Welcome to the 2020 GRITS Conference! Read on to learn more about the conference and our guest speakers.
Getting Radical in the South

A conference for social justice lawyers and activists in the South.

Conference mission

GRITS is a student-run public interest law conference that focuses on the difficulties and constraints inherent to social justice work in the South, and the unique strategies that legal practitioners and other public interest workers have developed to meet those needs. The conference emphasizes innovative, progressive, and even radical approaches to building community among students, practitioners, and community activists in the South to bring about social change.

The conference is an opportunity for law students, lawyers, and activists to build coalitions, share strategies for progressive lawyering, and develop new approaches for the future.

2020 Student Conference Planners

Andrew Eckhous  Jason Cruz  Madeline Waddell  Nicolas Sawyer
David Giannaula  Jess Hallam  Melissa Sopher  Noorulanne Jan
Elise Czuchna  Jill Applegate  Nathan Simmons  Simon Lu
GRITS Program                                                                                                                                                              February 28-29, 2020

Itinerary

Friday, February 28
UT Law School

12:30-1:00 PM  Registration
Susman Godfrey Atrium

Are you a lawyer or social worker who wants to receive CLE or CEU credits for GRITS? GRITS has been approved for Minimum Continuing Legal Education credit by the State Bar of Texas Committee on MCLE in the amount of 10.00 credit hours, of which 1.00 hours are ethics. GRITS has also been approved for 10.50 Social Work Continuing Education Credits. If you would like to receive either of these credits for your time at the conference, please be sure to let us know at registration. We will need to sign you in and give you required paperwork.

1:00-2:00 PM  GRITS Kickoff: The Power of Storytelling
Francis Auditorium

Renee Bracey Sherman | Writer, Organizer, Activist
Melissa Madera | Host, Founder, & Director of “The Abortion Diary”

Renee Bracey Sherman and Melissa Madera will open the conference with a discussion about the power and importance of abortion storytelling and visibility. Moderated by Zoraima Pelaez, UT Law student.

2:00-2:20 PM  Refreshments
Susman Godfrey Atrium

2:35-3:35 PM  Sex Work in the South
Eidman Courtroom

Please note: Phones and laptop computers will not be allowed into the courtroom during this panel unless absolutely necessary. There will be a place to check these items during this discussion in the Jury Room next to the Eidman Courtroom, where they may be picked back up after the panel.

CON’T ON NEXT PAGE . . .
Itinerary

Friday, February 28
UT Law School

3:50-4:50 PM  Labor Organizing in the South and Southwest  
*Francis Auditorium*

**Mike Cartwright | UAW Local 276**  
**Montserrat Garibay | AFL-CIO**  
**Christine Valenzuela | National Nurses Organizing Committee/National Nurses United**

A panel discussion with labor organizers from the South and Southwest about the importance of community-based labor organizing in the region and the policies that support or hinder unionization. Moderated by Bill Beardall from UT Law’s Transnational Worker Rights Clinic.

5:00-6:00 PM  Reproductive Justice: Coupling Litigation and Advocacy  
*Francis Auditorium*

**Amanda Williams | Lilith Fund**  
**Rosann Mariappuram | Jane’s Due Process**

An interesting reproductive rights discussion between the executive directors of two of the nation’s leading reproductive rights nonprofits about balancing legal advocacy with grassroots campaigns.

6:00-? PM  Happy hour!  
*Spider House Cafe and Ballroom, 2908 Fruth St.*

Join us for food, drinks, and good conversation with fellow social justice practitioners from a wide variety of backgrounds.
Itinerary

Saturday, February 29
UT Law School

9:00-9:40 AM  Breakfast
Susman Godfrey Atrium

9:00-9:40 AM  Breakfast Breakout: People of Color in Public Interest
TNH 2.310

Wendy Shang | Pretrial Justice Institute
Beto Mesta, Jr. | Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
Kiah DeBolt | The Safe Alliance
Judge Aurora Martinez-Jones | Associate Judge in Travis County

A time for people of color to meet, gather, and discuss issues specific to working as a person of color in social justice and public interest fields.

9:50-10:50 AM  Understanding Texas Legislation
Francis Auditorium

Donna Howard | Texas House of Representatives
Molly Bursey | Moms Demand Action
Jeffrey Jacoby | Texas Campaign for the Environment

A discussion between legislators and grassroots organizers regarding legislative updates and how to organize progressive politics at the legislative level. Moderated by Laura Gorsky from Indivisible Project.

