



Commissioners

Helen L. Chin
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Ilan Davidson
Vice President/Secretary

Preeti P. Kulkarni
Kevork Keushkerian
Fredrick Sykes
Vice Presidents

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Lisa Michelle Dabbs
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Jeanette EllisRoyston
Azusena Favela
Isabelle Gunning, Esq.
Derric J. Johnson
Guadalupe G. Montaño, Ed.D.
Jason Moss
Gay Q. Yuen, Ph.D.

Honorary Member
Philip R. Valera

Robin S. Toma, Esq.
Executive Director

Robert Sowell
Assistant Executive Director

Intergroup Relations Specialists

Pierre Arreola
Salvador Avila
Yvette Baharyans
Aneisa Bolton
Tony Cowser
Valentina D'Alessandro
Roland Gilbert
Oscar Hernandez
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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

"Enriching lives through effective and caring service"

May 2, 2025

MEMORANDUM TO THE COMMISSIONERS

FROM: Helen Chin, President

SUBJECT: Commission Meeting, May 5th, 2025

Our Commission will meet on Monday, May 5, 2025 at 12:30 p.m.,
at 510 S. Vermont Ave., 9th Floor, Conference room, Los Angeles, California.

You may also join meeting **Via Teams Calendar Invitation** [Click here to join the meeting](#). If you are unable to do so, you may Dial: [+1 213-204-2512](tel:+12132042512)., 980587174#
Please Post Agenda in your location.

Parking is located at 523 Shatto Place. Please pull a ticket when entering the parking structure. Please take the elevator to the 9th floor and walk through the bridge, which is located towards the northwest corner of the parking structure, to reach Terrace (T) Level of the designated candidate waiting area. Prior to leaving the facility, please take your ticket to either security desk (Ground Level or Terrace Level) for validation. **Do not park at the 510 South Vermont Avenue structure. Violators may be towed at vehicle owner's expense.**

Please review, and let me know if you have any questions.

If you are unable to join the meeting, please call me at (323) 719-9187 no later than 9:00 a.m., Monday, May 5th.

*Jenita Raksanoh
L.A. County Commission on Human Relations
Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors
510 S. Vermont Ave., 15th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90020
(323)-719-9187*



Los Angeles County Commission on
Human Relations - 510 S. Vermont Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90020 (213) 738-2788

AGENDA

MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

Monday, May 5, 2025 – 12:30-2:00 pm

LA County Vermont Corridor Bldg. - 510 S. Vermont Ave.- LA, CA 90020

Conference Room on the Terrace Level, 9th Floor

Also via MS Teams Video and Audio Conferencing [213-204 2512,,980587174#](https://laphilms2512980587174#) [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Our mission: to transform prejudice into acceptance, inequity into justice, and hostility into peace

- 1. Call to Order and Land Acknowledgment** (12:30)
- 2. Review & Approval of April 7, 2025 Meeting Minutes***
- 3. President's Report** (12:33)
 - 3.1. Spotlight on a Partner
 - 3.2. Reflections on our recent Strategic Planning Session
- 4. Executive Director's Report** (12:45)
 - 4.1. Launch of LA vs Hate Signs of Solidarity on April 19th (Montaño)
 - 4.2. CEO Proposed Budget and Other Admin and Program Updates
 - i Armenian Genocide Remembrance Event and Award of April 24th
 - ii Tri-County Conference at USC – LA vs Hate – April 26th
 - iii Trip to Sacramento on April 28th
 - 4.3. Communications Update (PIO Cowser)
- 5. Committee Reports** (12:55)
 - 5.1. Transformative Justice Committee (Gunning)
 - 5.2. Human Rights Committee (Yuen)
 - 5.3. Strategic Planning Committee (Kulkarni)
- 6. Public Comment** (3 minutes per person) (1:05)
- 7. Action/Discussion Items** (1:10)
 - 7.1. Nominations Committee business (formation and/or slate presentation)
 - 7.2. Strategic Plan Follow Up
 - 7.3. Collaboration with County Office of Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI)
- 8. Commissioner Announcements (2 minutes per Commissioner)** (1:55)
- 9. Adjournment:** In memory of social justice activist James Bell; and humanitarian Pope Francis.

For translation to other languages o para más información en español, call (213) 738-2788 or email us.

* Denotes that this agenda packet includes written material regarding this agenda item.

