



Ambassadors for Racial Justice 2022

The Program

Sponsored by the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative and The Gault Center, the Ambassadors for Racial Justice program is for defenders who are committed to challenging racial injustice in the juvenile legal system.

The Goal

To grow the number of youth defenders and advocates equipped to develop strategies to combat racial inequities in their jurisdictions and to facilitate difficult conversations on race. We recognize that combatting systemic racial inequities within the youth legal system requires efforts outside of litigation and requires advocates in various spaces. We believe that supporting a cohort of defenders to engage in work that transcends beyond legal advocacy will allow for long-term sustainable results within the youth legal system.

The Outcome

A group of well-trained, diverse youth defenders and advocates who may go on to become policy advocates, judges, and legislators, to represent minority viewpoints, empower communities of color, and systemically reform our youth legal system.



"Together, we can radically reduce the footprint of police in the lives of Black and Brown children. That work starts by decriminalizing normal adolescent behaviors and treating all children like children!"

Kristin Henning Washington, DC

Kristin Henning is the Blume Professor of Law and Director of the Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative at Georgetown Law, where she supervises law students and represents youth accused of delinquency in the District of Columbia. Kris was previously the Lead Attorney for the Juvenile Unit of the D.C. Public Defender Service and is currently the Director of the Mid-Atlantic Juvenile Defender Center.

Kris writes extensively about race, adolescence, and policing. Her new book, *The Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth* (Pantheon/Penguin Random House, 2021) has already received rave reviews in the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post*. Henning serves on the Board of Directors for the Center for Children's Law and Policy, the ABA's Juvenile Justice Standards Task Force, and ALI's Restatement on Children and the Law project. She has won several awards including the Juvenile Leadership Prize by the Juvenile Law Center and the Robert E. Shepherd, Jr. Award for Excellence in Juvenile Defense by The Gault Center.

Kris has trained state actors across the country on the impact of racial bias in the juvenile and criminal legal systems. Her workshops help stakeholders recognize their own biases and develop strategies to counter it. Kris also worked closely with the McArthur Foundation's Juvenile Indigent Defense Action Network to develop a 41-volume Youth Defender Advocacy Program (YDAP), a national training curriculum for youth defenders. She now co-hosts, with The Gault Center, an annual week-long YDAP summer academy for trial lawyers and a series of "Train the Trainer" programs for experienced defenders. In 2019, Kris partnered with The Gault Center to launch a Racial Justice Toolkit for youth advocates, and again in 2020, to launch the Ambassadors for Racial Justice program, a year-long program for juvenile defenders committed to challenging racial injustice in the juvenile legal system through litigation and systemic reform.

Mary Ann Scali

Washington, DC

Mary Ann Scali serves as the executive director of The Gault Center where she works with youth defenders and advocates dedicated to promoting justice for all children by ensuring excellence in youth defense. After working as a summer law clerk for the The Gault Center in 1996, Mary Ann became the Deputy Director in 2000 and the Executive Director in 2017. In partnership with The Gault Center team and youth defense leaders, Mary Ann delivers youth defense training and technical assistance, conducts state-level youth defense assessments, and facilitates cross-disciplinary reform efforts aimed at developing resources and policies to strengthen youth defense and access to justice for all youth.

Prior to joining The Gault Center, Mary Ann defended youth in the juvenile division of the Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore City, MD; spent two years teaching high school in Pohnpei, Micronesia; served in the Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome, Italy; and taught Baltimore City boys at the Baraka School in Nanyuki, Kenya. Mary Ann holds a JD and MSW from Loyola University Chicago where she was a CIVITAS Childlaw Fellow.



"Addressing racial disparities has long been a part of our work as juvenile defenders. We now have the mandate and the tools to create the change needed to establish racial justice for all youth!"



"There is no better time to combat the racism that has paralyzed our youth legal system for countless years. I am excited to work alongside a powerful team of Attorneys from across the country who are ready to transform the system. These are our Racial Justice Ambassadors and we are confident they will make real changes in our world."

Ayisha Scales-Bruce Washington, DC

Ayisha Scales-Bruce is the Racial Justice and Juvenile Defense Fellow. She is a proud alumna of Livingstone College where she earned her B.A. in social work, Fordham University where she earned her M.A. in social work, and Rutgers Law School where she received her J.D.