CON’T ON NEXT PAGE . . .
Itinerary

Saturday, February 29
UT Law School

11:00-12:00 PM  Breakout Sessions

**Breakout 1:** Immigration Detention and “Crimmigration”
*Francis Auditorium*

- **Chito Vela** | Walker Gates Vela
- **Linda Rivas** | Las Americas
- **Katrina Black** | RAICES
- **Jennifer Scarborough** | Private Immigration Attorney

A panel discussion of the consequences of criminal system involvement on immigration proceedings and the changes to detention policies and practices under the current Administration. Moderated by Denise Gilman from UT Law’s Immigration Law Clinic.

**Breakout 2:** Environmental Justice
*Eidman Courtroom*

- **Mario Atencio** | Diné Care
- **Bryan Parras** | Sierra Club
- **Kerene Taylor** | WE ACT for Environmental Justice

A panel discussion of the environmental oppression of the poor and communities of color, the generational effects of such harm, and best practices from environmental justice advocates. Moderated by Kelly Haragan from UT Law’s Environmental Justice Clinic.

12:00-1:00 PM  Lunch & Discussion: Judicial Nominations in the Trump Era
*Susman Godfrey Atrium*

**Steve Vladeck** | Professor at the University of Texas School of Law

Steve Vladeck will offer a talk about President Trump’s judicial nominations and appointments and their effects on the make up of the federal judiciary.

CON’T ON NEXT PAGE . . .
Itinerary

Saturday, February 29
UT Law School

1:15-2:15 PM  Breakout Sessions

Breakout 1:  Tips for Post Conviction Litigation in the South
Francis Auditorium

Sara Ann Brown | Foley & Lardner LLP
Kay Hutchinson | Texas Defender Service

A discussion about the local Rosa Jimenez case, strategies for working within a conservative court system, and tips for leveraging partnerships with law firms to support social justice lawyering.

Breakout 2:  Local Activism in Central Texas
Eidman Courtroom

Diana Earl | Everytown and Local Activist
Molly Bursey | Moms Demand Action

Diana Earl, an Austin activist against gun violence, and Molly Bursey, a New Braunfels-based activist who works with Moms Demand Action, will speak on topics including ending gun violence, supporting criminal justice reform, and improving the lives of people of color in central Texas and beyond.

CON’T ON NEXT PAGE . . .
Itinerary

Saturday, February 29
UT Law School

2:25-3:15 PM Breakout Sessions

**Breakout 1:** Secondary Trauma for Social Justice Workers
*Eidman Courtroom*

*Caitlin Sulley* | *Director of the Sexual Assault Research Portfolio at the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault*

*Jessi Duran* | *Intern with the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault*

A discussion of strategies and practices for avoiding and responding to secondary trauma as a worker in a social justice field.

**Breakout 2:** Can you be an activist and a lawyer at the same time?
*Francis Auditorium*

*Leah Rodriguez* | *Texas RioGrande Legal Aid*

*Gowthaman Ranganathan* | *Fulbright-Nehru Master’s Fellow at UT Law*

*Kiah DeBolt* | *The Safe Alliance*

A panel discussion of the ways that lawyering and activism can coexist with one another, as well as the ethical conflicts that may arise when they are combined. Moderated by Chris Harris from Texas Appleseed.

CON’T ON NEXT PAGE . . .
Itinerary

Saturday, February 29
UT Law School

3:15-3:35 PM  Coffee and Refreshments
Susman Godfrey Atrium

3:35-4:35 PM  Punishment Without Guilt
Francis Auditorium

Emily Gerrick | Texas Fair Defense Project
Imelme Umana | Civil Rights Corps
Wendy Shang | Pretrial Justice Institute

A panel discussion of access to justice for low-income defendants, including indigent defense, pretrial detention, and prosecutorial coercion in plea bargaining. Moderated by Nicolas Sawyer, UT Law student.

4:45-5:30 PM  Reclaiming Free Speech
Francis Auditorium

Gadeir Abbas | Council on American-Islamic Relations

In 2017, Texas, like more than half of the states in America, mandated that the state could not have a contract with a company unless that company promised not to boycott Israel. Attorney Gadeir Abbas, working on behalf of Ms. Bahia Amawi, fought that law in court and won. In this session, Mr. Abbas will discuss that case, as well as his other work defending free speech for all people in this country. Discussion will be guided by Reid Pillifant, UT Law student and former editor at Slate and Politico.

