

Tracing the Path of Voting Rights:

Past, Present, and Future

Moderator

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

Opening Remarks

Tee Leonardo-Santiago, Director of Outreach and Community Relations
New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Panelists

Toni Hendrix, 2nd Vice President
NAACP New Brunswick

James Michael, Chief of Legal Affairs
New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Alejandro Sorto, Campaign Strategist
American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey

Micauri Vargas, Associate Council, Democracy & Justice Program
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

Questions and Answers

Closing Remarks

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

Moderator & Panelists Bios

Kai Durant *(Moderator)*

*Community Relations Specialist
New Jersey Division on Civil Rights*



Kai Durant (she/her) 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 leads topics religion, disability, and the youth initiatives.

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.

Tee Leonardo-Santiago *(Opening Remarks)*

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



Tisha "Tee" Leonardo-Santiago (she/they) is the first Latinx Director of Outreach and Community Relations at the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR). In this role, they provides strategic oversight and implements statewide outreach and programming to support and educate communities. Tee also uplifts the Division's initiatives, manages its social media presence, and leads crisis response efforts to prevent and eliminate discrimination and bias in New Jersey.

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 their 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.

Prior to 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.

Toni Hendrix *(Panelist)*

2nd Vice President

NAACP New Brunswick Area



Toni Hendrix is a Lifetime member of the NAACP and serves as the 2nd Vice President and Community Outreach/Civic Engagement Chairperson for the New Brunswick Area Branch. She serves on the executive committee of the NJ State Conference of the NAACP and has served on the credentials committee representing Region 2 at the NAACP National Conventions.

In her NAACP role Toni helps develop and guide efforts to foster effective collaboration with organizations serving the community. She has actively led engagement in several initiatives such as; voter education - registration and activation, understanding and completing the 2020 Census including giving public testimony at the 2020 New Jersey State Redistricting hearings, as well as moderating public forums regarding COVID 19 health care issues and vaccination. Toni also works with businesses and organizations seeking to develop a deeper understanding of structural bias and how it impacts the community being served.

Toni is committed to supporting the civic engagement of high school and college students and has received accolades for her work with Franklin Township High School, Rutgers University, Middlesex County College, Raritan Valley Community College and for assisting in the development of the Montgomery Township School District's D.E.I.A. program.

Ms. Hendrix is a founding Trustee and President of the Lost Souls Public Memorial Project, Inc. whose mission is to uncover relevant history, raise community awareness and build a public memorial through centering the experiences of those who have become known as the lost souls, stolen in 1818 by a slave ring led by a corrupt Middlesex County judge. Toni is a member of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) - Raritan Valley Section and is working towards life membership. Since joining the Section, she serves on several committees including the Girls to Women program, community service and audit. She is also a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer for children in the foster care system, serves on the Middlesex CASA Racial and Equity committee, is currently directly advocating for four children, and serves as a peer coach supporting five volunteer advocates and their cases.

For the past 25 years Toni's professional career has been focused exclusively on the non-profit and performing arts communities providing strategic level consultation, with an emphasis on business development, marketing, and developing institutional customer focused relationships. Before turning her attention exclusively to her consulting practice, Ms. Hendrix held numerous managerial positions with AT&T and NCR. Notable was her role as Operating Partner for the AT&T Professional Services Business Unit where in addition to building and managing the unit, she led the completion of dozens of complex business assessment and redesign engagements throughout the United States, Asia Pacific Region, Australia, New Zealand, Caribbean Region and London, England.

Toni is a graduate of the Indiana University - Leadership Development for Global Business Management program, and a graduate of the MIT Sloan School of Management - Emerging Leaders program.

Toni and her late husband Alan, have lived in Somerset, Franklin Township since 1985. She is the proud mom and nana of Anthony, Lana, Taylor, Matthew and Sydney.

James Michael *(Panelist)*

Chief of Legal Affairs

New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

James Michael currently serves as Chief of Legal Affairs for the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. He comes to this position after representing the agency for almost 30 years while a Deputy Attorney General in the Civil Rights section of the Division of Law, where he served as Section Chief for more than a decade. In that role, he provided legal counsel to the Division on Civil Rights and oversaw prosecution of discrimination complaints related to employment, public accommodations and housing throughout the state. During his tenure Jim worked with the Division on Civil Rights to address and prevent discrimination and improve access for people with disabilities in workplaces, schools, stores, polling places and health care facilities.

Alejandra Sorto *(Panelist)*

Campaign Strategist

American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey



Alejandra Sorto is a Campaign Strategist for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, where she leads and supports policy advocacy campaigns in the areas of immigration, reproductive rights, democracy, and economic justice.

Prior to joining the ACLU-NJ, she was the director of civic engagement and organizing for Hispanic Federation, where she led large-scale civic education and voter mobilization campaigns throughout five states. Previously, she was the field and trainings coordinator for the Long Island Civic Engagement Table, where she focused her efforts on increasing grassroots political power within immigrant communities of color. Prior to this, she was a freelance journalist for publications in both El Salvador and NY.

Alejandra began her organizing efforts as a teenager as part of campaigns that targeted government corruption and impunity in crimes toward women and girls in her home country of El Salvador. She holds a bachelor's degree in social communications and journalism from the University Jose Simeon Cañas – UCA (El Salvador). Alejandra also serves as a member of the COMS Project Advisory Group, supporting efforts to develop collaborative, strategic messaging within the Reproductive Health Rights and Justice (RHRJ) field.

Micauri Vargas (Panelist)

*Associate Counsel, Democracy & Justice Program
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice*



Micauri Vargas is an Associate Counsel of the Democracy & Justice Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice.

Before joining the Institute, Micauri was a Deputy Attorney General in the 2020 New Jersey AG Honors Program. As an Honors Program Deputy, she was assigned to the Division of Law, Affirmative Civil Rights & Labor Section, which investigates civil rights, labor, and workplace violations and brings appropriate actions to combat those violations.

In 2020, she graduated from Rutgers Law School Newark, where she served as the Business Editor of the *Race and the Law Review* and was Co-Chair of the American Constitution Society and National Lawyers Guild. In 2014, she graduated with a B.A. in Economics from New York University.