

2026 DCR Housing Summit

Coming Home:

Navigating Housing Post Incarceration

Friday, April 24, 2026

10:00AM – 1:30PM



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AGENDA

- **Welcome + Introductions**

- Miguel Rodríguez, *Board of Trustees Member, The Newark Public Library*
- Jennifer Davenport, *New Jersey Attorney General*
- Dr. Joan Rivitz, *Commissioner, New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights*
- Yolanda N. Melville, *Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR)*

- **DCR's Enforcement Work: Fireside Chat with Investigations Staff**

- Meena Song, *Deputy Chief Legal Specialist*
- Erica Hernández DeLuna, *Legal Specialist*

- **Lived Experiences: Panel with Justice-Involved Individuals**

- Scott Phillips, *Surfside Structured Sober Living*
- Cass Severe, *Meet Her at the Gate*
- Al-Tariq K. Witcher, *Fair Share Housing Center*

Moderator: Taylor Thomas, *Community Relations Specialist, DCR*

- **Community Conversations: Audience participation is encouraged**

Facilitator: Stephanie Menezile, *Dispute Resolution Specialist, DCR*

- **Connections, Resources, and Next Steps: For everyone**

JoEllyn L. Jones, *Practitioner in Residence, Seton Hall Law School's Center for Social Justice*

- **Summary/Closing Remarks**

Michael Campion, *Deputy Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR)*

MC: Patricia D. Williamson

Director of Outreach and Community Relations, DCR



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Miguel Rodríguez

Board of Trustees Member, The Newark Public Library

Miguel “Don Mike” Rodríguez serves on the Board of Trustees for the Newark Public Library. He is a community and political leader who epitomizes the excellence that rose from the ashes of Newark’s Puerto Rican Rebellion of 1974.

Miguel “Don Mike” Rodríguez was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico in 1934. As a punishment for not completing his college work at the University of Puerto Rico, his mother sent him to live with his aunt in New York City in 1957 to learn the importance of education. Three years later, he married and moved to Newark, New Jersey, where he has lived for over 50 years. He has a bachelor’s degree in political science with a concentration in city administration from Seton Hall University. Mr. Rodríguez began his public service career in 1968 when he began working for the New Jersey Department of Labor. A year later, he began working for the Model Cities Program where he eventually became the North Newark Regional Director. Through the efforts of the Black and Puerto Rican Coalition and as a result of the Newark Riots (1967), Mr. Rodríguez became the Deputy Mayor of Community Affairs. He remained in that position for 16 years. In 1987, he began his second career working for the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program of the Newark Housing Authority. Throughout his civic career, Mr. Rodríguez became a founding member of the Puerto Rican Lion’s Club (the first Puerto Rican chapter in New Jersey), the Communication International Marketing Award (CIMA), and the Hispanic American Chamber of Commerce of Essex County, where he served as chairman. He retired to Florida in 2004, and now splits his time between the two states in order to continue his civic work in Newark/Essex County.

About The Newark Public Library | Main Branch

Facing Washington Park, the historic Newark Public Library traces its beginnings to the Newark Library Association, which was formed in 1847. The Newark Public Library continues to be a hub of knowledge and community and is dedicated to providing a welcoming space for learning, exploration, and connection. <https://www.npl.org>



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Jennifer Davenport

New Jersey Attorney General

Attorney General Jennifer Davenport is a lifelong New Jersey resident and the mother of two daughters. As Attorney General, Jennifer oversees over 42,000 law enforcement officers and the 8,000 employees of the Department of Law and Public Safety.

She arrives to the role with a long career in public service and with law enforcement, including four years in top roles at the Attorney General's Office, as First Assistant Attorney General and as Principal Law Enforcement Advisor. Jennifer also spent seven years as an Assistant U.S. Attorney at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey, including as Chief of the General Crimes Unit.

In addition to her work as a career prosecutor, Jennifer has held multiple senior roles within law enforcement agencies, including as Division Counsel to the New Jersey Division of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; as New Jersey Commissioner on the Waterfront Commission; and as an intelligence analyst for the DEA both before and during law school.