5:30-6:00 PM  Closing Comments and Refreshments
Susman Godfrey Atrium
Speaker Information

**Amanda Williams | Lilith Fund**

**Panel: Reproductive Justice: Coupling Litigation and Advocacy**

Amanda Beatriz Williams, a proud daughter of an immigrant, is a queer Tejana with more than ten years of experience working in the reproductive health, rights, and justice movement. Amanda is originally from Houston, Texas, where she planted her roots as a community organizer. Amanda holds a Master’s in Political Social Work from the University of Houston and has extensive background in nonprofit management, program development, policy, advocacy, and fundraising. She served on the board of the Lilith Fund from 2012-2015 and has been Lilith Fund’s executive director since 2016. Under her leadership, Lilith Fund has supported thousands of Texans seeking abortion care and expanded its programming to include emotional support and organizing. Amanda is a proud storyteller of the National Network of Abortion Fund’s (NNAF) We Testify program, which is dedicated to increasing the spectrum of abortion storytellers in the public sphere. Her writing has been published in Glamour Magazine, Rewire, TribTalk, and the Feminist Wire. She is also a board member for Youth Rise Texas, an organization that works to develop the leadership of youth of color who are directly impacted by incarceration and deportation. Amanda lives in Austin with her fiancée, Holly, and cat, Mica.

**Judge Aurora Martinez Jones | Associate Judge in Travis County**

**Breakout Session: People of Color in Public Interest**

Aurora Martinez Jones is an Associate Judge in Travis County. She presides over child welfare dockets, including Family Drug Treatment Court and Permanent Managing Conservatorship dockets, reviewing Travis County cases with foster children in the permanent care of Child Protective Services (CPS). Aurora has dedicated her career to ensure the most fragile members of our community have fair access to justice. Aurora is a first generation American and first generation law school graduate. While in college, at the University of Texas at Austin, Aurora established an organization to connect and support other minority women in law school - Minority Women Pursuing Law. Her optimism and work ethic then earned her spot at the University of Texas School of Law. Since then, Aurora has continued to give back to her community. She is currently a Board Member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and Chair of the statewide Children’s Justice Act Task Force. Aurora has also been involved with the Austin Black Lawyers Association and Foundation, Travis County Women Lawyer’s Foundation, Travis County Collaborative for Children, the Girls Empowerment Network, and Friends of the Children - Austin, among many others.
Beto Mesta, Jr. | Texas RioGrande Legal Aid

Breakout Session: People of Color in Public Interest

Alberto Mesta, has practiced law with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. (TRLA) since 2003. He is the branch manager of the TRLA-El Paso office where he oversees a staff of 43, including 19 attorneys. He started as a Farm Worker Division attorney at the El Paso migrant farm worker office of Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc. before its merger with the El Paso Legal Assistance Society to become what is now TRLA. Mr. Mesta was the former chair of the Poverty Law Section of the State Bar of Texas. He has served on the board of directors for the El Paso Bar Association. He is current member of the One Fund El Paso Task Force, which was created by City of El Paso and two El Paso foundations to streamline the process of distributing funds to the victims of the August 3, 2010 mass shooting in El Paso and their families. He graduated from University of Texas School of Law where he was the managing editor for the Texas Hispanic Journal of Law and Policy and officer with the Chicano/Hispanic Law Students Association. He was the recipient of the David Proctor Scholarship. Mr. Mesta majored in Political Science from the University of Texas at El Paso, (UTEP) where he received UTEP’s Men of Mines for outstanding service to fellow students and the university.

Bill Beardall | UT Law Transnational Worker Rights Clinic

Panel: Labor Organizing in the South and Southwest

Bill Beardall directs the Law School's ground-breaking Transnational Worker Rights Clinic. He has practiced as a public interest employment lawyer for low-income working men and women since 1978. Mr. Beardall also serves as Executive Director of the Equal Justice Center, a non-profit employment justice and civil rights organization with offices in Austin, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. Widely recognized for his experience in reforming public justice systems and private employment practices, Mr. Beardall is a leading expert in low-income employment law and in securing access to the justice system for working people regardless of their income or immigration status. From 1984-2000 he served as Director of the Migrant Worker Division of Texas Rural Legal Aid and from 2000-2001 he was Legal Director for Texas Appleseed. In 2001 he founded the Equal Justice Center which, under his leadership, has become the leading law firm specialized in enforcing the workplace rights of immigrant and low-wage workers in Texas and the surrounding region. He has also directed the Law School’s Transnational Worker Rights Clinic since 2004 establishing it as one of the nation's foremost law school clinics specializing in employment litigation and the evolution of U.S. employment law in a transnational labor market. The Clinic is operated as a partnership between the UT Law School and the Equal Justice Center.
Bryan Parras | Sierra Club

