

The Case for Second Chances



A Conversation About Criminal Justice, Collateral Consequences, and Clemency

Join the Office of the Pardon Attorney for this special event addressing the collateral consequences of incarceration and the role of record-clearing and clemency. Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta will provide opening remarks, followed by a panel discussion featuring the following justice-impacted advocates and experts:



Vanita Gupta
Assoc. Attorney General



Liz Oyer
Pardon Attorney



Ames Grawert
Brennan Center for Justice



Sheena Meade
The Clean Slate Initiative



Amy Ralston Povah
Can-Do Clemency



Robert Richardson
Clemency Recipient & Author



Tony Lewis, Jr.
Activist & Author

Scroll down to learn more about our speakers

Friday
Sept. 22, 2023
10:00-11:30 ET

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Livestream

www.justice.gov/live



Vanita Gupta

Associate Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

Vanita Gupta is the 19th United States Associate Attorney General and serves as the third-ranking official at the Department of Justice. Associate Attorney General Gupta supervises multiple litigating divisions within the Department of Justice, including the Civil Division, Civil Rights Division, Antitrust Division, Tax Division, and Environmental and Natural Resources Division. She also oversees the grantmaking components of the Department, including the Office of Justice Programs, the Office on Violence Against Women, and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services; and supervises the Office for Access to Justice, Office of Information Policy, the Community Relations Service, the Executive Office for United States Trustees, the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, and the Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative.

Associate Attorney General Gupta previously served as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the nation's oldest and largest coalition of non-partisan civil rights organizations in the United States.

Before serving in that capacity, from October 15, 2014, to January 20, 2017, Associate Attorney General Gupta served as Acting Assistant Attorney General and Head of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. Appointed by President Barack Obama as the chief civil rights prosecutor for the United States, Associate Attorney General Gupta advanced a wide range of civil rights enforcement matters.

Prior to her tenure leading the Civil Rights Division, Associate Attorney General Gupta served as Deputy Legal Director and the Director of the Center for Justice at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In addition to managing litigation, Associate Attorney General Gupta created and led the ACLU's Smart Justice Campaign aimed at promoting bipartisan justice reform while keeping communities safe. She began her legal career as an attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund.

Associate Attorney General Gupta graduated magna cum laude from Yale University and received her law degree from New York University School of Law, where later she taught a civil rights litigation clinic for several years.



Elizabeth G. Oyer

Pardon Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice

Elizabeth G. Oyer was appointed to the position of Pardon Attorney by Attorney General Merrick Garland on April 10, 2022. Prior to her Justice Department appointment, she was Senior Litigation Counsel to the Office of the Federal Public Defender for Maryland, where she represented indigent defendants at all stages of proceedings in federal district court. She handled a wide variety of criminal cases, ranging from complex fraud to drug and gun offenses, as well as violent crimes. In addition to her case work, she was the Office's ethics and conflicts advisor, discovery policy coordinator, and a mentor to junior attorneys.

Prior to joining the Federal Public Defender in 2012, Ms. Oyer was a partner in the Washington, D.C. office of Mayer Brown LLP, where she practiced civil and criminal litigation. While there, she handled a diverse array of cases, including class actions and multi-district litigations, at both the trial and appellate levels. She also maintained an active pro bono practice during her time at the firm.

Ms. Oyer received her undergraduate degree, magna cum laude, from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and her law degree, cum laude, from Harvard Law School. At Harvard, she was an Executive Editor of the Harvard Law Review and a member of the winning team of the Ames Moot Court Competition, in which she was awarded Best Oralist. After law school, Ms. Oyer clerked for the Honorable Stanley Marcus, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.



Sheena Meade

CEO, [The Clean Slate Initiative \(CSI\)](#)
[@sheena_meade](#)

Sheena Meade is a walking barrier breaker and one of America's leading experts on legal system reform. As CEO of The Clean Slate Initiative (CSI), Sheena leads a national bipartisan organization to advance policy that automatically clears all eligible arrest and conviction records across the US.

In April of 2023, CSI received a landmark financial commitment through The Audacious Project, a donor collaborative housed at TED. The award supports the organization's strategy to unlock opportunities for up to 14 million people in America and is an unprecedented investment in second chances. As part of the announcement from The Audacious Project, Sheena presented a TED talk at the TED2023 Conference in Vancouver, BC.

Sheena is regularly featured in media such as Ebony, CNN, PBS News, Newsweek, and more, as one of America's most influential and dynamic nonprofit leaders, women empowerment experts, and the premier voice for criminal justice reform. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Public Welfare Foundation and also sits on the boards of: the Policing Project at NYU School of Law; Live Free USA; and the Florida Coalition on Black Civic Engagement.

Perhaps the greatest tool Sheena has in her arsenal is how she makes people feel. Whether it is someone who has fallen on hard times or a multimillionaire; she connects with them and leaves them feeling inspired. Ask Sheena about these accomplishments and her drive, her answer is simple: "I'm just Sheena."