In the private sector, Jennifer served as Senior Director for Compliance, Deputy General Counsel, and Chief Litigation Counsel at PSEG and as a litigation associate at two major law firms. Jennifer clerked for Chief Judge John W. Bissell of the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey. She is a graduate of DeSales University and Seton Hall University School of Law.

Jennifer grew up in Cape May County and she currently lives in Monmouth County with her two daughters.

To learn more about the Office of the Attorney General, please visit: <https://www.njoag.gov/>



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Dr. Joan Rivitz

Commissioner, New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights

Dr. Joan Rivitz was appointed in 2003 and is proud to be the longest serving Division on Civil Rights Commissioner.

Dr. Rivitz received her doctorate from Columbia University in Family and Community Education in 1990. She began her career as an educational consultant specializing in matters of bias and prejudice. She has served on many boards and commissions. Dr. Rivitz served as the Chairperson of the New Jersey Human Relations Council Advisory Board from its inception through its first 13 years.

For 25 years, Dr. Rivitz served as the Associate Director of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education. Dr. Rivitz worked as a committee member of New Jersey Cares About Bullying Campaign and worked on the Train the Trainers Program of the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General's Office of Bias Crime. She also worked on Character Education Projects statewide. Dr. Rivitz was instrumental in the formulation of the highly successful Bias Crime Victims Support Service (a Bias Crime Hotline), as well as, the training of the hotline personnel. She was called upon as an expert to testify when the State of New Jersey was developing the New Jersey Anti Bullying Law. Her testimony was incorporated in the final product. As a Board Member and currently Mentor of the FBI Newark Citizens Academy Alumni Association, Dr. Rivitz served as Director of Community Outreach and Education. It was a proud moment, indeed, when she was chosen to receive the FBI Director's Community Leadership Award (DCLA) for her work with a racial healing grant, for her work with gangs in the City of Newark. The DCLA was presented to her personally in Washington, DC by Robert Mueller who was the FBI Director at that time.

Her name is inscribed on the Wall of Tolerance at the Civil Rights Center in Alabama, in recognition of her lifetime efforts to take a personal and public stand against hate, injustice and intolerance, and for leading the way toward a more just society.

To learn more about the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights, please visit: <https://www.njoag.gov/>



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Yolanda N. Melville

Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Yolanda N. Melville is the Director of the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. Melville previously served as Senior Counsel to Attorney General Platkin and Director of Community Engagement, a liaison to stakeholders across the state tasked with connecting them with the Office of the Attorney General's initiatives.

Melville has served as both a moderator and nationally recognized speaker on leadership and professional development, voting rights and housing issues. She has collaborated with some of the country's greatest social justice leaders and has served in various leadership roles within state and national civil rights organizations.

She has received numerous awards including the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Champion for Justice" Honoree for the New Jersey State Governor's Jefferson Awards (2019); Outstanding Young Professional Honoree for the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards (2022); and Atlantic County Bar Association's Benjamin A. Rimm Young Lawyer of the Year Award (2023).

Before joining the Office of the Attorney General, Melville was a partner at Cooper Levenson, P.A., where she represented public and corporate clients in various stages of civil litigation in federal and state courts. Melville clerked for the Honorable Susan F. Maven in the Superior Court of New Jersey, Appellate Division. She received her B.A. in English and Government from the College of William and Mary, M.S. in Criminal Justice from Virginia Commonwealth University, and J.D. from Howard University Law School, where she was the managing editor of the Human Rights and Globalization Law Review.

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Meena Song

Speaker: DCR's Enforcement Work: Fireside Chat with Investigations Staff

Meena Song is the Deputy Chief Legal Specialist for the Housing Investigations Unit at the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR).

Meena has spent most of her career in the non-profit sector providing direct legal representation to individuals of low-income in housing, consumer and family law matters.

Prior to DCR, Ms. Song served as a Managing Attorney and later as Litigation Director at the Community Health Law Project (CHLP) which provides legal assistance to individuals of low-income with disabilities.

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Erica Hernández DeLuna

Speaker: DCR's Enforcement Work: Fireside Chat with Investigations Staff

Erica Hernández DeLuna is a Legal Specialist in the Housing Unit at the Division on Civil Rights.

Erica is originally from San Francisco, California, where her interests have always included non-profit and community-based work.

