

## Harm Reduction After the War on Drugs: Reimagining New York's Treatment System

### Speaker Bios

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#### Erica Bond

Vice President of Justice Initiatives, John Jay College of Criminal Justice



Erica Bond is the Vice President of Justice Initiatives at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She has a diverse background in the government, non-profit, public policy, and legal sectors.

Previous roles include serving as the Policy Director at John Jay College's Data Collaborative for Justice, Special Advisor for Criminal Justice to the First Deputy Mayor of New York City, and Director of Criminal Justice at the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.

After earning her J.D. from Fordham University School of Law, Ms. Bond spent 5 years as a Litigation Associate at Kaye Scholer LLP. She holds a B.A. from Wesleyan University.

**Tracie M. Gardner**  
**Executive Director, National Black Harm Reduction Network**



Tracie M. Gardner is Founder and Executive Director of the National Black Harm Reduction Network (NBHRN), a national organization she launched in 2018 to address the intersection of substance use, public health, and racial equity. A nationally recognized expert with more than 30 years of experience, her work centers on the impact of the War on Drugs and incarceration on Black communities. She is a frequent speaker, media contributor, and published author on harm reduction, institutional racism, and the health and criminal legal systems. Under her leadership, NBHRN has grown into a nationwide network and became an independent nonprofit in 2024.

Previously, Gardner served as Senior Vice President of Policy Advocacy at the Legal Action Center (2017–2024), where she led the “No Health = No Justice” initiative, a multi-state effort advancing decarceration and expanding access to care for people with criminal records. She also played a key role in shaping organizational strategy and advised New York State on Medicaid-funded reentry care. Earlier, she served as New York State Assistant Secretary of Health (2015–2017), overseeing agencies focused on mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities.

She began her career in HIV/AIDS advocacy, leading policy and legislative campaigns with organizations including the NYC Minority Task Force on AIDS (FACES), the National Minority AIDS Council, GMHC, and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. Gardner has contributed to influential research and policy publications and served on numerous advisory bodies. Her leadership has been widely recognized for advancing equity at the intersection of health and justice.

Her proudest achievement is being a parent to her two sons, Caleb and Elijah Wright.

**Saeeda Lesley Dunston,  
CEO, Elmcor Youth & Adult Activities, Inc.**



Saeeda Dunston has served as Elmcor's chief executive officer since August 2014. With deep personal and familial ties to Queens and the East Elmhurst/Corona communities, Ms. Dunston has the privilege of working on behalf of her community each and every day. Recognized for her leadership in developing culturally competent programs for marginalized communities in New York State, her work focuses on empowering individuals

and families to be active change agents in their communities. Before joining Elmcor, Saeeda held several senior management positions throughout her career, addressing poverty, anti-racism, and healthcare needs in various New York City boroughs and citywide advocacy and policy-focused coalitions. Under her leadership, Elmcor has solidified its role as a key service provider and advocate at the neighborhood level. She has played a vital role in enhancing Elmcor's capacity through partnerships with public and private entities, addressing socio-economic and health disparities in Queens communities.

Saeeda has significantly contributed to developing and improving programs focused on behavioral health, health equity, social and economic justice, anti-stigma initiatives, and community education. Notably, she spearheaded Elmcor's first Supportive and Affordable Housing Project, providing essential housing solutions to the chronically unhoused, individuals recovering from substance use disorders, and older adults. Additionally, her vocal, impassioned grassroots advocacy forged the groundwork that ultimately prompted the inclusion of a funeral assistance fund operationalized in the Biden-Harris administration to support families who lost loved ones during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Saeeda is a proud wife, mother, and grandmother.

Saeeda is motivated by the following quote: *The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.* – Malcolm X.

## **Jeffrey Coots**

### **Director, From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice**



Jeffrey Coots, J.D., M.P.H, is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Criminal Justice Department and has served as the founding Director of From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH) at John Jay College since 2013. He facilitates several working groups of municipal and community-based partners in pursuit of agency-level policy adaptations that lead to improved outcomes for clients and increased efficiency and efficacy for frontline and managerial staff.

Over the past twelve years, P2PH has built a strong track record of organizing and evaluating multi-agency collaborative interventions focused on the intersections of public health and public safety, including the NYPD-DHS Subway Homeless Diversion Program launched in 2014 and the KCDA Brooklyn CLEAR program that dispatches substance use peers to police precincts. In the last five years, P2PH has focused on addressing crime, violence, mental illness, substance misuse and housing insecurity in Brownsville and Central Brooklyn, in close collaboration with Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and a growing number of community-based agencies, faith leaders and local residents involved in the Brownsville Safety Alliance.