Panel: Environmental Justice

Bryan is a longtime environmental justice and climate justice advocate born and raised in the Gulf South. Bryan has worked tirelessly in his hometown of Houston to improve the health and safety of residents living in the shadows of oil refineries, chemical plants, storage tanks, rail yards and pipelines in one of the largest concentrations of this industry in the world. He has seen, firsthand, the devastation that has been wrought on indigenous communities and people of color throughout the continent by the fossil fuel industry. Bryan has participated in the Environmental Justice Movement, the Climate Justice Movement, The Peoples Health Movement, The Immigrant Rights Movement and has always worked to build intersectional movements from the bottom up. Bryan is a trained facilitator of Theater of the Oppressed techniques, a graduate of The University of Texas at Austin. He has worked as an organizer, a journalist and as an artist. Bryan Parras is a co-founder of Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s.), co-founder of the Librotraficantes and now works as an organizer for the Sierra Club’s Beyond Dirty Fuels campaign.

Caitlin Sulley | Director of the Sexual Assault Research Portfolio at the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

Breakout Session: Secondary Trauma for Social Justice Workers

Caitlin Sulley, LMSW, is director of the Sexual Assault Research Portfolio and director of Operations at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work’s Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (IDVSA). The Sexual Assault Research Portfolio consists of a variety of research, evaluation, and training projects aimed to build knowledge on sexual assault. Sulley currently directs research and training initiatives focused on institutional response to sexual assault, gender-based violence among college populations, and victim engagement in the criminal justice system. Sulley enjoys conducting multidisciplinary training using decision cases and has authored several decision cases used among Texas sexual assault professionals. She served survivors of sexual assault and family violence in law enforcement and community-based settings.
Speaker Information

Chito Vela | Walker Gates Vela

Panel: Immigration Detention and “Crimmigration”

Jose “Chito” Vela III is originally from Laredo, Texas, and currently has his own Austin-based firm, Walker Gates Vela. Chito focuses on litigation, particularly criminal and immigration defense and the relationship between the two.

Chris Harris | Texas Appleseed

Panel: Can you be an activist and a lawyer at the same time?

Chris Harris is a native Texan, proud son, pro basketball fanatic, hip-hop head, and passionate advocate working to transform the criminal legal system. He currently serves as a Campaign Coordinator for Texas Appleseed, a public interest nonprofit that promotes social and economic justice for all Texans, and as a Public Safety Commissioner representing District 1 in the City of Austin. Chris has led and contributed to winning campaigns aimed at limiting: racial disparities in the criminal justice system, state violence, unnecessary arrests, ICE detentions, pre-trial incarceration, subpar indigent defense and further investment in police and prisons.

Christine Valenzuela | National Nurses Organizing Committee/National Nurses United

Panel: Labor Organizing in the South and Southwest

Christine Valenzuela has been in healthcare for 12 years and has worked as a registered nurse (RN) for 10 years. She is currently a nurse representative and a peer-elected negotiator for the National Nurses Organizing Committee/National Nurses United, and she was part of the team that negotiated the first ever union contract at her hospital in Tucson, Arizona.
Speaker Information

Denise Gilman | UT Law Immigration Clinic

Panel: Immigration Detention and “Crimmigration”

Denise Gilman teaches and directs the Immigration Clinic. Gilman received her undergraduate degree with honors in political science from Northwestern University. She received her law degree from Columbia University School of Law where she served on the Law Review. Gilman also has an LLM from Georgetown University Law Center. Gilman has written and practiced extensively in the international human rights and immigrants’ rights fields. From 2000 to 2005, Gilman was Director of the Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project at the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. At the Lawyers’ Committee, Gilman coordinated the representation of political asylum applicants by pro bono attorneys and engaged in advocacy on issues of significance to the newcomer community. She also investigated and litigated individual and impact cases involving law enforcement abuses against immigrants and discrimination against newcomers in housing and employment. From 1995-2000, Gilman served as Human Rights Specialist at the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights at the Organization of American States and then Director of the Mexico Project at the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (now Human Rights First). Gilman made her transition from legal practice to clinical teaching through completion of a two-year clinical teaching fellowship at the Georgetown University Law Center from 2005-2007.

