant for Purposeful, where she led feminist campaigns and coordinated regional advocacy efforts.



Maria Ortiz Pineda joins the National Partnership for Women & Families, Economic Justice Group as the Judy Lichtman Legacy Fund Fellow. She earned her

J.D. from American University Washington College of Law in 2025, where she was an editor for the *Labor and Employment Brief*. She holds a B.A. in Government and International Politics from George Mason University. Maria's commitment to advancing labor rights and economic justice is grounded in her work alongside low-wage workers, women, immigrants, and communities of color. As a Peggy Browning Fellow at the Communications Workers of America, she supported litigation before the National Labor Relations Board involving union discrimination and employer interference. At the National Women's Law Center, she led digital storytelling and speaker initiatives to uplift workers' voices. Maria also served as a fellow in the Office of then-U.S. Senator Kamala Harris, conducting policy research and supporting legislative priorities.



Briana Torres joins the O'Neill Institute and the National Health Law Program (NHeLP) as the Maeve McKean Fellow. She is a dedicated advocate for gender

equality, reproductive rights, and social justice. Briana earned her B.A. in Plan II Honors and English from the University of Texas and received her J.D. from SMU Dedman School of Law in 2025. She has worked with the ACLU Women's Rights Project, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the National Women's Law Center, and the

Center for Reproductive Rights, where she contributed to litigation and legal research on issues including pregnancy, housing discrimination, and maternal health. At the Judge Elmo B. Hunter Legal Center for Victims of Crimes Against Women, she worked on clemency and anti-trafficking efforts. During law school, she served as President of If/When/How and a Board member of the Hispanic Law Student Association.



The LAWA Program welcomes **Nardos Girma Wolde**, a dedicated lawyer and human rights advocate from Ethiopia. She earned her LL.B. from

Mekelle University in 2016 and a Master's in Human Rights from Addis Ababa University in 2020. Her thesis focused on child migration along the southern route. Nardos supported UN Women by organizing a national moot court on women's political participation. At UNODC, she contributed to programs on justice reform, gender-based violence, counterterrorism, and human trafficking, applying a rights-based lens to international legal issues. She served as a Senior Expert with Ethiopia's National Electoral Board, leading nationwide electoral training and contributing to legal reforms for inclusive, democratic processes. As co-founder of Optimal Consulting PLC, Nardos leads projects that bridge law, policy, and development, demonstrating her dedication to sustainable change in Ethiopia.

In Memoriam



We are saddened to learn of the passing of **Sarah "Sally" Burns (1983-1984)**. **Lynn Paltrow (US 1984-1985)** reflects on her friendship with Sally.

I became a Georgetown Women's Law and Public Policy Fellow in 1984, the second year of the program. Sally had been in the inaugural 1983 class of fellows. As I recall, the fellowship had provided a vital escape route for Sally from her law firm job. Her placement was at the Georgetown Law School's Sex Discrimination clinic where she remained during my fellowship year helping to run the clinic and the fellowship program.

With a couple of master's degrees in addition to her law degree and having had several years of experience practicing law including at the clinic, I looked up to Sally as someone who was already an accomplished feminist legal advocate and someone I could turn to for advice and support. This, as it turned out, was something that remained true through all the years since then including when Sally filed beautiful, brilliant amicus briefs in support of controversial clients I was representing; when we litigated and actually won hard and complex cases together; and when she so generously became a board member providing essential, steadfast guidance to the organization I founded, Pregnancy Justice (formerly National Advocates for Pregnant Women).

Her stories about her home life – where she lived with her beloved wife Amanda and their many animals, including horses, dogs and cats often provided much needed perspective on our work challenging yet another cruel and pointless state action against a pregnant woman. Right up until the very end of her life, Sally was providing me with extraordinarily insightful and creative feedback. I will miss her beyond words.



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