



PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

The Advocacy Institute Is Pleased to Present

Black Prosecutors – Challenges and Rewards

March 26, 2025
1:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

WEBINAR*

***Note: This webinar will be simulcast from a live program.**

Program Summary

An expert panel will share their insights into the rewards and challenges of a career as a Black prosecutor. In addition to their individual career paths and achievements, the panelists will discuss some of their unique experiences and battles as prosecutors, the potential impact on defendants and victims when the prosecutor is a person of color, and the opportunities that prosecutors have to shape outcomes in the criminal justice system.

Eligibility

This program is open to attorneys in the Department of Law and Public Safety and county prosecutors' offices.

Faculty

Nina D. Bonner retired in 2023, after working for 24 years in the Division of Criminal Justice in the Department of Law and Public Safety. At the time of her retirement, she was an Assistant Attorney General and the Chief of Staff in the Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, where she worked for ten years. Her previous assignments included the Office of State Police Affairs, the New Jersey Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force, and the Appellate and Civil Remedies and Forfeiture Bureaus. Before joining the Department of Law and Public Safety, Ms. Bonner was an Assistant District Attorney in the Government Fraud Unit of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office and an Assistant Prosecutor in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. She is also a Past President of the Association of Black Women Lawyers of NJ. She is currently a part-time hearing officer for the New Jersey Department of Health, and serves as a Trustee of the New Jersey Lawyer's Client Protection Fund. A graduate of Swarthmore College and Seton Hall University School of Law, Ms. Bonner clerked for the Honorable Sylvia B. Pressler, Presiding Judge of the New Jersey Appellate Division.

Karen D. Gwynn retired from her 30 year career as a prosecutor in 2023, as a Senior Assistant Prosecutor in Bergen County. Her experience includes working in the Juvenile Unit and the Grand Jury, Screening, Drug Court, Trial, Domestic Violence, Megan's Law, Sex Crimes, and Cyber Crimes sections. Ms. Gwynn was instrumental in developing the Drug Court Program in Bergen County and represented the prosecutor's office at community service events, including developing and organizing programs involving youths and their interaction with law enforcement. Ms. Gwynn is a member of the National Black Prosecutor's Association (NBPA), where she served as Vice President of Programs for seven years. She has also served as President of the Black Prosecutors Association of New Jersey, a local chapter of the NBPA. She is an instructor for the National Association of Attorneys General and the New Jersey Attorney General's Advocacy Institute. Ms. Gwynn is a board member of the NJ State Bar Association's Minorities in the Profession Committee and Co-chair of the Committee on Race and Equity in the Law. She clerked for the Honorable Betty J. Lester, J.S.C. in Essex County and holds a dual degree in Psychology and Law Enforcement from the University of Maryland and a J.D. from Seton Hall University School of Law.

Anthony R. Higgins is Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor of the Juvenile Justice Unit in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. He oversees over 2000 serious cases of delinquency annually and trains both current and new law enforcement personnel on the proper handling of juveniles and their delinquency matters. He is a founding member of the Juvenile Prosecutor's Leadership Network and a frequent speaker on juvenile justice topics and recent reforms. Deputy Chief Higgins has also worked as a senior corporate attorney, a trial attorney in a large law firm, as a law firm manager, and as general counsel for Newark's largest non-profit community organization. His experience includes trials, civil and criminal matters and investigations. He has also served as a certified civil mediator and arbitrator, handling hundreds of ADR matters. In addition to his private practice and corporate experience, Deputy Chief Higgins has served as a full-time municipal court judge in Newark and as a Master of the William J. Brennan Inn of Court, where he mentored the next generation of legal professionals. He also serves as a bar examiner for the Supreme Court of New Jersey, drafting and grading bar examination questions. Deputy Chief Higgins is a member of the Essex County Bar Association, the Garden State Bar Association and the Black Prosecutors Association of New Jersey. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Rutgers University – Newark College of Arts & Sciences and a Juris Doctor from Rutgers School of Law – Newark.

Tracy M. Thompson, Esq. retired from her 30 year career as a prosecutor in December 2022. She most recently served as New Jersey's Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, supervising a staff of 100 who investigate and prosecute all types of insurance fraud, including health care, auto, Medicaid, disability, and workers' compensation. The Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor also coordinates the anti-fraud activities of State and local investigative agencies and prosecutors. Prior to her appointment to head OIFP, Ms. Thompson served as Counsel to the Director of the Division of Criminal Justice. She advised the Director on a broad range of law enforcement policy matters, oversaw the Division's Litigation Academy, and served as a liaison between the Division and other governmental agencies. Before that, Ms. Thompson served as chair of the New Jersey Human Trafficking Task Force, where she represented the Attorney General and worked with the National District Attorneys Association's Human Trafficking Working Group.

Ms. Thompson has also served as Deputy Director of the Office of Government Integrity; Chief Counsel for the Bureau of Fiscal Oversight; Special Assistant to the Director of the Division of

Criminal Justice; and in the Financial Crimes Unit. Before joining the Attorney General's Office, she was an Assistant Prosecutor in the Mercer County New Jersey Prosecutor's Office, where she was Chief of the Domestic Violence Unit and prosecuted child abuse, sexual assault, arson and narcotics cases. Ms. Thompson is a faculty member for the Attorney General's Advocacy Institute and the National Attorneys General Training and Research Institute. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at the College of New Jersey. Ms. Thompson received her B.A. in African-American Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and her J.D. from Temple University School of Law. She is a 2014 recipient of an Attorney General's Award for Excellence in Advancing the Department of Law & Public Safety's Priorities and Initiatives.

CLE Credit

NJ CLE Credit: This program has been approved by the Board on Continuing Legal Education of the Supreme Court of New Jersey for 1.5 hours of total CLE credit. Of these, 1.5 qualify as hours of credit for ethics/professionalism in the Diversity, Inclusion and Elimination of Bias category.

Registration

Those who are eligible to apply should use the Zoom Webinar registration link in the Program Announcement email. Students who are registered will receive a confirmation email with a link to access the program.

Students must download Zoom before the webinar in order for the AGAI to record polling responses that are required for attendance verification and CLE credit.

The AGAI will be unable to verify attendance or grant CLE credit to students who have not downloaded Zoom before the webinar.