Donna Howard | Texas House of Representatives

Panel: Understanding Texas Legislation

Representative Donna Howard has served in the Texas House of Representatives since 2006. She is a member of the House Appropriations Committee, and sits on its Article III Subcommittee which oversees education spending in the state budget. Donna serves as Vice Chair of the House Administration Committee, and is also a longtime member of the Higher Education and House Administration Committees. A native of Austin, Donna earned a Bachelor’s degree in nursing and a Master’s degree in health education from the University of Texas. She worked as a critical care nurse at Brackenridge and Seton hospitals, and served as Austin’s first hospital-based Patient Education Coordinator. Donna is a past president of the Texas Nurses Association (District 5) and was a health education instructor at UT. Donna was elected to the Eanes ISD board in West Austin for the 1996-1999 term. She has served on the boards of Austin Area Interreligious Ministries, Common Cause Texas, Texas Freedom Network, and the Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. She now serves as a board member of the Expanding Horizons Foundation, supporting low-income housing and education.
Emily Gerrick | Texas Fair Defense Project

Panel: Punishment Without Guilt

Emily Gerrick focuses on Texas Fair Defense Project’s Criminal Justice Debt Initiative. Through litigation and legislative advocacy, she works to reduce court costs and stop jurisdictions from incarcerating people who cannot afford to pay fees and fines. Emily joined TFDP as a Liman Fellow in 2014. Her past experiences include providing direct legal assistance to prisoners in long-term solitary confinement, drafting motions and writs in federal criminal cases, and investigating inhumane conditions in Alabama, Connecticut, and Texas prisons. Emily is a graduate of Yale Law School and the University of California at Los Angeles. In law school, she was a member of the Capital Punishment Clinic, the student-director of the Detention and Human Rights Clinic, and a convener of the Criminal Justice Theory and Practice Workshop.

Gadeir Abbas | Council on American-Islamic Relations

Discussion: Reclaiming Free Speech

Gadeir Abbas is an attorney for the Council on American-Islamic Relations’ headquarters in Washington D.C. He has spearheaded major lawsuits across the country involving constitutional issues of particular concern to the American Muslim community, including the successful landmark challenge to Oklahoma’s State Question 755, a voter-approved referendum that would have barred reference to Islamic religious traditions in Oklahoma’s courts. Gadeir has also litigated on behalf of American Muslims surveilled by warrantless GPS tracking devices, placed on the federal government’s terrorist watch lists, and prevented from building schools and mosques by discriminatory zoning laws. He has appeared in national and international media outlets, including the New York Times, Washington Post, Associated Press, National Public Radio, The Guardian, MSNBC, and CNN. Mr. Abbas studied philosophy at Loyola University Chicago and law at Case Western Reserve University. Prior to becoming an attorney, he taught English in Mississippi with Teach for America.
Speaker Information

Gowthaman Ranganathan | Fulbright-Nehru Master’s Fellow at UT Law

Breakout Session: Can you be an activist and a lawyer at the same time?

Gowthaman Ranganathan is a Fulbright-Nehru Master’s Fellow from India. He is pursuing an LLM in Human Rights and Comparative Constitutional Law at The University of Texas School of Law. In India, he has worked with the Alternative Law forum, Bengaluru; the Centre for Social Justice, Ahmedabad; and the office of Advocate Sudha Ramalingam at Chennai. He has assisted and represented survivors of domestic violence, LGBT persons, and sex workers at various forums in Bengaluru and Chennai. He has worked extensively on the rights of transgender persons and on advocacy and litigation to decriminalize homosexuality in India. His current work is at the intersection of human rights, inequality, mental health, and marginalization. He holds an undergraduate degree from the National Law School, Bengaluru and an LLM in law and development from the Azim Premji University. He has also taught at the National Law University at Jodhpur and Delhi where he facilitated an undergraduate course on Law, Society and Social Justice Lawyering; and Law and Justice for postgraduate students.

Imelme Umana | Civil Rights Corps

Panel: Punishment Without Guilt

Imelme is the Soros Justice Fellow at the Civil Rights Corps. Previously, she clerked for Judge Robert Wilkins, US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. Imelme graduated from Harvard Law, where she was the first black woman to serve as the President of the Harvard Law Review.

