

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE- MEMBER BIOS
NOVEMBER 2023

Dr. Charlotte Brickhouse, CAC Chair, is an Executive Director in the School District of Philadelphia with over 20 years of service and dedication to the children of this great city. In her current role she works with administrators, school teams and internal and external stakeholders to improve the special education programs and services for students with disabilities. Dr. Brickhouse is a staunch advocate for students and youth with disabilities and has appealed to lawmakers on Capitol Hill for years regarding issues related to special education. She is a board member for the Pennsylvania Council of Exceptional Children, and a steering committee member for the Networks for Training and Development. Additionally, Dr. Brickhouse is also a member of the school district's Equity Coalition and served on the Hispanic Heritage and Juneteenth committees. As the Chair of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), Dr. Brickhouse is excited to lead this great work regarding criminal justice reform in Philadelphia. She continues to be laser focused on ensuring that equity and equality is afforded to all citizens of the city. It is her desire to be an impactful leader and advocate that will offer creative, innovative, and sustainable solutions to dismantle racist systems and break down barriers while creating bridges of justice, hope and opportunities to better the lives of Philadelphians.

Reverend Dr. Michelle Anne Simmons, CAC Co-chair, as a single mother of two children, has overcome many challenges throughout her life. She has received numerous awards for her leadership, advocacy, heroism, and humanitarianism that have afforded her opportunities to travel the world and share her experiences and minister to others. Rev. Simmons currently holds a D. Min. and an M.S. in Clinical and Counseling Psychology, as well as a B.S. in Human Services from Chestnut Hill College. She is also a Certified Allied Addictions Practitioner and a Human Services Board-Certified Practitioner. In 2001, Rev. Simmons founded *Why Not Prosper, Inc.*, a grassroots 501C3 organization located in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, PA. The organization's mission is to help women in the prison system to discover their own strength and to empower them to become responsible, economically self-sufficient, and contributing members of the community. Since its founding, the organization has assisted hundreds of women with their transition from prison to community. As a formerly incarcerated woman, Rev. Simmons has a deep understanding of the needs of women in the prison system. Her organization now provides pre-release mentoring to incarcerated women at Philadelphia Department of Prisons, and the State Correctional Institutions at Muncy and Cambridge Springs. On average, 100 to 150 women attend the workshops that prepare women for their release from prison. Rev. Simmons also founded the *Why Not Prosper House*—a 6-to-12-month residential program for women that are homeless or need more time to stabilize following prison that serves 45 to 60 women annually.

Eileen Horgan, CAC Member, is the Supervising Criminal Advocacy Attorney at the Women Against Abuse Legal Center in Philadelphia where she has worked for over twelve years. She practices family law with a focus on providing trauma-informed legal representation to domestic violence victims in Protection from Abuse (PFA) and child custody matters. She also trains community members and organizations on the dynamics of working with domestic violence victims. In addition, she oversees the criminal advocacy program which provides in-court support to



domestic violence victims involved in the criminal justice system. Eileen graduated from Rutgers-Camden School of Law in 2010.

Margaret E. Robertson, CAC Member, is a Philadelphian by choice. Her family migrated here from South Carolina during the last decade of the Great Migration. During her early years, she was nourished by her great aunt's weekly current events discussions of *Jet* magazine articles and national politics as she sat in her kitchen drinking Pepsi and eating Ritz crackers. On Sunday, she watched WWII documentaries with her father as he recounted his war experiences in Italy and North Africa. Her very practical mother taught her how to use words to protect herself. When she moved, she attended her last five years of public education in Philadelphia schools, then went to colleges in Pittsburgh, and returned for her graduate and professional education in Philadelphia. At Penn, her favorite class was the Legal Clinic. She has worked primarily in Maryland and Philadelphia in education and law. Her passion is lifting the barriers that separate the weak from power in their own lives.

Child advocacy and literacy organizations were her volunteer choices until 2009. That was the year that the criminal justice system affected Margaret personally. As a result, she began to focus on work in social justice with the first Participatory Defense Hub in Norristown. In Philadelphia, she worked with the Coalition Against Mass Incarceration, The Center for Returning Citizens, and the ACLU Court Bail Program. When Participatory Defense Hubs began to form in Philadelphia, she joined the Youth Hub and helped to form the Germantown Hub.

