

## **Criminal Justice Reform in New Orleans**

### Panelists' Biographies

**Derwyn Buntun** is the Chief Public Defender for Orleans Parish (New Orleans) Louisiana. He is responsible for the competent and effective representation of all poor persons charged with crimes in New Orleans, and is the Chief Executive Officer for the Orleans Public Defenders Office (OPD). Prior to becoming Chief Defender, Derwyn was the Executive Director of Juvenile Regional Services (JRS). JRS is the first stand-alone juvenile defender office in the nation and the first non-profit law office devoted to juvenile justice reform and front-line juvenile representation. Formerly the Associate Director for the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL), Derwyn graduated from New York University School of Law in 1998 and joined the fight in Louisiana to defend the rights of juveniles. He has spent 9 years challenging what has been called the most troubled juvenile justice system in the United States. He has authored and co-authored appeals on issues involving greater attorney access to juvenile records, constitutionality of statutes affecting children and the right to jury trials for juveniles.

From 2000 to 2006, Derwyn aided in monitoring the settlement agreement between the United States Department of Justice, the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, private plaintiffs and the State of Louisiana regarding Louisiana's juvenile prisons. Derwyn was also part of the litigation team that sued Louisiana over the conditions of its juvenile prisons.

During Hurricane Katrina, Derwyn was part of a team of advocates and lawyers assisting the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court, the Louisiana Office of Youth Development (OYD) and the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) locate and reunite youth and adults evacuated to OYD and DOC facilities after being trapped in by floodwaters in the Orleans Parish Prison. Children and adult prisoners were scattered across the State in the wake of Katrina.

Most recently, Derwyn was part of a team of lawyers representing the so-called Jena 6 in Jena, Louisiana. Originally charged with attempted murder, Derwyn's client pled guilty to a misdemeanor and received 7 days probation.

As Chief Defender, Derwyn currently assists in the training and supervision of the lawyers, investigators and other support staff at OPD. He represents the office on various boards and committees, including the, the Louisiana Supreme Court Juvenile Court Rules Committee and the Louisiana State Bar Association Right to Counsel Committee. Derwyn also presents and trains lawyers and advocates throughout Louisiana and the nation at regional and national conferences.

**James Carter** is a New Orleans City Council member representing Algiers, the French Quarter, and neighborhoods from the Mississippi River to Mid-City. He is a lifelong resident of New Orleans who embarked on his first bid for public office within months of Hurricane Katrina. As the first chair of the Council's Criminal Justice Committee, Carter

joined with community groups to sponsor two Criminal Justice Roundtables and invited the Vera Institute of Justice to speak on best practices. Based on Vera's report on the criminal justice system in 2007, Vera was asked to assist in a system-wide criminal justice change effort.

Believing that an effective approach to improving public safety in New Orleans must reach beyond the criminal justice system, Carter also initiated a partnership with Chicago CeaseFire, spearheaded the establishment of the Division of the Independent Police Monitor, sponsored ordinances encouraging the police to increase the use of summonses in lieu of arrest for minor offenses, led the Council in providing funding for juvenile court initiatives and a highly successful collaborative GED/literacy program for at-risk youth and young adults, and facilitated and promoted Laura Kurgan's research for "Justice Reinvestment New Orleans," in which she identified Central City as a "million dollar neighborhood."

James Carter earned both a Bachelor's Degree and a Juris Doctorate from Howard University, where he received the Law School's Academic Achievement Award. After graduating, Carter became a practicing defense attorney and served as the first director of New Orleans's nationally recognized Weed and Seed Program, an innovative approach to community revitalization, law enforcement, and crime prevention sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice.

**Dana Kaplan** is currently the Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL), a state-wide legal and advocacy organization dedicated to the reform of Louisiana's juvenile justice system. Prior to joining JJPL, Dana Kaplan was a Soros Justice Fellow at the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York City, focused on detention reform. At CCR, Ms. Kaplan worked with community groups and government on developing alternatives to detention and downsizing local jails in states including Tennessee, California, Ohio, Louisiana, and New York. She was also the State-wide Organizer for the New York Campaign for Telephone Justice, a partnership between CCR and two prison family organizations that successfully reduced the cost of all phone calls from New York State prisons by fifty percent. Ms. Kaplan has also been on staff at the Brooklyn-based Prison Moratorium Project, where her efforts helped stop the construction of a youth prison in upstate New York and two youth jail expansions in New York City. She has consulted with national organizations including The National Resource Center on Prisons and Communities and the National Education Association (NEA), developing a curriculum for teachers on Education not Incarceration. She currently serves on the Advisory Council for the National Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, an effort to end the practice of sentencing children to life without parole sentences nation-wide, and FREE, a New York City based organization of individuals with loved ones in prison organizing for criminal justice reform. Ms. Kaplan holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California at Berkeley.

**Gina Womack** is the Executive Director and Co-founder of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC), a statewide membership-based organization dedicated to creating a better life for all of Louisiana's youth, especially those who are

involved, or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. After hearing horrific stories of children beaten and abused while locked behind bars in Louisiana's juvenile prison system, in 2000 Gina founded FFLIC along with other parents, to conduct extensive community outreach to families caught in the juvenile justice system and advocate on their behalf. After gathering and hearing similar stories, families were compelled to organize around and join the law suit against the state of Louisiana around prison conditions of confinement led by the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) and the Department of Justice (DOJ). She was lead organizer of FFLIC's infamous Mock Jazz Funeral with parents, along with various other direct action events that have allowed parents to recognize their voice and hence, their power. Since its inception, FFLIC has worked with allies to pass sweeping reform that has close two prisons and are working on a statewide campaign to derail the school to prison pipeline in Louisiana.

Gina is the proud mother of three children. She is a board member of the Louisiana Public Defender Board, the Petra Foundation and Metairie Park Country Day School. She is also a 2006 Petra Fellow, 2009 Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana Advocate of the Year and 2009 Ms. Foundation Women of Vision award. Under her leadership FFLIC also received the 2009 National Juvenile Justice Network & Campaign for Youth Justice Organization of Distinction Award and the Effies 2009 Community Leadership Award.