Prior to law school, Ayisha worked as a forensic social worker in New York City. Ayisha served as a fearless advocate for youth in foster care, the youth legal system, and public schools. Ayisha witnessed firsthand the intersections of race, inequality, and the law and this inspired her to become a lawyer.

During law school, Ayisha served as a student attorney in the Children's Justice Clinic, representing youth charged with delinquent acts. She also served as a judicial extern for the supervising Administrative Juvenile Judge and as a summer associate for the Center for Law and Social Justice.

Ayisha was the regional vice chairwoman of the Black Law Students Association. As a racial justice advocate, she raised awareness of police racial profiling students, which led to reform efforts in Windsor County. For her outstanding achievement in pursuit of social justice and equality, her academic excellence, and her advocacy for Black law students, Ayisha was honored with the 2020 Mary Philbrook Public Interest Award, the 2020 Justice Garibaldi Award, the 2020 David Doligenos Memorial Graduation Award, the 2020 Barristers Award, the 2019 Garden State Bar Association Diversity Award, the 2018 Heart of Black Law Students Award, and the 2018 Equal Justice Award. Ayisha sits on the board of the Rutgers Law RADICAL Diversity Committee.

Ebony Howard Washington, DC

Ebony is the Deputy Director for The Gault Center. In this role, she works to serve youth defenders and advocates so that they may seek justice for children and adolescents and provide excellence in juvenile defense.

Prior to joining The Gault Center, Ebony was a Senior Supervising Attorney at the Southern Poverty Law Center where she developed, implemented, and managed litigation and policy campaigns to combat injustice and systemic racism in the criminal and youth justice systems. Ebony also defended individuals charged with federal crimes in District Court as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Alabama. Currently, Ebony serves on the boards for the National Juvenile Justice Network and Youth Towers – a Birmingham, Alabama-based organization dedicated to supporting homeless youth ages 19 to 26.

Ebony graduated from Howard University Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude with a B.A. in Political Science, and attended the Georgetown University Law Center. While at Georgetown Law, Ebony was a student attorney in the Juvenile Justice Clinic where she represented young people before the District of Columbia Superior Court.



“Black and Brown children, like all children, are entitled to a healthy and happy childhood without the interference of racism and biases from the adults who are supposed to be protecting them. It is our responsibility to safeguard their opportunity for positive life outcomes by defending their rights vigorously and standing guard against harms that flow from involvement in the system.”



"I'm thrilled to support the 2022 Ambassadors for Racial Justice as we work together to abolish the white supremacy embedded in our legal system and create a world where Black and Brown youth are free to fully enjoy their rights as children! "

Rebba Omer Washington, DC

Rebba Omer serves as Staff Attorney and Program Manager for the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJCI). Rebba joined JJCI after serving for four years as an Assistant Public Defender at the Community Law Office in Knoxville, TN where she specialized in advocating for children accused of delinquent offenses. Rebba has been trained in holistic, client-centered criminal defense representation and youth defense specialization through the Gideon's Promise Core 101 three-year training program and The Gault Center's Youth Defender Advocacy Program (formerly JTIP) Summer Academy. Rebba came to the Community Law Office through Northwestern University School of Law's Pritzker Fellowship.

While a student attorney in the Northwestern Bluhm Legal Clinic's Children and Family Justice Center, Rebba represented individual clients impacted by the juvenile justice system and collaborated with professors on policy advocacy.

In her final year of law school, Rebba completed a senior research project in Bangladesh where she assisted an NGO with a country-requested audit of the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Prior to law school, Rebba was an AmeriCorps volunteer at an Oakland, CA homeless shelter where she taught job search and retention skills to clients with barriers to employment. She graduated summa cum laude from DePaul University in 2010 with a B.A. in English literature and a minor in public policy.

Ashlynn Rotta Mejia Cleveland, Ohio

"It is not enough to look upon the civil rights efforts of our parents and grandparents with distant admiration. To honor their legacy is to continue their efforts demanding a more equal society, and ensuring our children have a childhood free from systemic oppression"



Ashlynn Rotta Mejia is a youth defender with the Cuyahoga County Public Defender's Office in Cleveland, Ohio. As a youth defender, Ashlynn is a fierce advocate and represents young people charged with felonies and misdemeanors in juvenile court. She strives

to provide the families of charged youth with a better understanding of the legal system so they feel empowered. Ashlynn believes a critical part of her job is helping her clients and their families learn to navigate the system so that they do not get trapped in a cycle of court dates, probation violations, and detention.