Jeff earned his juris doctorate from Northeastern University School of Law and Masters in Public Health from Tufts University School of Medicine in 2013, and his Bachelor of Arts in International Government Relations from Dartmouth College in 2004. Jeff also served as an Albert Schweitzer Fellow in 2012, delivering dialogue-based "Healthy Reentry" workshops to increase primary care utilization, prevent new infections and mitigate the effects of chronic disease. In his spare time, Jeff enjoys coaching youth soccer and hiking in the mountains of New Jersey and New York State.



**DATA COLLABORATIVE FOR JUSTICE**  
AT JOHN JAY COLLEGE

**P2PH**  
FROM PUNISHMENT  
TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Center  
for  
Justice  
Innovation

**gabriel Sayegh**  
**Executive Director, Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice**



gabriel sayegh is the executive director of the Katal Center for Equity, Health and Justice. Launched in 2016, Katal works to develop intergenerational leadership and organizing capacity to build community-based power and win systemic change.

Before cofounding Katal, gabriel served as managing director of policy & campaigns at the Drug Policy Alliance, collaborating with grassroots organizations in New York and around the country in the fight to end the war on drugs. From 2013 – 2016, gabriel co-led efforts to build and launch a pre-arrest diversion program in Albany, NY.

In 2016, he co-founded a national organization to provide technical assistance to municipalities seeking to establish pre-arrest diversion programs anchored in the principles of harm reduction and racial equity. He lives in Brooklyn.

**Samuel Roberts, Ph.D.**

**Associate Professor of History, Sociomedical Sciences and African American and African Diaspora Studies, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health**



Dr. Samuel Kelton Roberts, Jr., PhD, is Associate Professor of History at Columbia University and Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, and a former Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS).

Dr. Roberts' scholarship focuses on African American urban history, particularly medicine, public health, and science and technology. He is the author of *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (2009), which examines the intersection of race, segregation, and the development of the modern U.S. public health system.

Dr. Roberts' current research explores the history of race and addiction treatment in the United States, tracing the evolution of heroin treatment policy and practice from the 1950s through the 1990s, including therapeutic communities, methadone maintenance, and the emergence of harm reduction. He previously served as Policy Director of Columbia's Justice Initiative (now the Center for Justice), where he edited *Aging in Prison: Reducing Elder Incarceration and Promoting Public Safety* (2015).

He also leads the Research Cluster on the Historical Study of Race, Inequality, and Health at Columbia's Center for Science and Society and co-edits a Columbia University Press series on Race, Inequality, and Health. In 2018, Dr. Roberts launched the podcast *People Doing Interesting Stuff (PDIS)*, featuring conversations with leaders in public health and social justice, including harm reduction, HIV/AIDS, reproductive justice, and criminal justice reform.

**Megan French-Marcelin**  
**Senior Director for New York State Policy, Legal Action Center**



As the Senior Director for New York State Policy, Megan leads the New York Policy team in strategic engagement with state and local stakeholders in service of LAC's mission.

Previously, Megan served as the Director of Criminal Justice at Color of Change and as the Campaign Director of JustLeadershipUSA's "A Working Future" Campaign. She also worked as the ACLU's Policy Research Manager where she oversaw a broad portfolio of advocacy-driven criminal justice and policy research.

Megan has consulted for organizations, including Abolitionist Law Center and Voice of the Experienced. She holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University in US History, is the author of several scholarly articles, and has written for publications including *Jacobin*, *NY Daily News*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Jadalyyyia*.

**Bridget Rivera Degnan**  
**Senior Policy Manager, Data Collaborative for Justice at John Jay College**



Bridget is a Senior Policy Manager at the Data Collaborative for Justice (DCJ). Her work focuses on advancing data-driven criminal legal reforms through cross-sector collaboration and applied research. At DCJ, she supports the Committee on Latine Communities and the New York Criminal Justice System, leading stakeholder engagement and research on issues impacting Latine communities statewide.

Before joining DCJ, Bridget was a Project Manager at the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, where she oversaw a national portfolio of federal reentry initiatives and led technical assistance across justice, health, and housing sectors. Her earlier work includes conducting mixed-methods research on sex trafficking, contributing to an evaluation of police body-worn cameras, and providing direct support to parents reuniting with their children after incarceration.

Bridget brings over a decade of experience partnering with government agencies and community leaders to drive meaningful change at the intersection of policy, research, and practice. She is also an adjunct professor at John Jay College, where she teaches sociology and criminology. She holds a BA from Patrick Henry College, an MEd from the University of Oklahoma, and is completing her PhD at the City University of New York Graduate Center.

**Aaron Fox, M.D., M.S.**

**Professor of Medicine, Division of General Internal Medicine at Albert Einstein College  
of Medicine/Montefiore Medical Center  
Director of Bronx Transition Clinic**



Dr. Fox is a Professor of Medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine/Montefiore Medical Center and is board-certified in Internal and Addiction Medicine.

