



TITLE: The New Faces of Suffrage: Restoration of Voting Rights

SESSION DATE: October 7, 2021

SESSION TIME: 2:00 PM – 3:15 PM

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

The centennial of the 19th Amendment’s passage in 2020 offered Americans the chance to reflect upon and celebrate one of the most significant expansions of voting rights in the country’s history. But, while the country celebrated, an estimated 5.17 million otherwise-eligible Americans were barred from registering to vote because of a felony conviction. In all but two states, felon disenfranchisement laws take away a person’s right to vote upon conviction of a felony offense. In a few states, the right is automatically restored when a sentence has been served. In others, including Tennessee, returning citizens must navigate a labyrinth of procedural and sometimes monetary requirements to be able to vote again. These laws affect Black voters at a rate nearly four times greater than voters of other races, leading some to compare them to the Jim Crow laws that once prevented eligible Black Americans from registering to vote. The momentum to dismantle these barriers to voting is growing, and challenges are being made in legislatures and at the ballot box across the United States. Learn about this quickly changing legal landscape, including reform efforts in Tennessee, which currently bans one in twelve eligible voters from voting based on a past felony convictions—a higher rate than all but two other states. Returning citizens will share stories of what getting back the right to vote has meant to their reentry journeys.

PANELISTS:



Shanna Singh Hughey—Think Tennessee

Shanna Singh Hughey is the president of ThinkTennessee. Previously, she was a senior advisor to Nashville Mayor Karl Dean and the director of the Mayor’s Office of New Americans. She also served as nominations counsel on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, where she worked extensively on the Supreme Court confirmations of Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan. Shanna also was a lawyer in the Washington, DC office of O’Melveny & Myers and press secretary to U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

Shanna serves on the board of the Nashville chapter of the American Constitution Society, the advisory board of Girls on the Run of Middle Tennessee and as a soccer coach for her two young children. She is a member of the 2018-19 class of Leadership Tennessee and a 2017 graduate of Tennessee Bar Association Leadership Law.

Shanna graduated with honors from The George Washington University Law School and The University of Michigan.



Dawn Harrington – Free Hearts

Dawn is the Executive Director of Free Hearts is also the Director of Special Projects for the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Recording Industry Management and Public Relations from Middle Tennessee State University and a Master of Business Administration degree in Information Technology from Bethel University. During her incarceration, Dawn was disturbed by the impact of incarceration on families, especially moms and kids, and

inspired to make a difference upon her release. Today, Harrington is Director of Special Projects of National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, Just Leadership USA fellow, advisory board member for Nashville Defenders and Unheard Voices Outreach, and Executive Director of Free Hearts that was created to reunite families and keep families together by providing support, education, and advocacy, organizing families impacted by incarceration.



Kendra Lee – The Equity Alliance

Kendra Lee is a native Memphian and graduate of Spelman College with a bachelor’s in Psychology and Juris Doctorate from the University of Dayton School of Law.

Her commitment to public policy led to her becoming an organizer in 2016. She has worked on local and national campaigns including canvasser for Tami Sawyer for Shelby County Commissioner in 2018; political advisor to Dr. Jeff Warren for Memphis City Council; community organizer for Elizabeth Warren for President; and

training manager for the Jon Ossoff for Senate Campaign's community organizer program. Additionally, she served as the political director and redistricting fellow at the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

As a part of the TEAm, she strengthens and advances our advocacy presence at the Tennessee General Assembly.

FACILITATOR:



Charles Grant, Baker Donelson

Since taking his first pro bono case in 1996 to help a person convicted of a felony to regain the right to vote, Charles Grant has helped countless persons regain the franchise through litigation, educational workshops and campaigns, and lobbying. Presently, he is one the plaintiffs' attorneys in the pending voting rights class action case of NAACP et al. v. Lee et al., Case No. 3:20-cv-01039 (Middle District of Tennessee).

Charles is a veteran litigator who has tried more than 50 jury trials to verdict in both federal and state courts and has represented numerous clients in mediation and arbitration proceedings across more than a dozen states. An expert in complex employment litigation, Grant has defended clients in class actions, collective actions, and whistleblower actions under state and federal law. Grant is a shareholder at the national law firm of Baker Donelson, where he is a past member of the board of directors.

In 2014 he was named the first African-American president of the Nashville Bar Association, since its inception in 1831. He was President of the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland, from 2018-2020. Among his many awards, Grant is the recipient of the Bruce Kramer Cooperating Attorney Award, American Civil Liberties Union (2015) and the Tennessee Bar Association's Harris Gilbert Pro Bono Volunteer of the Year Award (2008). He's listed in The Best Lawyers in America, Mid-South Super Lawyers, and "The Best of the Bar," Nashville Business Journal.

PRODUCERS:

Shanna Singh Hughey

Hon. Alistair Newbern