

GA Summit 2014 – Presenter Biographies

Kevin Aslanian, Executive Director Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.

Kevin Aslanian is a former AFDC recipient. He has been a welfare rights activist since 1970. During that time he has assisted thousands of fellow welfare recipients with problems navigating the complex welfare bureaucracy in California. While receiving public assistance he worked as a full-time welfare right advocate for the Santa Clara County Welfare Recipients League, Inc. In 1980 he briefly worked for the California Rural Legal Assistance until he started working with the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc. Kevin Aslanian has been a long time lobbyist at the State Capitol and before the various state administrative agencies since 1970.

Edward Barnes, Staff Attorney Mental Health Advocates

Edward Barnes currently advocates for access to public benefits at Mental Health Advocates in Oakland, California. Mr. Barnes received his B.A. from Brown University, and then served three years as a Math teacher in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, West Africa. He obtained his J.D. from New York University, after which he practiced law for five years at DNA Legal Services on the Navajo Reservation. For six years he did statewide impact litigation on welfare issues at the Legal Aid Society of Alameda County. For twenty-five years he was the Director of the East Bay Community Law Center's Welfare & Policy Unit, supervising law students who provided benefits representation and welfare policy advocacy. During that period, he also served for six months as an Administrative Law Judge at the Department of Social Services. He is the author of numerous welfare policy changes that are now in statute, ordinance, regulation, or caselaw.

Jodie Berger, Regional Counsel Legal Services of Northern California

Jodie Berger is Regional Counsel for the Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC). She assists LSNC staff and advocates statewide by co-counseling, mentoring, providing technical assistance, strategizing cases and conducting trainings. Jodie participates in several statewide workgroups and advisory committees, including those addressing issues of: automation, Civil Rights Bureau, Fraud, Sanctions, and Support Services. She was the former Chair of the State Bar Association's Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services, and the current Co-Chair of the Administrative Agency Subcommittee of the Access to Justice Commission.

Prior to joining LSNC, Jodie worked for five years as the Project Director of the Welfare-to-Work Advocacy Project at the Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center (LAS-ELC). In this capacity, she addressed employment-related issues of welfare-to-work programs. That work was preceded by more than 10 years of providing direct legal services and performing impact work (litigation and policy) as a Legal Services attorney specializing in public benefits. Ms. Berger received her law degree from Cornell Law School, and her B.A. from UC Berkeley.

**Antionette Dozier, Senior Attorney
Western Center on Law & Poverty**

Antionette Dozier focuses on public benefits and other economic disparity issues facing poor Californians. Antionette litigates, provides technical support to legal services attorneys, and works on policy and legislation to secure public benefits for and to remove economic barriers to prosperity for the poor. She also facilitates state and community discussions to ensure that public benefits recipients receive fair opportunity to self-sufficiency. At Western Center, she has co-counseled class actions involving the right to mental health services and public benefits, and impact cases regarding the CalWORKs and General Assistance/General Relief programs. Before Western Center, Antionette completed a term as a clerk for the United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit in the chambers of the Honorable R. Guy Cole, Jr. Antionette also was a litigation associate at Jones Day after graduating from UCLA School of Law.

**Stephanie Haffner, Senior Litigator
Western Center on Law & Poverty**

Stephanie joined WCLP in 2011 as Senior Litigator working on welfare and housing issues, including CalFresh, General Relief, homelessness, housing element, and landlord-tenant matters. Previously, Stephanie was the Supervising Attorney for housing and consumer matters at Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County and a staff attorney at California Rural Legal Assistance. While at CRLA, Stephanie served as lead counsel in *Price v. City of Stockton*, a complex federal case securing replacement housing and relocation benefits for hundreds of former residents of downtown residential hotels, and chaired CRLA's public benefits task force. Stephanie taught at Whittier Law School and currently serves as core faculty for Benchmark Institute, on the California Reinvestment Coalition's board of directors, and the State Bar's Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services. Stephanie studied African-American Studies at Wesleyan University, and obtained her law degree from Berkeley Law.

**Lauren Hansen, Staff Attorney
Public Interest Law Project**

Lauren joined PILP in 2012 as its first Attorney Fellow. She is now a staff attorney, and splits her time evenly between the housing and public benefits units. Prior to joining PILP, Lauren worked at Legal Services of Northern California for three years in its Ukiah office doing housing, public benefits, and health law. Lauren graduated from UCLA in 2004, and then worked as a legal assistant at Arnold & Porter LLP in Washington D.C. She went to law school at the University of Iowa College of Law, where she helped develop the Citizen Lawyer Program, a program that helps students find both legal and non-legal volunteer opportunities. As a law student, she did welfare rights advocacy with the East Bay Community Law Center, and impact litigation at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest in health, disability rights, environmental justice, and police misconduct.

At PILP, Lauren has worked on a variety of cases on issues including redevelopment, housing element, General Assistance, and food stamps. She started and currently leads PILP's Rural

General Assistance Project (Rural GAP), a project dedicated to increasing access to General Assistance benefits in rural areas. She is admitted to practice in California and Washington D.C.