He directs the Bronx Transitions Clinic, which provides care to individuals with chronic health conditions recently released from incarceration. His research focuses on opioid use disorder, HIV, incarceration, and chronic pain.

Dr. Fox is a graduate of Albert Einstein College of Medicine, completed residency and chief residency at Montefiore, holds a Master's degree in Clinical Research Methods, and serves as President of the New York Society of Addiction Medicine

## David Lucas

### Senior Technical Advisor – States, Overdose Prevention Program, Vital Strategies



David Lucas (MSW) is a drug policy advisor and social work educator focused on reducing harm and advancing evidence-based practice at the intersection of substance use, healthcare, housing, and the criminal legal system.

As a Senior Advisor at Vital Strategies, he oversees overdose prevention and policy reform initiatives. Previously, Dave served as a Clinical Advisor at the Center for Justice Innovation, where he provided training and technical assistance to judges, attorneys, and clinical teams on overdose prevention and effective treatment.

David spent more than a decade in direct practice as an addiction therapist and clinical lead at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). Dave has taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Toronto and as a course director at York University's School of Social Work, and has published and presented widely on harm reduction, drug policy, and court-supervised treatment across North America. Before relocating to New York in 2018, he helped establish Toronto's first Overdose Prevention Site.

**Allison McCullough, DSW, LCSW**  
**Clinical Director, Midtown Community Justice Center**



Dr. Allison McCullough, LCSW, serves as Clinical Director of the Center for Justice Innovation Midtown Community Justice Center. In this role, she oversees the court's clinical services, including the Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court, Emerging Adult Court, and Community First, a mobile outreach team that uses peer navigators and a harm reduction approach to engage individuals in voluntary services in the community.

Allison has been working in the fields of mental health and decarceration for over 15 years, with experience in outreach to individuals experiencing street homelessness and alternative to incarceration programming for individuals with serious mental illness. She earned a Masters of Social Work from Columbia University and a Doctor of Social Welfare from New York University, where her research focused on the intersection of gender and incarceration.

**The Honorable John Zhuo Wang**  
**Presiding Judge, Midtown Community Justice Center**



Hon. John Zhuo Wang is the Presiding Judge of the Midtown Community Justice Center and an Acting Supreme Court Justice in Manhattan. Judge Wang is the first Asian American elected to the 1<sup>st</sup> Municipal District as a Judge of the NYC Civil Court. Prior to his election, he served as a Housing Judge in Kings County. Judge Wang was also Principal Law Clerk to the former Administrative Judge of the New York City Civil Court.

Judge Wang has also clerked in Civil and Family Court and began his legal career as a Fellow at South Brooklyn Legal Services. Judge Wang co-chaired the Civil Court Committee of the New York Women's Bar Association and is a member of the Asian American Bar Association and Asian American Judges Association of NY. An immigrant from China at age five, Judge Wang was raised in New York City public schools and is a graduate of Bronx High School of Science, Vassar College, and Brooklyn Law School. He currently serves on the New York State Judiciary's Mental Health Task Force and on the Board of Trustees of the Calhoun School.

**Mary Ellen Stitt, Ph.D.**  
**Assistant Professor, University at Albany School of Criminal Justice, Rockefeller  
College of Public Affairs and Policy**



Mary Ellen Stitt is a sociologist who studies the state's governance of mental illness and substance use. She is an assistant professor in the School of Criminal Justice in the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy at the University at Albany, SUNY. Beginning in the fall of 2026, she will be an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Rutgers University - New Brunswick. Her book *Trial by Treatment: Punishing Illness in an Age of Criminal Legal Reform* (University of Chicago Press, 2025) draws on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, surveys, administrative data, and other sources to document the unexpected impacts of treatment-based alternatives to traditional criminal punishment.

Her work has appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Punishment & Society*, *Social Forces*, and *Social Problems* and has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy, P.E.O. International, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Racial Democracy Crime and Justice Network & Arnold Ventures, among others. It has received awards from the American Sociological Association's Sections on the Sociology of Law; Crime, Law, and Deviance; and the Sociology of Mental Health.

**Darryl Phillips**  
**Executive Director, Always Strive and Prosper (ASAP) Foundation**



Darryl Phillips is the co-founder of the Always Strive and Prosper Foundation (“ASAP” Foundation) and Co-Director of the Brooklyn based organization, We Build The Block. Darryl is a passionate and dedicated harm reduction activist who has fostered distribution network of over 50,000 fentanyl test kits through partnerships with 50+ bars, restaurants, and retail partners across New York City and featured in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, NBC and other media outlets.