Ashlynn received her B.A. in Spanish from Cleveland State University. She originally had her sights set on teaching but went to the Cleveland Marshall School of Law after recognizing the injustices faced by the youth of Cleveland. While in law school, Ashlynn organized a mission to send students to the Mexican border to provide free legal services to asylum seekers being held in detention. She also volunteered to provide translation services and participate in legal advice clinics held in prisons throughout the state detaining undocumented immigrants. Her advocacy in law school won her the Dean's Community Service Award from her law school. She is also the recipient of the Ohio Supreme Court Pro Bono Service Award.

Bryan Jeffries Columbia, South Carolina

"The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks or people look at reality, then you can change it."
— James Baldwin



Bryan Jeffries is a 2002 graduate of the University of South Carolina School of Law in Columbia, South Carolina where he served as Chair of the Minority Affairs/Minority Recruitment Committee of the Student Bar Association and Vice-President of the

Black Law Students Association. He currently works as a Juvenile Justice Resource Attorney for the Children's Law Center at the University of South Carolina School of Law. In private practice, Bryan has worked as a youth defender, represented adults charged with criminal offenses and represented individuals who had been subjected to unlawful discrimination in employment, public accommodations and housing. Bryan is a founding member of the Diversity Committee of the South Carolina Bar Association and is very active in the Committee's mission to promote full and meaningful participation in the legal profession in South Carolina by people of diverse backgrounds and to acknowledge historical discrimination in the state's judicial system. Bryan is especially interested in ending the overrepresentation of minority youth in the legal system.

Carnita McKeithen Memphis, Tennessee

"[I]t isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it, one must work at it." – Eleanor Roosevelt



Carnita McKeithen is the first-ever supervisor of the Youth Trial Division in the Shelby County Public Defender's Office located in Memphis, Tennessee. She is a tenacious advocate for youth rights and has served the youth of Shelby County as a youth defender

throughout her career. She holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Jurist Doctorate from the University of Tennessee. She has been practicing law for sixteen years. She began her career as an associate for a small boutique firm located in Knoxville, Tennessee. Carnita then returned to her native city of Memphis to work as a clerk for Federal Court Judge Bernice Donald. She later served as the Juvenile Justice and Termination/Administrative Hearings Attorney for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services before operating a solo law practice for five years.

An accomplished leader, public defender and social justice activist, Carnita is active with a number of community organizations. In addition to being a front-line advocate, she serves the community as an active member and missionary of The Life Church. Carnita serves as a part of Life's outreach program through the Memphis Dream Center and does missionary work locally, nationally, and internationally. Carnita is a member of the Central Juvenile Defender Center Advisory Council and a certified trainer in the Youth Defender Training Program (formerly known as JTIP). She is proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated.

Cecilia Appleberry St. Louis, Missouri

"We do this 'til we free us." – Mariame Kaba



Cecilia Appleberry is an Assistant Public Defender with Missouri State Public Defender's Children's Defense Team. She previously worked in the St. Louis City Trial Division. Cecilia has represented numerous clients on cases ranging from misdemeanors to high-

level felonies and has successfully tried multiple felony cases. She frequently litigates issues of race and class in detention hearings, adjudication hearings, and disposition hearings to help judges have a more holistic view of her clients. When Cecilia is not advocating for her clients in the courtroom, she is standing with the community, fighting for justice. She spoke during the George Floyd March that MSPD organized in St. Louis and is an inspiration to MSPD offices statewide. She is the Chair of the Women in Law Employee Resource Group and is also a part of the People of Color Employee Resource Group. Cecilia is always taking advantage of training opportunities and ways to lift our client's voices.

Farah Rahaman Union County, New Jersey

"I am excited to be an Ambassador for Racial Justice because I want to shine a light on the bifurcated youth legal system in my county. I want to ensure that my clients are afforded the same opportunities and chances to make mistakes that their white counterparts are given."



Farah Rahaman is a youth defender with the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender in Union County. Farah joined the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) in the fall of 2018. Prior to that, she clerked for a juvenile court judge in Essex County. Since joining OPD,

Farah has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing racial equity. Her motions are featured on the Racial Justice for Youth: A Toolkit for Defenders, an online resource for defenders across the nation.