Margaret has seen that when social justice policy is discussed and conceived, the voices most likely to be muted are those communities, families, and individuals most affected by the decisions. The voices most likely to be amplified are those of professionals and politicians. If she can raise the volume on the voices of the least regarded until the sound and consideration are equalized, she will feel successful. Margaret hopes to share what she has learned and will learn from other members and our partner agencies as we fulfill our commitments.

Mary Archer, CAC Member, is the Program Director of the Goldring Reentry Initiative, a reentry program that supports individuals pre- and post- release as they transition out of the county jail system. Previously, Mary worked as a social worker at the Defender Association of Philadelphia where she provided support and advocacy to clients with ongoing criminal court matters. Prior to her career in social work, Mary taught middle school English Language Arts in Hawaii's public school system. Mary earned her bachelor's degree in social work from Temple University and her master's degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania.

Mary is passionate about supporting meaningful reform efforts that are responsive to the needs of the community. She is a member of the South Philadelphia Participatory Defense Hub and is the lead organizer for the Digital Defense Project, a grassroots filmmaking collective that uses the power of storytelling and amplified community voices to advocate for more just outcomes and policies within the criminal legal system. She is the board chair of Central Division Victim Services, an organization that supports victims of crime in the 6th, 9th, and 22nd police districts. Mary believes that it is possible to enhance community safety while minimizing our reliance on incarceration and hopes to accomplish this as a member of the Community Advisory Committee.

Jerry Coleman, CAC Member, is a lifelong community activist committed to civic duty. He has been a first responder and instructor for many years. Jerry helped establish the current seatbelt legislation and organized the movement for and assisted in educating the public on the importance of the 911 & E911 systems. He also secured funding and authored legislation for multiple states. Jerry has served and currently serve on numerous local, state, and federal committees and task forces that focus on reducing accidents, injuries and improving public health and the quality of life for everyone. He struggles with the lack of equity for all in many current programs and systems. Jerry currently works in public safety as a Personal Protection Specialist and in Quality Control for The Philadelphia EAGLES. He is a long-time elected Judge of Elections and works hard to motivate others to engage in civic duties, from voting to community service projects. Jerry is a Friends of Clark Park member and active with The White House Visitors Center, working with tours and special events. He taught High School level Emergency Services Technology and many Emergency Medical Services programs as an Instructor and Instructor Trainer. Jerry resides in the center city district, moving here from Bucks County, having spent plenty of time in Philadelphia.

Jerry serves on the CAC because he finds it disheartening that there is no equity in justice and that our prison system has become a for-profit system that does little to rehabilitate with inadequate oversight. Criminal justice needs transparency, and our city needs more accountability to its citizens. It's time for real change, less talk, and more action. Lawlessness is not the solution to making our city equitable and safe.

Michelle Sossino, CAC Member, has over 18 years of diverse community affairs, government relations, communications, and fundraising experience. Michelle currently serves as the Director of Institutional Giving and Government Relations at University of the Arts. Prior to this, she was the Director of Communications and Marketing at Germantown Friends School. Michelle has also held various non-profit administration roles, including Director of Development at Career Wardrobe, Public Relations Specialist for the City of Philadelphia, Communications Manager for Chubb Insurance, and Manager of Institutional Giving at Women's Way. Michelle interned for Philly.com when the site was in its infancy and continued as a part-time employee for two years after graduating from college. She remains obsessed with the news, specifically physical newspapers. Michelle has her BS in Journalism from Boston University, a certificate in Nonprofit Administration from the Fels School of Government, as well as a Master of Public Administration – also from Fels. She served as President of the Philadelphia Public Relations Association from 2021-2022 where she increased their savings from just \$10 to \$55,000, bringing in sponsors and offering appealing and relevant events. She is now on the Board of the League of Women Voters Philadelphia Chapter.