Meetings are held in English. If interpretation in other languages or accommodations for persons with disabilities are needed, please contact the Commission at (213) 738-7288 at least 3 business days before the meeting. The meetings of the Human Relations Commission are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Note: The following Commissioners will be participating by teleconference communication from the following corresponding locations: Kevork Keushkerian, 1115 Valley View Avenue, Pasadena, CA, 91107. Dandy De Paula, 21815 Pioneer Blvd., Hawaiian Gardens, CA 90716. Frederick Sykes, 3537 Samantha Ave, West Covina, CA, 91792. Lisa Dabbs, 6528 Greenleaf Ave, Whittier, CA 90601.

PUBLIC COMMENT

When prompted by staff, members of the public sector may request to provide public comment after each item:

- If joining in person, staff will call upon individuals who signed up to speak on an item.
- If joining remotely via Teams, please use the “raise your hand” feature then unmute microphone once enabled.
- Callers by phone, dial *5 to raise hand, once called upon dial *6 to unmute.



Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations

510 South Vermont Avenue, 15th floor
Los Angeles, California, 90020
www.lahumanrelations.org
(213) 738-2788

PROPOSED MINUTES

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

Meeting of April 7, 2025

PRESENT:	Helen L. Chin Dandy De Paula* Jeanette Ellis Royston Azusena Favela* Isabelle Gunning	Ilan Davidson Preeti Kulkarni Kevork Keushkerian* Fredrick Sykes Gay Yuen
ABSENT:	Michael Cheung Lisa Dabbs Derric J. Johnson	Guadalupe Montaña Jason Moss
STAFF:	Pierre Arreola Tony Cowser Robert Sowell	Jenita Raksanoh Robin Toma Siranush Vardanyan
GUEST:	Grace Lowenberg	

- 1. Call to Order and Land Acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples:** Commission President Helen Chin called the meeting to order at 12:42 p.m. with a quorum in attendance. President Chin began by reading the L.A. County Land Acknowledgment, which can be found at the following link: [Land Acknowledgment – \(lacounty.gov\)](http://lacounty.gov). President Chin recognized the Tongva, Tataviam, Serrano, Kizh, and Chumash Peoples as original inhabitants of these lands, honoring and paying respect to their elders and descendants; acknowledged that settler colonization resulted in land seizure, disease, subjugation, slavery, relocation, broken promises, genocide, and multi-generational trauma; and reminded us of our responsibility and commitment to truth, healing, and reconciliation, and to elevating the stories, culture, and community of the original inhabitants of Los Angeles County.

* This commissioner, and others marked by an asterisk, attended the meeting via internet video (MS Teams link), providing their location address for inclusion on the posted agenda, in compliance with applicable open meeting laws and policies.

** This commissioner, and others marked by double asterisks, attended the meeting via internet video (MS Teams link), but did not provide their location address for inclusion on the posted agenda, and were not in compliance with applicable open meeting laws and policies, causing them not to be accounted for in quorum and their votes not to count.

2. **Review & Approval of March 3, 2025 Meeting Minutes:** President Chin invited a motion to approve the proposed minutes of the Commission meeting of March 3, 2025, submitted by Vice President-Secretary Ilan Davidson. The motion was made by Commissioner Ilan Davidson and seconded by Commissioner Gay Yuen. The motion passed unanimously.

3. **President's Report**

- 3.1 **Spotlight on Staff Grace Lowenberg (retired as of March 28, 2025):** President Chin invited newly retired employee, Grace Lowenberg to speak as she shared words of gratitude for her hard work with the Human Relations Commission. Ms. Lowenberg expressed how much she enjoyed working at the Los Angeles County for fifty years and that she valued having the opportunity to get to know each Commissioner and staff, which she considers her lifelong LA County family. Ms. Lowenberg expressed her passion for helping people and shared that she will continue to do her work by mentoring students and through volunteering. The Commissioners individually thanked Ms. Lowenberg for her work ethic and voiced their love for her, adding that she will be missed.
- 3.2 **John Anson Ford (JAF) Human Relations Awards Event of March 20th:** President Chin reported that she participated in our John Anson Ford Awards event and enjoyed seeing the Commissioners and Human Relations Commission staff. President Chin thanked Commissioner Davidson for being the MC and the staff for organizing a successful event. Commissioner Davidson shared that it was an honor to be a part of this event.
- 3.3 **'Every Person Has a Name' event of March 22nd:** President Chin informed the Commissioners that although she was unable to attend the event opening, she had the privilege of reading publicly for at the event for 30 minutes the names of those who perished during the Holocaust. President Chin expressed thanks to Commissioner Jason Moss for inviting her to this event organized by his organization, the Jewish Federation of the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys, and the significance of the reading of names as a way to appreciate that each had a story and history.