Through a partnership with We Build The Block and The ASAP Foundation Darryl has helped to architect a new program and curriculum entitled “Block Aid” which combines WBTB’s ‘Heal The Violence’ programming and the harm reduction expertise of “ASAP” to create a multi-month and tiered program targeting youth directly impacted by gun violence, youth detention and other state impacts and hurdles. Participants of the program are trained in social engagement, overdose prevention, critical thinking and conflict resolution, to teach their peers about fostering community well being and safer drug consumption.

Darryl's overall work is centered around the connection between harm reduction, media, and social justice. He has 20 years of experience as a director and producer of films, multi-media, and online content with an exemplary body of work focused on social justice, prison reform, climate change, and trans-rights, and drug legalization.

**Brittney Vargas-Estrella**  
**Director of Operations, On Point NYC**



Brittney Vargas-Estrella is a proud Bronxite and Boricua driven by a deep commitment to building equitable systems that uplift historically marginalized people, including individuals who use drugs, engage in sex work, experience homelessness, and/or have been impacted by the criminal-legal system.

As the Director of Operations at OnPoint NYC, Brittney drives operational excellence and strategic growth across multiple sites and a fleet of mobile vehicles, optimizing systems for efficiency and sustainability, and supporting the organization's programs to ensure participants have access to comprehensive and compassionate care. Brittney oversees core operational infrastructure, including contract management and reporting, compliance, and organizational development, ensuring the organization operates with integrity, accountability, and alignment with its mission and funding requirements.

Brittney holds a B.A. in Psychology from Manhattan College, is currently pursuing an M.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, and brings lived expertise to her leadership.

**Valerie St. Vil, LMSW**

**Associate Director of Mental Health/Director of Street Health Outreach and Wellness (SHOW) Program, NYC Health and Hospitals**



Valerie St. Vil, LMSW (she/her) serves as the Associate Director of Mental Health and Director of the Street Health Outreach & Wellness (SHOW) Program at NYC Health + Hospitals, Office of Behavioral Health (OBH).

Valerie is a Licensed Master Social Worker with 15 years of experience in social services. Valerie also works as a part-time psychotherapist in private practice, where she is trained in Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) & Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). She has experience working with individuals of all ages, from adolescence through late life. Valerie has dedicated her career to working at the intersection of social justice, mental health, substance use and homelessness. Valerie brings a deeply informed, compassionate perspective to her work, grounded in both clinical expertise and frontline experience.

**Eric Trujillo, LMSW**

**Social Worker, Street Health Outreach & Wellness (SHOW) Program, NYC Health and Hospitals**



Eric Trujillo is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) with over three years of experience in street outreach, specializing in connecting individuals to detoxification programs, rehabilitation services, shelters, and safe havens through a low-barrier, client-centered approach.

He began his outreach work in 2022 with the SHOW program under DOCGO and later joined NYC Health & Hospital in 2023.

Eric remains committed to advocating for harm reduction and equitable access to care within the Lower East Side community. He earned his Master of Social Work (MSW) from Hunter College in 2022. He is also a recipient of the Cabrini-Hunter Fellowship, awarded by the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation to exceptional graduate students pursuing careers in interprofessional, team-based healthcare.

## Allan Clear

### Director, New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute's Office of Drug User Health



Allan Clear is a prominent American public health advocate and harm reduction activist, renowned for his leadership in drug user health initiatives since the early 1990s.

Allan serves as the Director of the Office of Drug User Health at the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute, where he oversees programs addressing overdose prevention, and access to medical and mental health services for people who use drugs.

Allan's commitment to harm reduction began in the Lower East Side of New York City, where he was the founding Executive Director of the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center—one of the first syringe exchange programs in the state. He later led the Harm Reduction Coalition, a national organization promoting harm reduction as a framework for working with drug users in the U.S. His work has been instrumental in shaping drug policy and advocating for public health approaches to drug use.

**Imogen Carr**  
**Senior Program Officer, Redlich Horwitz Foundation**



Imogen Carr is the Senior Program Officer at the Redlich Horwitz Foundation which supports strategies that strengthen the growing family justice movement to right-size the child welfare system, and expand community-driven supports that promote child well-being and keep families intact. Prior to this work, Imogen was the Senior Program Officer at Open Society Foundations, leading the foundation's work on drug treatment systems, both in the United States and internationally.

Imogen has been advocating for the vital need to move away from punitive models of drug treatment for the past decade. This work was informed by her work in New York City government and social service systems where she witnessed the deleterious impact of carceral and punitive treatment models on the health and safety of people who use drugs and other criminalized people, regardless of whether they entered treatment voluntarily or through mandates. Imogen works with the ultimate goal of promoting racial equity, reducing the power of criminalizing systems, and instead investing in responsive systems of care. Imogen holds a First Class Honors in Psychology from the University of Sydney, Australia.