Jeffrey Jacoby | Texas Campaign for the Environment

Panel: Understanding Texas Legislation

Jeffrey Jacoby began his career with TCE in 2004 and directed our DFW office from 2005-2011 and our Central Texas office from 2012-2019. After obtaining a Master of Arts from the University of Maryland and living in Washington, D.C. for three years, Jeff found TCE when he returned to his native Texas. Jeff believes that change begins at home, one person at a time. His commitment to grassroots democracy and environmental advocacy stems from a strong desire to transform the mindset of a culture bent on harming the very source of its sustenance.
Speaker Information

Jennifer Scarborough | Private Immigration Attorney

Panel: Immigration Detention and “Crimmigration”

Jennifer Scarborough is a staff attorney with ProBAR’s adult office in Harlingen, Texas where she represents adults detained along the South Texas border. She assists both new arrivals seeking asylum as well as long-time residents of the Rio Grande Valley. Jennifer graduated from DePaul University College of Law. During her four years in law school, she worked full time as a partially accredited DOJ representative with the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago.

Jessi Duran | Intern at the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Breakout Session: Secondary Trauma for Social Justice Workers

Jessi Duran is an MSSW student at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work and an MPH student at the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health. She is currently interning at the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault for her final field placement before graduation. She has previously worked in child welfare and chronic pain settings, and hopes to work in community engagement and programming.

Katy Hutchinson | Texas Defender Service

Breakout Session: Tips for Post Conviction Litigation in the South

Katy Hutchinson is a post-conviction staff attorney in the Austin office of the Texas Defender Service. Katy graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 2011, where she was a member of the Capital Punishment Clinic. After graduating, Katy clerked for Judge Sarah Vance on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana and Judge Raggi on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Katy then joined Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP, where she represented clients in capital cases in Pennsylvania and Texas. Before law school, Katy worked for Senator Patrick Leahy on the Senate Judiciary Committee. She graduated college from the University of Texas – Austin in 2002.
Speaker Information

**Kelly Haragan | UT Law Environmental Justice Clinic**

**Panel: Environmental Justice**

Kelly Haragan is a clinical professor and Director of the Environmental Clinic. Kelly joined the faculty in 2008. Prior to joining the Clinic, Kelly worked as legal counsel for national nonprofits including: the Environmental Integrity Project in Washington DC, Environmental Defense Fund in Austin, and Public Citizen’s Austin office. She also worked at the Austin firm Henry, Lowerre, Johnson, Hess & Frederick, representing citizen and environmental groups in permitting and enforcement matters. Kelly specializes in Clean Air Act permitting and enforcement.

**Kerene N. Tayloe | WE ACT for Environmental Justice**

**Panel: Environmental Justice**

Kerene N. Tayloe Esq. is a social justice advocate who has worked tirelessly in the areas of Environmental Justice, Civil Rights, and voter protection. Kerene is proud to work as the Director of Legislative Affairs for WE ACT for Environmental Justice, one of the country’s preeminent social justice organizations. She is focused on ensuring that communities of color lead and speak for themselves as we address the important challenge of climate change. To that end, she believes it is imperative that people of color and women have access to economic opportunities in the clean energy sector. She was a fellow in the highly selective Clean Energy Leadership Institute whose mission is to empower young professionals for careers in clean energy. Kerene also recently completed her training in Vice President Al Gore’s Climate Reality Project. In addition to her environmental work, Kerene has worked in many political arenas but is most proud of helping to elect New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, the first African American to represent the city of Yonkers in the State Senate and the first woman in New York State history to lead a conference in Albany, NY.

**Kiah DeBolt | The Safe Alliance**

**Breakout Session: People of Color in Public Interest**

**Breakout Session: Can you be an activist and a lawyer at the same time?**

Kiah DeBolt works with The Safe Alliance in Austin assisting survivors of child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, domestic violence, and commercial exploitation. Kiah graduated from the University of Texas School of Law, where she was active in both the pro bono community and the Thurgood Marshall Legal Society.
Speaker Information

Laura Gorsky | Indivisible

Panel: Understanding Texas Legislation

Laura Gorsky is Indivisible’s Senior Regional Organizer for New Mexico, Texas, and Arkansas. She has completed multiple cycles of campaign organizing in her home state of Virginia. Laura has years of experience working on campaigns and with progressive nonprofits. Most recently, Laura worked as a policy aide in the Texas State Legislature during the 2019 legislative session. Laura holds a Masters of Public Affairs from the LBJ School at the University of Texas and a Bachelor of Arts from The College of William and Mary.

Leah Rodríguez | Texas RioGrande Legal Aid

Breakout Session: Can you be an activist and a lawyer at the same time?