4. **Executive Director's Report**

- 4.1 **JAF Human Relations Awards and Every Person Has a Name Event:** Executive Director (ED) Robin Toma thanked Commissioner Moss for the opportunity to represent the Commission by speaking at the event. He expressed the importance of supporting one another to stand in solidarity against hate and violence to prevent the escalation to greater human rights violations such as genocide. He also informed the Commissioners that he was invited by Vic Gerami of the Truth and Accountability League (TAAL) to speak at an event to commemorate the Armenian Genocide on April 24th, 2025.
- 4.2 **Communications Update – Tony Cowser:** Public Information Associate (PIO) Tony Cowser presented a recap of the John Anson Ford Awards to the commissioners and showed photos of the event, including the new standing banners that enhanced and built the event's brand. PIO Cowser shared media coverage of the JAF Awards, from diverse outlets such as the LA Sentinel and Channel 36, as well as distribution in Supervisor Solis's and Supervisor Mitchell's e-newsletters, and that Supervisor Horvath and the Board of Supervisors' Executive Office shared social media posts of the event. PIO Cowser presented a video clip of the JAF Awards aired by LA36 TV. PIO Cowser also presented the media coverage of our first ever annual report on hate incidents in LA County that included the LA Daily News, ABC, NBC, Telemundo, Fox News, KNX Radio, ethnic media outlets such as the LA Sentinel and Jewish Journal. PIO Cowser indicated that we did not get coverage from La Opinión this time, but was hopeful the commission could get coverage from the newspaper in the

future, despite some recent changes the newspaper had been experiencing.

4.3 Other Program and Administrative (Budget) Updates: ED Toma recognized Commission manager Dr. Monica Lomeli and her team's hard work in putting together hundreds of hate incident reports, on top of the hate crime reports. He also noted that LA County has announced that \$4 billion is going to be paid out in settlement for child sexual abuse claims (AB 218), which will impact the overall county budget. ED Toma explained that our budget as well as all departments will likely be reduced, and hiring affected.

5. Committee Reports

5.1 Strategic Planning Committee (Kulkarni): Committee Chair Commissioner Preeti Kulkarni, announced that our Commission Strategic Planning retreat will take place on Wednesday, April 30, 2025 from 10am-4pm.

5.2 Transformative Justice Committee (Gunning): Committee Chair Commissioner Isabelle Gunning also shared that the Transformative Justice Committee also met and discussed their part of the Strategic Plan, and that they will have input for the entire commission retreat on the 30th.

5.3 Human Rights Committee (Yuen): Committee Chair Commissioner Yuen announced that the committee had met on March 23rd and reviewed the draft Strategic Plan section pertaining to human rights, ensuring that it represents their voice and is clear to understand. Commissioner Yuen said the committee will be ready for discussion by the time of the Strategic Planning retreat.

5.4 John Anson Ford Human Relations (JAF) Awards Committee (Davidson): Committee Chair Commissioner Davidson stated that there is no further information to be shared at this time.

5.5 LA vs Hate Committee (Montaño): Given Committee Chair Commissioner Guadalupe Montaño's absence, ED Toma shared that the committee met to review the proposed strategic priorities and goals that have to do with LA vs Hate and hate crime prevention. Additionally Assistant Executive Director (AED) Robert Sowell joined to explain that the Policy Advocacy Committee, also chaired by Commissioner Montaño, identified three of our strategic planning goals that called for policy change and policy involvement.

6. Public Comment: (3 minutes per person): None was offered.

7. Action/Discussion Items:

7.1 Custody Facilities Report: Staff member Pierre Arreola said the purpose of the Transformative Justice Committee visits is to have a deeper understanding of the criminal justice system. The Custody Facilities Report shares key observations of Commissioner and staff visits to all six LA County custody facilities run by the Sheriff's Department. The motion to approve the custody facilities report was made by Commissioner Davidson and seconded by Commissioner Kulkarni. The motion passed unanimously.

7.2 New HRC resource on international human rights for local government: ED Robin Toma said that the Commission staff's Human Rights team led by manager Aneisa Bolton and with support by AED Sowell, put together a guide to help people understand the purpose of their work and committee's background, which is included in the meeting

packet. He pointed out that this is an effort to support educating other individuals about human rights and building a human rights culture.