Erica attended Seton Hall School of Law and has dedicated her legal career to public service. She was previously a staff attorney at the Community Health Law Project, where she represented low-income and disabled clients in a variety of practice areas, including Family and landlord-tenant court, Social Security Disability, and Welfare appeals.

Just prior to coming to DCR, she was a senior staff attorney at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services, where she focused on family law and domestic violence, as well as appeals in Social Security Disability, Unemployment, and Welfare.

As a Legal Specialist at DCR, her work focuses on investigating and assessing claims of discrimination in housing throughout the state.

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Scott Phillips

Speaker: Lived Experiences: Panel with Justice-Involved Individuals

Scott Phillips is a combat veteran, speaker, and advocate for recovery and second chances.

After serving honorably in the United States Army, Scott returned home and pursued higher education at Marshall University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and management. Following graduation, Scott began struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder related to his combat service. Without adequate support, he turned to drugs and alcohol in an attempt to cope. What began as self-medication eventually led to unemployment, chronic homelessness, and incarceration.

Today, Scott uses his lived experience to inspire others. Through accountability, recovery, and commitment to personal growth, he rebuilt his life and now speaks candidly about the realities of addiction, incarceration, and the hard work required to create lasting change.

Scott's story is one of resilience, redemption, and leadership, offering hope and practical insight to anyone seeking a successful life after addiction and incarceration.

To connect with Scott Phillips, find him at <https://surfside.org/>



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Cass Severe

Speaker: Lived Experiences: Panel with Justice-Involved Individuals

Cass Severe is a justice-impacted advocate, speaker, and community leader dedicated to transforming the reentry experience for women.

She is the Founder of Meet Her At The Gate (MHATG), a reentry initiative rooted in dignity, connection, and real support, providing women with a “red carpet” welcome home experience, care packages, and ongoing wraparound services as they transition back into their communities.

Cass recently earned her Master of Social Work (MSW) from Monmouth University, specializing in Global and Community Practice. Her academic journey was a natural extension of the work she was already leading, using both lived experience and formal training to design programs that are not only compassionate, but effective and sustainable.

Her work is deeply personal. As a formerly incarcerated woman, Cass understands firsthand the barriers women face upon release, housing instability, lack of support, stigma, and systemic gaps. She has transformed that lived experience into purpose, developing pre-release programming such as “Are You Really Ready?”, a curriculum focused on housing readiness, self-assessment, and preparing women within six months of release for the realities of reentry through honest dialogue and practical planning.

Cass has come full circle in her journey, having previously served on the Board of Trustees for Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, the very place where she was once incarcerated—bringing critical lived experience into leadership and systems-level conversations.

In her professional role, Cass serves as a Community Case Manager with the RWJBarnabas Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery, where she supports individuals impacted by substance use and justice involvement. Her work includes connecting clients to essential resources such as housing, treatment, recovery support, and care coordination, while walking alongside them in their healing and stabilization process.

Through all of her work, Cass is committed to breaking cycles, restoring dignity, and creating pathways for women to not just return home, but to truly rebuild their lives.

To connect with Cass Severe, find her on Instagram: [@meetheratthegate](https://www.instagram.com/meetheratthegate)



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Al-Tariq K. Witcher

Speaker: Lived Experiences: Panel with Justice-Involved Individuals

Al-Tariq K. Witcher is an accomplished advocate, entrepreneur, and community leader who has overcome a troubled past to become a beacon of hope and empowerment for those impacted by the criminal justice system.

Born and raised in Newark, NJ, he excelled academically until mischievousness and substance abuse derailed his life and led to over 20 years in prison.

While incarcerated, Al-Tariq became a paralegal and dedicated himself to fighting for the rights of his fellow prisoners and their families. Al-Tariq is Managing Director of External Affairs at Fair Share Housing Center (FSCH), where he coordinates work on policy, communication, and organizing. Prior to joining FSCH, Tariq spent the last 14 years in the advocacy space in New Jersey, focusing his efforts on justice-impacted individuals, at-risk youth, and underserved populations. He co-founded the Returning Citizens Support Group and has also held other key roles at New Jersey Together, Rutgers University, and Catholic Charities.