Leah Rodríguez is an immigration attorney and Equal Justice Works fellow at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid in Austin, Texas. Her two-year fellowship project, funded by Baker Botts LLP and Dell Technologies, centers on providing removal defense for asylum seekers in central Texas and working on issues of language access for indigenous language speakers in immigration proceedings. At Texas Law, she enjoyed volunteering with the Mithoff Pro Bono Program and participating in the Immigration Clinic. Before law school, Leah received her B.A. from The University of Texas at Austin in Latin American Studies and was involved in local immigration advocacy through Grassroots Leadership.

Linda Rivas | Las Americas

Panel: Immigration Detention and “Crimmigration”

Linda Y. Rivas was born in Mexico and raised in El Paso, Texas. Linda is currently the Executive Director and Managing Attorney of Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, a 32-year-old organization dedicated to the legal needs of low-income migrants. Las Americas’ mission is dedicated to asylum seekers, family reunification and advocating for the dignity and rights of all migrants. Linda is also a co-founder of the Borderland Immigration Council (BIC), which was formed to help address the dire situation of due process abuses, family separation and abuse of discretion that immigrants and refugees face during the course of their legal immigration cases. This year, Linda and her Las Americas team are leading the way to fight against the harmful “Remain in Mexico” policy, as they cross the border to help ensure due process for migrants forced to wait in Mexico for their asylum hearings.
Speaker Information

Mario Atencio | Diné CARE

Panel: Environmental Justice

Mario Atencio is Háshtl’iiishnii; born for Tódichíííiní; Táneezháání are his cheiis and Tlaash’íí are his nálís. He has been involved in oil and gas development issues facing the Diné communities of the far eastern Diné Nation. Mario became involved with Diné CARE (Citizens Against Ruining our Environment) by starting the work around the Colorado River water rights struggle that the Diné Nation is still facing.

Melissa Madera | Host, Founder, & Director of “The Abortion Diary”

GRITS Kickoff: The Power of Storytelling

Dr. Melissa Madera: Originally from Washington Heights, New York, Dr. Melissa Madera (a.k.a. the abortion diarist) is a first generation Dominican-American, and the Jill of all trades at The Abortion Diary. Her own abortion story and the deep impact sharing it (13 years later) had on her, her family, her friends, and complete strangers inspired her to create The Abortion Diary in 2013. Since beginning the project she has listened to and recorded over 300 people share their reproductive experiences. Melissa is also the Senior Project Manager and Research Fellow for Project SANA (Self-managed Abortion Needs Assessment) at the University of Texas, Austin.

Mike Cartwright | UAW Local 276

Panel: Labor Organizing in the South and Southwest

Mike Cartwright is a Member of the UAW Local 276. Mike was appointed by the UAW Vice President to serve the members of UAW Local 276, where he holds the position of human resource development representative. He was previously the President of UAW Local 276 (2011-2014), representing over 4000 UAW members. He began his career holding various positions as a UAW member. Since 1985, he has worked as a GM hourly employee, held the positions of alternate committee person, civil and human rights committee chair, Local 276 president, and other positions within the region.
Speaker Information

**Molly Bursey | Moms Demand Action**

**Panel: Understanding Texas Legislation**

Molly Bursey is the volunteer Legislative Lead for the Texas Chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. Shortly after moving to New Braunfels in early 2016, she founded the first Moms Demand Action group outside of a major city in Texas and has served as a local group leader and local group manager for Central Texas. During her first semester of teaching middle school special education, Molly watched helplessly as the shooting at Columbine High School unfolded. As a new mom, despair overwhelmed her when 20 first graders and six educators were murdered inside their school in Newtown, Connecticut. Since then, she has learned about the toll of daily gun violence in our cities, gun violence at the hands of domestic abusers, and the lethality of suicide attempts with a gun, which has driven a compulsion to change gun laws and the culture in Texas and the nation.

**Montserrat Garibay | AFL-CIO**

**Panel: Labor Organizing in the South and Southwest**

Montserrat Garibay is the Secretary-Treasurer of the Texas AFL-CIO. Previously, she served as Vice President for Certified Employees with Education Austin. An activist on education and immigration issues, Garibay came to the U.S. from Mexico City as an undocumented immigrant and became a citizen 20 years later. She has been instrumental in promoting opportunities for all students, including those from immigrant families. She promoted passage of the Texas version of the DREAM Act and comprehensive immigration reform. A bilingual pre-kindergarten teacher for eight years, Garibay has strongly supported early childhood education. Among her other roles: former President of LULAC Council 4859, Texas AFT “Super Advocate” in 2011 and member of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. Garibay is a UT-Austin graduate.
Speaker Information