- 7.3 Special convening of community partners re anti-hate campaign:** ED Robin Toma referred to the press release in the meeting packet on the launch of LA vs Hate's newest campaign, "Signs of Solidarity." This event will start off at the first neighborhood, Westlake/the MacArthur Park area, and in San Pedro on Saturday, April 17th and 19th. He expressed how important it was to move the LA vs Hate campaign to a visibility campaign in key neighborhoods based on our hate crimes and hate incident data over the two most recent full years of data. ED Robin Toma informed the Commissioners that this will build on the LA vs Hate Summer of Solidarity campaign which created murals for each of the most hate-targeted communities in the Los Angeles County. The Signs of Solidarity campaign will bring together community leaders in an effort to fill the neighborhoods with unity against hate signage, such as lawn signs and posters, to deter hate activity.
- 7.4 Specific actions to address new levels of reported hate:** ED Robin Toma shared that the team has worked with their partners, community and supervisors' office to develop a set of actions for the board's support. He expressed that the budget aspect will be critical in ensuring our anti-hate agenda can be fully carried out.
- 7.5 Collaboration with County Office of Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI):** Assistant Director Robert Sowell briefly shared that staff continues to work actively with ARDI, despite the federal anti-DEI efforts.
- 8. Commissioner Announcements:** Commissioner Yuen invited the Commissioners to attend an event that will be held on April 16th from 6:00pm to 8:45pm at the Chinese American Museum with a panel of experts on birthright citizenship. The event will be co-sponsored by UCLA Asian American Studies Center by the Museum of Social Justice.
- 9. Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn in honor of Grace Lowenberg for her decades of dedication to the Commission was made by Commissioner Kulkarni and seconded by Commissioner Gunning. Commissioners expressed appreciation and affection for Grace and her service and support of the Commission. The motion passed unanimously. President Chin also acknowledged Jim Schwab, a senior human relations staff member who passed away earlier this year. President Chin adjourned the meeting at 2:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ilan Davidson
Commission Vice President-Secretary



Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations
510 S. Vermont Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90020
(213) 738-2788

**AGENDA FOR MEETING OF THE
TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE COMMITTEE
LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS**

Monday, May 5, 2025 | 10:45AM – 12:15PM

**510 S. Vermont Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90020
9th Floor, Press Room**

**[Via Microsoft Teams](#)
Or Call In at +1 (213) 204-2512
Phone Conference ID: 333 921 796#**

Chair: Commissioner Isabelle Gunning | **Secretary:** Commissioner Azusena Favela

Members: Commissioners Preeti Kulkarni, Fredrick Sykes, Derric Johnson,
Jeanette Ellis-Royston

Staff: Robin Toma, Robert Sowell, Pierre Arreola, Joshua Parr, Paul Smith

- 1. Call to Order and Land Acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples (10:45)**
- 2. Review & Approval of April 7, 2025 Meeting Minutes (10:47)**
- 3. Discussion: Sheriff Accountability (10:50)**
 - 3.1. LA County Custody Facilities Visits**
- 4. Discussion: Staff & County Updates (11:20)**
 - 4.1. Strategic Planning – Strategic Priority #3**
 - 4.2. Regional Projects**
- 5. Public Comment (3 Minutes Per Person) (12:00)**
- 6. Action Items (12:05)**
 - 6.1. LA County Custody Facilities Visits**
 - 6.2. Strategic Planning – Strategic Priority #3**
- 7. Commissioner & Staff Announcements (12:10)**
- 8. Adjournment (12:15)**

Note: The following Commissioners will be participating by conference telephone communication from the following locations: Preeti Kulkarni, 3419 Federal Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90066.

For translation to other languages o para más información en Español, call (213) 738-2788 or email us at PArreola@hrc.lacounty.gov. An asterisk () denotes that this agenda packet includes written material regarding this agenda item.*

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Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations

510 South Vermont Avenue, 11th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90020
www.lahumanrelations.org
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PROPOSED MINUTES TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE COMMITTEE

*Meeting of April 7, 2025
In Person and via Microsoft Teams Video & Audio Conferencing
510 South Vermont Avenue, 9th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90020*

PRESENT:	Chair Isabelle Gunning Secretary Azusena Favela* Jeanette Ellis-Royston	Preeti Kulkarni Fredrick Sykes
STAFF:	Pierre Arreola Robert Sowell	Paul Smith