His academic achievements include an AA in Paralegal Studies from Essex County College and a BS in Criminal Justice with a minor in Legal Studies from Rutgers University. He is a youth mentor with Rise2gether, a program that empowers young people to be leaders in their communities. He served on the Hudson County Advisory Board for the Reduction of Gun Violence. In 2015, Al-Tariq launched Around the Clock Property Management, LLC, which focuses on developing and managing affordable housing for Returning Citizens in Essex County. He also co-founded Second Chance Developers LLC, which aims to build safe, affordable, sustainable housing for system-impacted individuals and create opportunities for Newark residents to build wealth through homeownership. Al-Tariq's philosophy is simple but powerful: "Once part of the problem, now part of the solution!" He is committed to using his experiences and expertise to make a positive impact in his community and beyond.

To connect with Al-Tariq Witcher, find him at: <https://www.fairsharehousing.org/>

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Taylor Thomas

Moderator: Lived Experiences: Panel with Justice-Involved Individuals

Taylor Thomas currently serves as the Community Relations Specialist, Housing and FCHA in the Community Relations Unit at the Division on Civil Rights.

Taylor focuses on spreading education and awareness around housing rights under the Law Against Discrimination and the Fair Chance in Housing Act.

She previously served as the Re-Entry Unit Supervisor at the Atlantic County Justice Facility for Jewish Family Service and as a Court Service Officer in Landlord-Tenant and Small Claims Court in Atlantic County.

With a Master of Criminal Justice from Stockton University and a Master of Social Work from Rutgers University, Taylor is passionate about serving the incarcerated, justice-involved, and other vulnerable communities throughout New Jersey.

Taylor works out of DCR's Atlantic City location.

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Stephanie Menezile, J.D.

Facilitator: Community Conversations

Stephanie Menezile, J.D., is a seasoned mediator with more than a decade of experience navigating complex disputes across the legal field.

Currently serving as the Dispute Resolution Specialist and Lead Community Mediator for the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights' Community Relations Unit (CRU), she brings a sophisticated, multi-jurisdictional perspective to neutral facilitation and high-stakes conflict resolution. Holding a Bachelor's degree in Legal Studies from SUNY Canton College of Technology and a Juris Doctorate from Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Stephanie is a triple-certified mediator with professional credentials in Michigan, New York, and New Jersey.

As the lead for the Unit's Crisis Response initiatives, Stephanie specializes in restorative justice practices, organizational and community assessments, and advanced community dialogue methodologies. In this capacity, she is responsible for stabilizing and supporting communities before and after civil rights incidents, guiding diverse stakeholders toward durable, mutually beneficial outcomes in high-pressure environments. Widely recognized for her empathy, neutrality, and integrity, Stephanie excels at bridging the gap between institutional policy and community needs. Her work ensures that mediation serves not only as a mechanism for resolving disputes, but as a practical tool for social reconciliation and long-term systemic equity.

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JoEllyn L. Jones, Esq.

Speaker: Connections, Resources, and Next Steps

JoEllyn L. Jones Esq. is a mother, daughter, sister, friend, and defense attorney.

She received her BA from Rowan University, JD from Widener University - Delaware Law School and her Master's Degree in Restorative Justice with Distinction from Vermont Graduate and Law School. She currently works for Seton Hall Law School's Center for Social Justice as a Practitioner in Residence overseeing the Criminal Legal Education and Advocacy Reentry Project. In addition, she works part-time at her own solo law practice, The Law Office of JoEllyn L. Jones LLC.

In addition to being a Board Member with NACDL, she is the co-chair of the Diversity Committee and the State Legislative Affairs Committee. She is a member of the Decarceration Committee. Board Outside of NACDL she is active with other organizations. She is the current Vice-President of the Association of Black Woman Lawyers of New Jersey, a trustee for the Cumberland County Barr Association where she is also the Co-Chair of the Diversity Committee. She is a Founding Board Member and Chair of the Board for Dream Catchers of Gouldtown, a non-profit that works with youth and young adults to help them create life plans and go after their dreams. In June of 2024 she was appointed to the Governor's Clemency Advisory Board by NJ Governor Phil Murphy.

To learn more about JoEllyn L. Jones, Esq,
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Michael Campion

Deputy Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Michael Campion serves as the Deputy Director of the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR), where he helps lead DCR's efforts to enforce and uphold New Jersey's robust civil rights laws.