Tessa Upin, CAC Member, is a Philadelphia native and an independent consultant working on youth and adult criminal legal system reform across the country. Previously, Tessa served as the Deputy Director of the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) – a national leader in criminal legal system reform. Tessa began her career in youth justice system reform at the county level and expanded her work to state-level policy reform, primarily assisting state and local youth justice agencies to design and implement data and research-driven policies. Tessa led implementation of comprehensive youth justice system reform as part of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Smart on Juvenile Justice Initiative and the Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project in Arkansas,



Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, South Dakota, West Virginia, Utah, and Tennessee. Tessa also helped launch and staff the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System Working Group to analyze youth justice system policy, statutes, and data and helped develop recommendations for system reform in Pennsylvania. Additionally, during her time at CJI, Tessa worked on system reform efforts as part of the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI). As part of this work, Tessa engaged extensively with system stakeholders, developed policies and procedures related to the legislatively required reforms including risk assessment selection, implementation and inter-rater agreement, and helping build capacity to collect and report performance measures data. Tessa has also developed and delivered training on the Principles of Effective Intervention, graduated response systems, cognitive interaction skills and effective case management.

She previously worked for the state of New Jersey at the Juvenile Justice Commission and was awarded the New Jersey Attorney General's Award for Excellence in Innovation for her work on statewide implementation of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Tessa was formerly a truancy case manager in Philadelphia and ran an afterschool program for middle school girls. Additionally, she interned at the Philadelphia Defender's Association and the Public Defender Service in Washington, D.C. Tessa served on the 3rd District Youth Aid Panel in South Philadelphia and was a Big Sister with the Big Brothers Big Sisters Independence program. Tessa is driven by the positive impact criminal legal system reform has on youth, families, communities, and states across the country. Tessa graduated from J.R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration High School and the University of Pennsylvania with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Master of Science in Criminology.

Tessa joined the CAC because she has been working on criminal legal system reform for over 15 years. My passion for making changes within the system began my freshmen year in college when I participated in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. This was in 2002 and at the time, women were being held at the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center (PICC) in pods inside the men's facility – they did not have their own facility. A women's facility was being built and the focus of the class was on college students, and women being held in the jail at that time participating in the class, to develop recommendations for what the facility needed to have to address the unique needs of women. That experience opened my eyes to the myriad of problems, dysfunction, injustices and harm caused by the system on countless individuals. From there on, I pursued an academic and professional career focused on trying to reduce these harms and injustices. While I did all this continuing to live in Philadelphia, most of my work on system reform has taken place outside of my hometown. Becoming a member of the Community Advisory Committee seemed like a unique opportunity to bring my personal and professional passion to the community in which I have lived my entire life. I am energized by the possibilities of what can be accomplished when diverse groups of people representing the community and system partners get together to work towards change.

Chaka Fattah, Jr., CAC Member, is a management consultant who has built a reputation for serving organizations looking to thoughtfully scale. He previously served as Chief Operating Officer of an alternative education company with 100+ employees and an \$8 million annual budget. Mr. Fattah is a proven leader who has helped Philadelphia-based criminal justice organizations raise more than \$1 million in grant funding from government, corporate, and private foundations. Mr. Fattah is a justice-impacted individual who knows first-hand the challenges that are faced by people reentering society.

Andrea Rivera, CAC Member, serves as a Bilingual Crisis Responder for the C.A.R.E.S Program (Crisis Assistant Response & Engagement for Survivors) within the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. Working directly with families that have been affected by homicide. Andrea decided to join CAC because she is a person who has been personally involved with and affected by criminal justice. She wants to work on being the change and a voice for the individuals who are currently incarcerated to reduce mass incarceration.

Merletta Matthews, CAC Member, is a Youth speaker & Advocate for the Institute for the development of African American youth/ IDAAY. She joined the CAC because she wants to be the voice and face of change. Merletta wants to make a difference in her community and Philadelphia.

Kris Henderson, CAC Member, is the Executive Director for the Amistad Law Project and joined the CAC because our city can thrive with investments in people, not in carcerality and the work of the CAC is helping to forge that path forward.