**Renee Bracey Sherman | Writer, Organizer, Activist**

**GRITS Kickoff: The Power of Storytelling**

Renee Bracey Sherman is the Beyoncé of Abortion Storytelling. She’s a Chicago-born, midwest-raised writer and activist committed to the visibility and representation of people who have had abortions in media and pop culture. She is founder and executive director of We Testify, the only national and intersectional leadership organization for people who’ve had abortions in the United States, created by and for people who’ve had abortions, centering race, class, and gender identity. She has trained hundreds of abortion storytellers, including elected officials, and mentored over 60 We Testify storytellers through the fellowship, whose voices have been featured in articles, interviews, books, media, comics, events, and legislative testimony. Most recently, We Testify launched We Testify Texas, a program elevating the voices of people who navigated the financial and logistical barriers to abortion access in Texas. She’s also coined phrases like ‘Everyone Loves Someone Who Had An Abortion’ and started the #AskAboutAbortion campaign demanding presidential debate moderators ask candidates questions about abortion. Renee’s writing has appeared in the New York Times, The Guardian, Playboy, and the Washington Post. In 2015 she co-authored Speak Up & Stay Safe(r), a multi-lingual digital guide on handling online harassment. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in economics and sociology from Northeastern Illinois University and a Master’s degree in public administration from Cornell University.

**Rosann Mariappuram | Jane’s Due Process**

**Panel: Reproductive Justice: Coupling Litigation and Advocacy**

Rosann Mariappuram (she/her) is a lawyer and advocate, as well as Executive Director of Jane’s Due Process. She is a graduate of the University of Texas School of Law, was a legal intern with Jane’s Due Process and the Center for Reproductive Rights and served on the boards of the Lilith Fund for Reproductive Equity and NARAL Pro-Choice Texas. Prior to joining Jane’s Due Process, Rosann was an If/When/How Reproductive Justice Fellow with Surge Reproductive Justice and Legal Voice in Seattle, WA. Before law school, Rosann worked at the Reproductive Health Access Project in New York, NY where she helped expand access to contraception, miscarriage care and abortion in primary care settings. Rosann received her M.A. in international relations from the City College of New York and her B.A. from New York University. She is originally from Cleveland, OH and is the proud daughter of immigrant parents.
Speaker Information

Sara Ann Brown | Foley & Lardner LLP

Breakout Session: Tips for Post Conviction Litigation in the South

Sara Ann Brown represents clients in all aspects of high-stakes commercial litigation, from preliminary negotiations to trials and appeals. Sara is a versatile attorney and has the ability to master diverse subject matters, with experience litigating contract, fraud, trademark, fiduciary duty, and health care disputes. She also works closely with the firm’s Bankruptcy & Business Reorganizations Practice, prosecuting and defending fraudulent transfer claims under the Bankruptcy Code and state fraudulent transfer statutes. Prior to joining Foley Gardere, Sara served as a law clerk to the Honorable Harry Lee Hudspeth, United States District Judge for the Western District of Texas.

Steve Vladeck | Professor at The University of Texas School of Law

Lunch & Discussion: Judicial Nominations in the Trump Era

Stephen I. Vladeck (@steve_vladeck) is the A. Dalton Cross Professor in Law at the University of Texas School of Law. His teaching and research focus on federal jurisdiction, constitutional law, national security law, and military justice. A nationally recognized expert on the role of the federal courts in the war on terrorism, Vladeck’s prolific and widely cited scholarship has appeared in an array of legal publications — including the Harvard Law Review and the Yale Law Journal — and his popular writing has been published in forums ranging from the New York Times to BuzzFeed.
Speaker Information

**Wendy Shang** | Pretrial Justice Institute

**Panel: Punishment Without Guilt**
**Breakout Session: People of Color in Public Interest**

As the research and communications associate at Pretrial Justice Institute, Wendy Shang uses her legal and writing background to research and create reports, blogs, and other communications materials for a broad range of audiences. While working as an attorney for the American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center, Wendy identified ways to improve access to counsel and the quality of representation of juveniles. She helped produce several reports, including “A Call for Justice: An Assessment of Access to Counsel and Quality of Representation in Delinquency Proceedings”; “More Than Meets the Eye: Rethinking Assessment, Competency and Sentencing for a Harsher Era of Juvenile Justice”; and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention bulletin “Innovative Approaches to Juvenile Indigent Defense.” Wendy is also an award-winning author of children’s books. She received a bachelor of arts in psychology and a juris doctor degree from the University of Virginia.