In this role, Michael leads investigations and works to secure civil rights protections in housing, employment, education, and public accommodations. Before joining DCR, Michael was the Chief of the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey, where he led federal enforcement efforts to address civil rights and constitutional violations across New Jersey. Michael also works closely with community and advocacy groups to help strengthen civil rights awareness and enforcement.

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Patricia D. Williamson

Event MC

Patricia D. Williamson (she/her) is the Director of Outreach and Community Engagement and a Community Mediator in the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights' Community Relations Unit.

Patricia is the unit's lead on programming initiatives for the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination. She provides 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 community response efforts to prevent and eliminate discrimination and bias in New Jersey. She is based in Trenton.

Prior to this position, Patricia was the New Jersey Counts Project Director at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. Patricia led the Institute's work to ensure a complete and accurate count of New Jersey's urban communities in the 2020 Census. Patricia was part of the Census 2020 NJ Coalition, and convened a sub-coalition of African American community-based organizations, non-profits, and institutions (such as clergy). Patricia worked for over 20 years as a systems engineer in the optical networking area of various telecommunications companies in New Jersey. She was also an adjunct professor at Bloomfield College.

Patricia resides in central New Jersey. She earned a BA in Mathematics from Hampton University, an MS in Computer Science from Howard University, and an MA in Education and Human Development in the Educational Technology Leadership Program at The George Washington University.

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New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR)

The New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) is the state agency charged with enforcing New Jersey's civil rights laws, including the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (NJ LAD), the New Jersey Family Leave Act (NJFLA), and the Fair Chance in Housing Act (FCHA).

The mission of DCR is to protect the people of New Jersey from discrimination and bias-based harassment in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

- To learn more about DCR and your civil rights, please visit: njcivilrights.gov
- To file a complaint with DCR: please:
 - Visit: bias.njcivilrights.gov
 - Call: 1.833. NJDCR4U (1.833.653.2748) (voice) Relay Service at 711
 - Email if you need a free interpreter: LanguageHelp@njcivilrights.gov
- To learn more about DCR's news and public programs, please:
 - Connect with us on Facebook & Twitter: [@CivilRightsNJ](https://www.facebook.com/CivilRightsNJ)
 - Email Community Relations: CommunityRelations@njcivilrights.gov

DCR's Community Relations Unit works with groups across the state to raise awareness about civil rights protections under NJ's anti-discrimination laws. To invite DCR into your community, please reach out about your events and to coordinate "Know Your Rights" presentations and Community Conversations.



GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

<https://www.nj.gov/dca//dhcr/index.shtml>

The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is a State agency created to provide administrative guidance, financial support and technical assistance to local governments, community development organizations, businesses and individuals to improve the quality of life in New Jersey. DCA offers a wide range of programs and services, including local government management and finance, affordable housing production, fire safety, building safety, community planning and development, historic preservation, disaster recovery and mitigation, and information privacy.

DCA | The Division on Housing & Community Resources

The division provides a wide range of services addressing needs in Housing Assistance, Housing Production, Community Development, Neighborhood Revitalization and Improvement, Energy Assistance and Community Services.

Services include:

- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers
- Lead Assistance Programs
- Supportive Housing Connections (SHC)
- Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV)
Information for owners wanting to lease
- Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV)
Information for owners waiting to lease to DCA Section 8 participants



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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey (CSPNY)

<https://cspnj.org/>

Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey is a peer-led not-for-profit organization. CSPNY empowers New Jersey residents with behavioral health challenges by providing peer-led, values-based services that foster wellness, recovery, housing stability, and advocacy.

Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey

<https://www.hcdnnj.org/>

The Network is a statewide association of over 250 non-profit housing and community development corporations, individuals, professional organizations, and prominent New Jersey corporations that support the creation of housing choices and economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income community residents.

Integrity House

<https://integrityhouse.org/>

Integrity House's mission is to help individuals and families through an effective and measurable system of comprehensive Therapeutic Community addictions treatment, mental health treatment, and recovery support in a way that brings about positive, long-term lifestyle change.

These community organizations provided resource materials at the Housing Summit.
Their services are not connected to the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights.



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