



**COMMUNITY
MATTERS**

Timely Conversations That Bring Us Together

“Disparity of Discipline for Girls of Color” Part 2

Speaker Bios

Subira Gordon

Subira Gordon is the Executive Director of the Connecticut General Assembly’s Commission on Equity and Opportunity. The Commission on Equity and Opportunity’s mission is to inform and engage all policy makers about constituent needs for the African American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Latino and Puerto Rican populations in Connecticut. Ms. Gordon previously served as an Associate Commission Analyst with the African-American Affairs Commission. As the legislative analyst Subira lead the commission’s policy initiatives and successfully introduced and passed bills that are beneficial to the African American community in the state. Her focus has been on education, housing criminal justice and economic development. Prior to moving to the commission, Subira worked as a policy analyst for the House Democratic Caucus of the Connecticut General Assembly. There she monitored legislation related to seniors, housing, labor and economic development. She prepared news releases and memoranda, talking points and resource materials for legislators. Ms. Gordon also served as committee clerk for the Human Service Committee. Subira managed political campaigns, and recruited and trained volunteers how to effectively interact with voters. She also worked on developing childcare, home care and health care policy.

Subira earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Bates College and her Master of Arts degree in Public Policy from New England College.

Cheryl Sharp, Esq.

Cheryl Sharp was appointed as the Deputy Director of the State of Connecticut, Commission on Human Rights on July 4, 2014. Prior to her appointment, she served as a litigation attorney within the CHRO's legal department for more than twenty years. She represents the state in the prosecution of complaints of discrimination before the CHRO's Office of Public Hearings and in state and federal court. She has argued before various Connecticut courts including appearances before the Connecticut Supreme Court and has negotiated millions of dollars in settlements between parties. A certified mediator, she represents the CHRO in the Connecticut Safe School's Coalition and the CT Racial Profiling Working Group. She is a member of the Commission on Racial & Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System and is responsible for organizing the agency's education and outreach programs. She is also a trainer for the CHRO's Business Training Institute. She authored an article, "Sweet Land of Liberty: The treatment of Muslims in CT through the Lens of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities," which was published in 2012 by the University of Connecticut School of Law's Public Interest Law Journal. She has sat on various panels including "One Nation Under the Law" and "The Disparate Impact" panel at the University of CT School of Law and the ADA

panel and anti-bullying panel at the Civil Rights Conference for the U.S. Department of Justice. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Scandinavian School of Jersey City, a non-profit organization that focuses on the Emilia Reggio approach to education and enrichment and on the Board of the National Association of Multi-Cultural Education.

In 2017, she was named Woman of the Year by the Commission on Equity and Opportunity. In 2015, she was recognized by the International Association of Human Rights Agencies for her work to promote civil and human rights law and equality. She was recognized by the CT Law Tribune as one of the dozen who made a difference for her work raising public awareness about civil and human rights. Further, she was recognized by the CT Law Tribune as a "Lawyer of Color High Achiever." She was also named as one of the Connecticut NAACP's 100 most influential black people in Connecticut. Her honors include membership to the Phi Delta Phi Honor Society, the Nutmeg Volunteerism Award, The Sojourner Truth Award for the Advancement of Women and HUD's Best Practices Award for development of Kids' Court.

She received her Business degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, attended Women's Campaign School at Yale University and received her law degree from UCONN School of Law and her Bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University.

Leon Smith, Esq.

Leon Smith is an attorney at the Center for Children's Advocacy in Bridgeport, CT where he is the Director of the Racial Justice Project. This project seeks to protect the civil rights of youth of color who are subjected to policies and practices that result in racial disparities in educational outcomes and juvenile justice involvement. The Project provides legal representation to youth of color who are subjected to harsh school discipline, illegal push-out which leads to increased dropout rates and unconstitutional targeting by law enforcement. Through legislative advocacy, litigation and collaborative work with communities and state agencies, the Project identifies and reforms policies and practices that lead to racial inequities in educational services, school discipline, treatment by the juvenile justice system and access to behavioral health services. As part of this project, Mr. Smith is the lead facilitator and co-chair of Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) committees that study and advocate policy change with respect racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system in Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury, CT.

Prior to his current position, Mr. Smith was the Director of the Alternative Schools Project at the Center. This project advocated reform of Connecticut's alternative school system to ensure that vulnerable students who struggle in mainstream educational settings still receive the appropriate services and support that they need in order to improve their outcomes and reduce the number of these students who drop out. The project has been effective in bringing heightened awareness to the role alternative schools can play in acting as a safety net for vulnerable students. In 2013, the project was successful in crafting legislation that requires the Connecticut State Department of Education to collect data from and provide oversight of alternative schools. In 2015, the project drafted additional legislation which became Public Act

15-133, which defines alternative education, created minimum standards and guidelines for these schools and required that students in alternative education receive “as nearly equal advantages” as students in traditional public schools.

Prior to his arrival in Connecticut, Mr. Smith worked as a trial attorney in the juvenile justice system for 11 years, representing system-involved youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. He began his career in 2001 as a juvenile court public defender, first in Providence, Rhode Island and later at the Committee for Public Counsel Services in Roxbury, Massachusetts. He subsequently managed his own law practice devoted to juvenile and criminal court advocacy in the Massachusetts Juvenile, District and Superior courts. Mr. Smith then moved on to the Vera Institute of Justice in New York City, working on youth oriented local and national public policy issues. Mr. Smith is a 1995 graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, OH and a 1999 graduate of New England School of Law in Boston, MA.

Mario Florez

Mario is currently the Director of School Climate and Culture for Hartford Public Schools where he oversees character education, restorative practices, attendance, discipline, behavior management, and crisis prevention. He holds a Master’s degree in education specializing in special education and has been in the field of education for the past 8 years. Prior to his work in education, Mario worked in the field of social services with local community based non-profit organizations focused on the support of those with the highest needs in Hartford; children, adults in crisis and the HIV positive population. Mario is also the Vice Chair for the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors for the CT State Legislature, serves on the board of directors for Educational Resources for Children in Enfield, is a CT REALTOR, and dedicates time to serving the communities of Hartford. He has a beautiful wife and 3 daughters that keep him busy in his down time.