



## Building on Progress:

# Conversations on the State of Fair Housing in New Jersey

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### AGENDA

April 17, 2024

#### Moderator:

**Kai Durant**, Community Relations Specialist, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

#### Opening Remarks:

**Sundeep Iyer**, Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

#### Panelists:

**Aarin Williams**, Chief Advisor to the Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

**Abdul Rehman Khan**, Assistant Clinical Professor, Seton Hall University of Law

**Alon Hawkins**, Director of Fair Housing, New Jersey Citizen Action Education Fund

**Ciera Hart**, Director of Housing and Economic Justice, NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence

#### Questions and Answers

#### Closing Remarks

**Tee Leonardo-Santiago**, Director of Outreach & Community Relations, NJ Division on Civil Rights

# Moderator & Panelists Bios

## **Sundeep Iyer** (Opening Remarks)

*Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights*

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**Sundeep Iyer** is the Director of the Division on Civil Rights. He previously served as Assistant Attorney General and Senior Counsel to Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin. In that capacity, he was the Attorney General's principal advisor on civil rights matters and coordinated department-wide civil rights initiatives. He also worked with the Office of the Solicitor General on appeals involving matters of constitutional law, statutory interpretation, civil rights, and criminal law.

Prior to joining the Office of the Attorney General, Iyer was a senior associate at Hogan Lovells US LLP. During his time at the firm, he served as a special attorney for the State of Minnesota in the prosecution of the four former police officers charged in connection with the death of George Floyd. He was part of the legal team that

obtained a conviction of Derek Chauvin on charges of second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter, and he briefed, argued, and won key legal motions for the State at trial.

Iyer was also part of the litigation team that obtained an injunction against President Trump's travel ban and defended that injunction before the U.S. Supreme Court. He represented federal death-row inmates in a challenge to the Trump Administration's federal lethal injection protocol. And he was one of the lead attorneys for a group of eight plaintiff organizations challenging President Trump's rescission of the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah.

Iyer previously clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justices David H. Souter and Stephen G. Breyer, as well as for then-Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. He received his A.B. from Harvard College and J.D. from Yale Law School. Prior to graduating law school, Sundeep was the Principal Quantitative Analyst at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, where he directed statistical research on voting rights, campaign finance, and redistricting issues.

# Kai Durant (Moderator)

*Community Relations Specialist, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights*

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**Kai Durant** is a community relations specialist in the Community Relations Unit (CRU) at the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. At CRU, she works to prevent acts of discrimination and bias based harassment through education and community engagement. She co-leads topics of housing, employment, disability, and the youth ambassador program.

She completed her undergrad at Rutgers University with a focus Sociology and Gender Studies. Following undergrad, she completed her Master's in Social Work with a concentration on policy at Columbia University. She has experience in community outreach, advocacy, and organizing from her past work at a non-profit, community health center, and campaign.

# Aarin Williams (Panelist)

*Chief Advisor to the Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights*

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**Aarin Michele Williams** (she/her) is an experienced and versatile attorney who works to champion the principles of equity, justice, and opportunity, over civility or respectability. She is barred in New Jersey, New York and the Southern District of New York but has appeared in various jurisdictions around the country. She is an experienced civil rights litigator, social, racial, and reproductive justice movement lawyer and proud criminal defense attorney. Aarin is currently the Chief Advisor to the Director of the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR). She has held various roles with DCR and has led teams in a landmark mortgage redlining matter with the DOJ, published civil rights reports on issues including the spread of white supremacy and bias in the state, promulgated our nation's first of its kind Fair Chance in Housing Act and heads the Divisions home appraisal

task force, and much more. Currently she also leads DCR's historic home appraisal discrimination initiative.

In prior positions, Aarin represented pregnant people around the nation who were charged with crimes or faced punishment related to their pregnancies and served as a zealous trial attorney at the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender where she was a trial strategy trainer and lead lawyer handling complex felony criminal cases. She has also served as an Adjunct Professor at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Seton Hall Law School. At Seton Hall Law School she developed and co-taught the course "Incarceration and Social Inequality in the Law", a critical race theory course that highlights the vast inequities in the legal system that future lawyers should be prepared to confront and commit to remedying.

Aarin strongly believes that her community is owed and deserving of the benefits and fruits of her education, and she works hard to ensure that it receives the same. In her community, she mentors and volunteers through several organizations. Aarin attributes her success to the opportunities provided by her proud, hardworking, no-nonsense parents, supportive and equally dynamic circle of friends and all ancestors who have led the charge towards liberation and justice.

*She lives by the adage: I am exceptional without being an exception.*

# Abdul Rehman Khan (Panelist)

*Assistant Clinical Professor, Seton Hall University School of Law*

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**Abdul Rehman Khan** is an Assistant Clinical Professor at Seton Hall Law School's [Center for Social Justice](#). He founded the New Jersey Legal Design Lab, a social change laboratory that shifts power into local movements through co-creation design methods. He currently co-directs the [Housing & Legal Design Clinic](#), and he has previously taught Torts, Lawyering, and directed the Civil Litigation Clinic.