Amy Ralston Povah

CEO, CAN-DO Foundation

@candoclemency

For the past twenty years, Amy Ralston Povah has been an accomplished filmmaker, writer, speaker, and activist. Her efforts have focused primarily on issues related to executive clemency, criminal justice reform, conspiracy laws, women in prison, and the drug war.

Amy served 9 years of a 24-year sentence for "conspiracy" in a drug case. Oscar nominated journalist David France researched and featured Amy's case in Glamour Magazine, which led to more media exposure on Court TV and other news outlets that ignited public outcry for a sentence commutation, which President Clinton granted on July 7, 2000.

Post-incarceration, Amy started the CAN-DO Foundation which became a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2004. CAN-DO educates the public about the conspiracy law and advocates for clemency applicants seeking "justice through clemency." Over 100 people featured on the CAN-DO website have been set free. Amy has spoken on panels at Yale University, Pepperdine University, Vanderbilt University, Washington State University, New York University, Columbus School of Law, University of St. Thomas, on Capitol Hill and The George Washington University school of law.

Amy has authored Op Eds for new sources including the New York Times, Fusion, HuffPost, San Francisco Chronicle, The Hill, Business Insider and has been interviewed and/or quoted by almost every major media source which can be viewed on the CAN-DO media page.



Tony Lewis, Jr.

Activist and Author

@MrTonyLewisJr

Tony Lewis Jr is an author, activist, criminal justice reformer, and reentry expert that has spent his adult life working tirelessly at the intersection of poverty, violence, mass incarceration, and trauma. His 23 years of servant leadership fostering community-based strategies to help prevent violence and increase public safety has brought much needed clarity and solutions to these complex problems. He has fought to create institutional change for those that require it most, while casting a bright light on their needs, hopes, and dreams. In the process, he has built coalitions and developed meaningful relationships with a wide variety of powerful stakeholders across the city and throughout the country.

Mr. Lewis Jr's activism and advocacy has led to legislative/policy changes regarding children with incarcerated parents, voting rights for incarcerated residents, returning citizen hiring/housing, social equity, the arts, and gun violence prevention/intervention. He has been a leader locally and nationally around issues that have impacted communities of color the most. He has traveled the country lecturing about the collateral damage of Mass Incarceration and gun violence. He has organized efforts to address food insecurity, displacement, and access to opportunity. He has galvanized thousands across all demographics to take on personal responsibility to improve their circumstances and communities. He has been a bridge and translator of sorts between government and community. Tony Lewis Jr has been an example that transformational change is possible and continuous no matter the circumstances.

His work and advocacy have been featured on CNN, BET, The Breakfast Club, The Washington Post, and many media outlets. His unwavering service and advocacy helped to free his Father Tony Lewis Sr from a Life Without Parole sentence after serving 34 years. He resides in Washington DC with his Wife Jessica, their daughters Isabella and Sophie and his Father.



Robert Richardson

2018 Clemency Recipient and Author
Founder, Rich Family Ministries
Founder, PDMNOLA
@FoxandRob

In 1997, Rob Richardson, a first-time offender in Louisiana, was sentenced to 61-years' imprisonment following an overzealous prosecution. His wife and co-defendant, Sibil "Fox Rich" Richardson, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment; she was released after serving three and a half years. After her release from prison in 2002, Fox Rich led a valiant charge to regain her husband's freedom and unite her family. In June 2018, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards granted clemency to Rob. Ninety days later he was released.

Their story is told in the acclaimed, award-winning documentary, TIME. They have also written a book together about their experience.

Upon Rob's release, the couple started Rich Family Ministries, which they founded with the vision of "changing lives and laws through love," and is dedicated to advocating for families impacted by incarceration. Through their ministry, they subsequently founded PDMNOLA, the local New Orleans chapter of the Participatory Defense Movement, which has over 40 Participatory Defense hubs nationwide. PDMNOLA is a community organizing initiative designed to provide families, communities, and the accused with legal awareness as a best form of defense, empowering them to be more actively engaged in their own legal matter.

Rob and his wife have six sons and live in New Orleans, Louisiana.



Ames Grawert

Senior Counsel, John L. Neu Justice Counsel,
Justice Program, Brennan Center for Justice
@AmesCG

Ames Grawert is senior counsel and John L. Neu Justice Counsel in the Brennan Center's Justice Program. He leads quantitative and policy research focused on trends in crime, and the collateral costs of mass incarceration. Additionally, he advocates for criminal justice reform policies at the state and federal level.

Previously, Grawert served as an assistant district attorney in the Appeals Bureau of the Nassau County District Attorney's Office, where he reviewed and litigated claims of actual innocence in addition to his appellate work. Before entering public service, he was an associate at Mayer Brown LLP, where he represented criminal defendants pro bono in post-conviction litigation.