Farah sits on the OPD Anti-Juvenile Waiver Task Force and Post Disposition Unit, where her primary focus is to reduce the racial disparities in New Jersey youth prisons. She is also a member of the OPD Juvenile Training Committee. In August 2021, OPD named Farah "Attorney of the Month" and recognized her for changing the environment of her court by consistently challenging the Judiciary and the State to adopt recent trends in youth defense. For example, Farah filed an interlocutory appeal to contest a long-standing waiver procedure that precluded litigation of dispositive motions prior to waiver. The Appellate Division granted leave and she is currently preparing her argument.

Farah earned her B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University and her Law Degree from Rutgers School of Law, Newark. While in law school, Farah participated in the Criminal and Youth Justice Clinic and the Constitutional Rights Clinic. Farah grew up in Union County, where she currently practices and is fortunate enough to reside there with her young son. She works fiercely and tirelessly to disrupt systemic racism.

Leslie Faith Jones Southern District of Mississippi

"In the Deep South, children of color are disproportionately targeted in the classroom and the community. I am learning new strategies to lead reform efforts requiring justice systems to consider normal adolescent development, brain science, and racial trauma before locking up a Black or Brown child."



Leslie Faith Jones is a Philadelphia native and a graduate of Spelman College, the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Temple University's Beasley School of Law. She considers herself a People's Lawyer, using what she has learned in 25 years of movement

building to empower communities (youth, adults, families) to challenge criminal justice and environmental policies which adversely affect and impact their lives. In central New York State she represented children in delinquency/dependency proceedings, students of color who were disproportionately suspended from school and threatened with expulsion, and teenagers in misdemeanor drug court.

As the former Policy & Advocacy Director for the Montgomery County (PA) Office of the Public Defender, Leslie served as facilitator for the County's Disproportionate Minority Contact Working Group and Co-Chair for Education, Research, and Training for Pottstown Trauma Informed Community Connection. She was also a member of the Statewide Advisory Committee on the Use/Effects of Youth Courts in Pennsylvania's Education/Juvenile Justice Systems. Leslie continues to focus on the under-developed strengths of at-risk communities as a member of the Justice Consortium (Co-Chair); the Culture Consortium; and as Anti-Racism Summit Faculty for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. She currently works as a Senior Staff Attorney in the Criminal Justice Reform Practice Group of the Southern Poverty Law Center where she defends the constitutional rights of children detained in Mississippi and Florida.

Megan Eaton Palm Beach County, Florida

"Racism separates, but it never liberates. Hatred generates fear, and fear once given a foothold; binds, consumes and imprisons. Nothing is gained from prejudice. No one benefits from racism." – Thurgood Marshall.



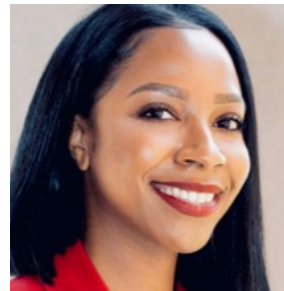
Megan Eaton is an Assistant Public Defender and Chief of the Juvenile Division at the Office of the Public Defender – 15th Circuit in Palm Beach County, Florida. She has worked with the office for over fourteen years as an assistant public defender in

the misdemeanor, juvenile, felony, and serious crimes divisions and as the county resource attorney. She has been the Chief of the Juvenile Division for the last five years. As part of her work, Megan represents children in delinquency drug court and in commitment programs and leads a team of zealous youth defenders. She is the co-chair of the Circuit 15 Juvenile Justice Advisory Board, the Chair of the Racial and Ethnic Disparity Juvenile Subcommittee, and the Chair of the Juvenile Steering Committee for the Florida Public Defender Association.

Megan has worked to create programs that assist children in staying out of the legal system, and if they are in the legal system, getting those children out as quickly as possible. She has partnered with the local library and other stakeholders to have authors of color, like Jason Reynolds and Elizabeth Acevedo, visit children in the detention sites. As part of her subcommittee's work, they have created a restorative justice program for youth on probation.

Rhyzan Croomes Los Angeles, California

"Turning a blind eye to racial injustice is choosing a child in shackles, accepting families being ripped apart, and destroying our best hope for the future."