Khan served as the inaugural Pro Bono Fellow for the City of Newark with McCarter & English. In this capacity, he leveraged the firm's pro bono resources to represent tenants facing eviction, and he collaborated with stakeholders to influence public opinion on the critical societal aspects of eviction. Abdul Rehman Khan serves on the Board of Directors for Essex-Newark Legal

Services, the primary source of free civil legal assistance for thousands of individuals and families in Essex County.

# Alon Hawkins (Panelist)

*New Jersey Citizen Action Education Fund, Director of Fair Housing*

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**Alon Hawkins**, Director of Fair Housing, came to New Jersey Citizen Action Education Fund (NJCAEF) with over 10 years of professional service in both the non-profit and corporate sectors. Alon was hired as NJCAEF's Director of Fair Housing in April 2023 to lead their Fair Housing Enforcement Program based on her strong skill set in Program Implementation and Management, as well as community relationship building and engagement experience. As a former Fair Housing Tester, she has almost a decade of experience in fair housing enforcement as well as experience as lead training facilitator, testing specialist, and outreach coordinator. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Health Science from Howard University and attained her Master's degree in Public Health from George Washington University in Program Planning and

Evaluation. Both her educational and Public Health experience speak to her passion for strategic planning and community advocacy in the fair housing sector and beyond.

# Cierra Hart (Panelist)

*NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence, Director of Housing and Economic Justice*

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**Cierra Hart** is a fierce survivor advocate with unique perspectives who has been advocating for survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual violence for almost two decades. Cierra Hart is the Director of Housing and Economic Justice for the New Jersey Coalition to End

Domestic Violence (NJCEDV). Cierra is also a national consultant for the National Network to End Domestic Violence's Housing Consortium. Cierra provides advocacy, training, technical assistance, public awareness, and support for advocates and survivors. Cierra has been involved in various federal, state, and local housing and economic justice advocacy and policy initiatives to help survivors heal, restore, and renew their lives. Cierra's community activism is focused on

identifying and breaking down barriers that keep people from surviving and thriving in society.

Cierra's work has been recognized locally, statewide, and nationally. Cierra has been instrumental in expanding survivors' access to housing statewide. Cierra has worked with many communities in the areas of homelessness prevention, emergency and transitional housing, domestic violence program development, community development, eviction prevention, and rental assistance programs. Cierra was instrumental in creating a statewide hotel aggregator program in March of 2020 to help house hundreds of survivors and children fleeing from domestic violence during the global pandemic and has led planning and implementation of the Domestic Violence Housing First model statewide. Cierra was the recipient of the 2021 Excellence Award for Victims' Justice from the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General and in 2022 she was the recipient of the Irene Hill Smith Community Service Award from the NAACP Gloucester County chapter.

"I have a duty to fight for justice for all. Each day I fight to end discrimination, oppression, and violence for ALL. Activism, advocacy, and empowerment isn't a job or task-it's my calling! I found my voice and now I help other survivors to find theirs because we rise by lifting others."

# **Tee Leonardo-Santiago** (Closing Remarks)

*Director of Outreach and Community Relations, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights*

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**Tisha “Tee” Leonardo-Santiago** (she/they) holds the proud distinction of being the first Latinx Director of Outreach and Community Relations at the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR), where they provide strategic oversight and implementation of the Community Relations Unit’s statewide outreach and programming to support and uplift the Division’s initiatives, social media presence, and crisis response efforts to prevent and eliminate discrimination and bias in the Garden State. Tee’s team is also a crisis response unit following major civil rights incidents. As a community mediator, they engage in complex mediation, restorative justice practices, and community dialogue with a trauma-informed care lens. In recognition of the Unit’s exceptional outreach and Tee’s leadership, in 2023, Attorney General Platkin presented the Community

Relations Unit the “Excellence in Community Outreach” Award and Tee the “Excellence for Exceptional Service Award.”

Before joining the Community Relations Unit, Tee began her career at the Division as a Bilingual Investigator in the Enforcement Unit, investigating employment and place of public accommodation cases while assisting with Division outreach. They served as the bilingual subject matter expert in developing and implementing the online complaint portal, the New Jersey Bias Investigation Access System (NJBIAS), launched in November 2020. Before joining DCR, Tee was the first Bilingual General Adjuster for one of the oldest insurance adjustment firms in the country, where they investigated commercial fire & theft, personal lines, fine arts & fidelity claims. Tee is a second-generation Latinx from Hudson County and a first-generation college graduate receiving their undergraduate and graduate degrees in Criminal Justice from New Jersey City University.