**Mike Herald, Legislative Advocate
Western Center on Law & Poverty**

Mike Herald, who joined WCLP in December, 2003, has been an advocate for the poor and for affordable housing for more than 20 years. As the former executive director of Housing California, Mike championed such issues as affordable housing, homelessness, community reinvestment and adequate public benefits and services for the poor. In February, 2002, Mike was appointed by Governor Davis as Deputy Director for External Affairs and Innovations at the state Department of Housing and Community Development. His official duties included interagency liaison, public speaking, and federal advocacy. He co-authored reports by Governor Davis' Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, played an active role in creating the state's Olmstead plan and staffed HCD's Farm Labor Housing Assistance Plan. In 2003 he served as HCD's Acting Deputy Director for Legislation before joining Western Center. Mike is a lawyer and a native Californian who graduated from UC Santa Barbara.

**Patti Prunhuber, Staff Attorney
Public Interest Law Project**

Patti Prunhuber has been with the Public Interest Law Project (PILP) since 2010, specializing in Public Benefits and needs-based programs. Since coming to California, she has litigated several writ proceedings including: *Parent Voices Oakland v. California Dept. of Education*, halting the termination of Stage 3 subsidized child care for 56,000 low-income children, *Hartley v. Calif. Dept. of Social Services*, ending the Department's practice of collecting from children, and former children, the welfare debts of their parents or guardians, and *Versis v. County of Marin*, challenging that county's General Assistance program.

Prior to coming to PILP, she worked in legal services programs for 25 years, most recently as Litigation Director at the Legal Assistance Corporation for Central Massachusetts (LACCM). She has extensive experience litigating individual and class actions in state and federal court in the areas of public benefits, health care, fair housing and workers' rights. Her areas of specialty include welfare programs, employment and unemployment law, access to health care, landlord/tenant law, and fair housing. She has taught courses in the areas of Welfare Law and Social Policy, Family Law, and Labor and Employment Law.

**Gretchen Regenhardt, Regional Director
California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.**

Gretchen has been a legal services practitioner for more than 35 years, initially as a staff attorney in Pennsylvania and then as director of a program of legal assistance to elderly individuals and groups in Massachusetts. For the last 30 years she has practiced in California. As a staff attorney at Legal Aid Society of Santa Cruz County (now CRLA), Gretchen specialized in public benefits and housing cases, including land use and affordable housing development. She became Directing Attorney in 2004 and Regional Director of the Santa Cruz County, Salinas, and Santa

Rosa offices in 2011. Gretchen is involved in efforts to expand CRLA's work in labor rights for non-agricultural workers and is very active in CRLA's homelessness and fair housing work.

**Cynthia Rice, Director of Litigation, Advocacy, and Training
California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.**

Cynthia Rice is currently a Director of Litigation, Advocacy, and Training for CRLA and a part-time litigation coordinator for the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation Labor and Civil Rights Litigation Project. Cynthia received her B.A. from the University of Colorado in 1976 and her J.D. from Santa Clara University School of Law in 1979. She was admitted to the California Bar in 1979 and to the Hawaii Bar in 1995. Cynthia has specialized in Education law and Labor and Employment rights in private practice and as a legal aid attorney for Community Legal Services (now Legal Services of Santa Clara County) Marin County Legal Aid and CRLA.

Cynthia has successfully litigated cases against a variety of state agencies, including California's Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board, the California Labor Commissioner, and local school districts. She has appeared before the California Supreme Court and various appellate courts on behalf of workers and students, and as a CRLA Foundation employee she has provided technical assistance on a variety of labor and education bills. She is a CELA Board member and a member of the Board of Centro De Los Derechos Del Migrantes.

**Crystal Sims, Former Director of Litigation
Legal Aid Society of Orange County**

Crystal Sims served 38 years at LASOC, first starting as staff attorney and ending as the Director of Litigation. She represented more than 20,000 clients who had been unlawfully denied county benefits, scores of homeless person who had been wrongfully abused by law enforcement, and low-income tenants who deserved better living conditions. Crystal has been instrumental in implementing a consent decree in *Mankinen v. County of Orange*, a case that challenged the unlawful GR program in Orange County. The caseload has jumped from approximately 325 GA recipients to over 4,000. Crystal will receive the LASOC Lifetime Achievement Award for her impressive record and monumental success with impact litigation on October 8, 2014.

**Laurel Yorks, Paralegal
Legal Services of Northern California**

Laurel Yorks has been a public interest paralegal for thirty four years. She joined the Chico office staff of Legal Services of Northern California in 1986, where she specialized for many years in administrative representation in public benefits programs. She now covers the weekly Unlawful Detainer Clinic and the emergency and routine housing intakes. She was recognized as a "Local Hero" in 2004 by the Chico News and Review for her many years of volunteer service to community non-profit agencies. She produces and hosts a public affairs program on the local community radio station. Laurel has authored "Handling Potential Fraud Cases at the Civil Level" and co-authored "When Cash Aid and Food Stamps become a Gateway to Prison and What You Can Do About it" -- both articles appearing in the September-October 2003 edition of Clearinghouse Review, Journal of Poverty Law and Policy.