1. **Call to Order & Land Acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples:** Chair Isabelle Gunning called the meeting to order at 10:56 AM, with a quorum in attendance. Secretary Azusena Favela joined the meeting virtually from a previously disclosed, publicly accessible location per Brown Act requirements. Chair Isabelle Gunning then acknowledged that settler colonization has caused intergenerational trauma and the loss of lands and lives to the native cultures who lived here prior to the later waves of migrants who came to what is now called Los Angeles County.
2. **Review & Approval of March 3, 2025 Meeting Minutes:** At 10:58 AM, Secretary Azusena Favela invited a motion to approve the minutes of the Transformative Justice Committee meeting on March 3, 2025, as presented by staff. Secretary Azusena Favela motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Preeti Kulkarni seconded the motion, and the vote proceeded as follows:

Moved: Favela

Seconded: Kulkarni

Ayes: Ellis-Royston, Favela, Gunning, Kulkarni, Sykes

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Johnson

Vote: 5 - 0

The motion passed unanimously.

3. **Discussion: Sheriff Accountability:**
3.1. LA County Custody Facilities Visits Report:

The Committee reviewed and refined the presentation summarizing conditions in Los Angeles County correctional facilities. The discussion identified a series of systemic failures that span infrastructure, service provision, human rights, and institutional operations. One major concern involves deficiencies in operational infrastructure throughout the facilities. Committee members highlighted widespread non-compliance with ADA standards, compounded by dilapidated physical conditions. Rehabilitation and reentry support have emerged as another critical shortfall. Access to educational and vocational programming is limited, especially for those charged but not yet convicted, creating inequities in rehabilitation opportunities. The absence of structured “warm handoffs” to community-based services upon release undermines continuity of care and successful reintegration. Equitable access to trustee programs and rehabilitative roles within facilities also remains inadequate, reinforcing structural disparities in opportunity. Mental health and emotional well-being were recurring themes of concern. Incarceration conditions were described as exacerbating psychological distress, with limited access to both general counseling and specialized mental health services. A noteworthy exception is the FIP Step-Down Program at Twin Towers, which was praised as a replicable model for supporting stability and transition. However, the discontinuity of mental health care following release was cited as a critical gap requiring systemic attention and investment.

Issues of human dignity and civil rights were also raised. Policies surrounding compensation for incarcerated labor remain unclear, and there is a general lack of clear, multilingual signage regarding individuals’ rights, including the right to vote. Additionally, surveillance practices were critiqued for not accounting for gender sensitivity and privacy, highlighting broader ethical concerns about carceral oversight and policy. Custody staff are also affected by structural failures. Chronic understaffing and excessive reliance on mandatory overtime have resulted in workforce exhaustion and exposure to both primary and secondary trauma. Furthermore, the lack of transparent reporting on staff-to-inmate ratios undermines accountability and hinders operational safety and workload equity assessment. Systemic challenges were identified, including a consensus that Men’s Central Jail (MCJ) must be closed immediately due to extreme and ongoing deterioration. Furthermore, the Inmate Welfare Fund, which relies on commissary-generated funds, lacks transparency and oversight in its spending.

4. Discussion: Staff & County Updates

4.1. Strategic Planning – Strategic Priority #3: Under Strategic Priority 3, the Committee reviewed the guiding objective of fostering equity and wellbeing within Los Angeles County’s justice ecosystem. This priority reflects the Committee’s commitment to confronting systemic racism, legal estrangement, and collective trauma through community-rooted strategies that elevate safety beyond punitive models. Rather than viewing justice solely through the lens of enforcement and incarceration, the Committee seeks to center community-driven alternatives that promote healing, accountability, and trust. These include policy reforms that are informed by lived experience, responsive to community needs, and grounded in equity-based principles.

The use of the term “ecosystem” is deliberate and meaningful—it acknowledges that justice is not confined to the formal institutions of law enforcement, courts, or custody. Instead, it encompasses a much broader network including community-based organizations (CBOs), reentry programs, street outreach initiatives, and interventions led by directly impacted individuals and groups. The Committee agreed this broader perspective allows for a more holistic understanding of public safety and wellbeing, valuing collaboration and integrating preventative, rehabilitative, and restorative efforts. In crafting this strategic language, the Committee is working to ensure that its goals resonate with

diverse audiences, particularly those who may be wary of institutional terminology or traditional DEI frameworks. Coalition building and cross-system alignment were discussed as essential mechanisms for sustainability and impact.

4.2. Regional Projects: There were no regional projects discussed.

5. **Public Comment:** There was no public comment at this meeting.