Rhyzan Croomes is the Supervising Attorney at LMU Loyola Law School's Center for Juvenile Law and Policy (CJLP). She is a ferocious and dedicated advocate who strives to take a holistic approach to litigation, making sure all youth have a voice during their delinquency

proceedings. Rhyzan started her legal career at Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers as a dependency attorney, helping adults navigate the system and fight to get their children back from DCFS custody. She then continued her career in private practice, focusing on adult criminal and youth defense. She is a defender through and through. She is also a board member for the Center for the Empowerment of Families, a non-profit organization that focuses on providing mental health services for indigent youth.

Rhyzan received her J.D. from Loyola Law School, with concentrations in public interest and criminal justice. While at Loyola, she was on the board for a non-profit organization called 'The Skid-Row Project,' was the President of the Black Law Student Association, was the Chair for the National Lawyers Guild, and was the 2019 recipient for the Dean's Service Award as well as the Alumni Association Award. She is currently working with professors, experts, and attorneys with the first-of-its-kind independent Forensic Gang College that prepares individuals, who have personal gang knowledge, to provide court testimony explaining what drives young men and women to join gangs.

Robin Salter Prince George's County, Maryland

"I refuse to be a cog in the wheel of a legal system that robs the souls of Black and Brown children, polices their minds, bodies, and actions, and intentionally limits their abilities to thrive - all based on the color of their skin. In the words of the late Frederick Douglass, 'Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.'"



Robin Salter is an Assistant Public Defender in the Juvenile Division of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD) in Prince George's County. She received her bachelor's degree with honors from George Mason University and law degree from the

University of the District of Columbia's David A. Clarke School of Law. She joined the MOPD immediately after graduating from law school. Currently, Robin serves as a member of the Maryland Suspension Representation Project, MOPD's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Council, where she chairs the subcommittee on culture and programming, and a member of the office's internal Community Engagement Committee. While at UDC Law, Robin was a student attorney in the Joseph B. Tulman Juvenile Justice and Special Education Clinic representing children with pending delinquency matters, special education litigation, and legislative reform projects. She also participated in a reform initiative prohibiting school suspensions and expulsions. Later, the D.C. Council unanimously passed the Student Fair Access to School Act.

Prior to joining MOPD, Robin was the Court Manager at the Arlington County Circuit Court, in Arlington, Virginia, serving the Honorable William T. Newman, Jr., Chief Judge and several other Circuit Court judges.

Tiffany Reid-Collazo Washington, District of Columbia

"If caging Black children protects us from anything, it's from having to seriously consider their very humanity."



Tiffany Reid-Collazo is currently a Staff Attorney in the Juvenile Services Program of the Community Defender Division at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia where she has worked since 2020. Tiffany moved to Washington, D.C. to pursue a Master's in

African American History at "The" Howard University and, after deciding on law as the weapon with which she would arm herself in the fight for Black liberation, stayed and attended American University Washington College of Law. During law school, she clerked for several public defender offices, represented adults and children as a student attorney in the Criminal Justice Clinic, taught constitutional law at a local public high school, and served on the executive boards for the Journal for Gender, Social Policy & the Law and Black Law Students Association. After law school, she became the J.D. Distinguished Fellow at the Juvenile Court Division and the Youthful Defendant Unit of the Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore, MD.

Currently, she is the Chair of the Community Aid Subcommittee of the Youth Justice Project (YJP) and serves on various community-based youth advocacy committees. YJP partners with local youth defenders and community-based organizations to address the needs of youth under the supervision of the Department of Youth and Rehabilitation Services (DYRS).

Bridging her community work and legal advocacy, Tiffany partners with local organizations and individuals to supply regular book donations to the children caged at the Youth Services Center. She is also part of the efforts to change the behavior modification program at New Beginnings Youth Development Center so that it better accounts for the science of Black adolescent brain development. Additionally, she is doing legislative advocacy work with a government advisory group that recently proposed goals and strategies for reducing disparities at arrest for young people.

Ambassadors for Racial Justice

For more information about the Ambassadors for Racial Justice Program and the Juvenile Justice Initiative at Georgetown Law, please visit www.law.georgetown.edu/experiential-learning/clinics/juvenile-justice-clinic/juvenile-justice-initiative/ or email lawjjc@georgetown.edu. You can find a toolkit for juvenile defenders at defendracialjustice.org.