6. **Action Items**

6.1. LA County Custody Facilities Visits Report Presentation: Commissioner Preeti Kulkarni moved to approve the presentation to the General Commission. Commissioner Fredrick Sykes seconded the motion, and the vote proceeded as follows:

Moved: Kulkarni

Seconded: Sykes

Ayes: Ellis-Royston, Favela, Gunning, Kulkarni, Sykes

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Johnson

Vote: 5 - 0

The motion passed unanimously.

6.2. Strategic Planning – Strategic Priority #3: The committee decided to postpone this agenda item until the commission convenes to discuss it during the upcoming General Commission meeting and have further discussions at the Commission retreat.

7. **Commissioner & Staff Announcements:** The meeting concluded with the committee acknowledging that the commissioners will have a retreat on Friday, April 11, 2025, at a location yet to be confirmed.

8. **Adjournment:** Commissioner Sykes invited a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Preeti Kulkarni seconded the motion, and the vote proceeded as follows:

Moved: Sykes

Seconded: Kulkarni

Ayes: Ellis-Royston, Favela, Gunning, Kulkarni, Sykes

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Johnson

Vote: 5 - 0

The motion passed unanimously. Seeing no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting adjourned at 12:42 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Azusena Favela

Transformative Justice Committee Secretary

James Bell, Founder of the Burns Institute, Has Passed Away

By [John Kelly](#)

James Bell, who founded a national organization to address racial disparities and disproportionality within America's juvenile justice systems, died this month at the age of 71.



James Bell

Bell founded the Oakland, Calif.-based [W. Haywood Burns Institute](#), named for his mentor and a civil rights activist and lawyer, in 2001. The institute focuses on advocating for community-centered approaches to justice and against “the social control of communities of color by the justice sector and other public systems,” per its mission statement.

Before founding the Burns Institute, Bell worked as an attorney representing youth in juvenile court for over 20 years at the Youth Law Center in San Francisco.

“My dear friend James Bell was a brilliant champion for justice and love,” said Angela Glover Blackwell, in a [statement](#) posted online. “He positively impacted the lives of thousands of young people and taught and inspired a generation of advocates to work for transformative change.”

The Burns Institute was prominently involved in two of the major philanthropy-led juvenile justice reforms of the past 40 years: Annie E. Casey Foundation's JDAI Initiative, which has focused on downsizing the use of locked facilities and probation through better data and alternatives, and the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change, which invested heavily in research about adolescent development and in comprehensive reforms in several states. Both projects included the reduction of racial disproportionality as a core tenet.

Under Bell's leadership, the Burns Institute collaborated with over 200 counties in 23 states, engaging justice stakeholders and communities to implement strategies aimed at assessing disproportionate minority contact and promoting youth well-being. He trained numerous professionals and community members on the importance of addressing race, ancestry and inclusion in the delivery of safety for all communities.

"Few people could articulate the plight of children in the American juvenile justice system better than James," said Dan Macallair, in a public statement about the passing of his friend of 40 years. "I am consoled by knowing that because he lived, there are countless children around the country who have a chance at a better life."

The number of youth incarcerated in detention centers and youth prisons has plummeted since the late 1990s, as has the exposure of minors to adult criminal courts and facilities. Undoubtedly these trends have meant far less youth of color experiencing the deep end of the justice system. But among those youth who are locked up or transferred to adult court, the proportion who are not white [has remained high, and in some cases has increased](#).

Reducing disproportionate minority contact, or DMC, has been one of the four federal requirements on juvenile justice since 2002, when it was added as an element of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Bell was consistently critical of that requirement, because, he argued, the vague nature of it permitted states to simply discuss the issue and not work to address it.

"How many more annual DMC-related conferences will be held to restate what was discussed the year before?" Bell wrote with co-author Laura Ridolfi, in the 2008 paper [Adoration of the Question](#). "How much money will be spent on hotel rooms and catering instead of programming that is intentional, targeted, data-driven, and has been proven to reduce disparities?"

In [an interview with Youth Services Insider](#) following the release of that paper, Bell articulated the need for a mediator like Burns to engage communities in recognizing and acting on racial disparities.

"Everyone is eager to speak about public safety but at the same time many are worried about saying the wrong thing or appearing racist," Bell said. "Almost everywhere we have been, folks of color in communities have a different sense of the system than the system has of itself. Therefore there must be someone that can address that with the skills to mediate with both parties."

John Kelly

John Kelly is senior editor for The Imprint.

jkelly@imprintnews.org