THE HOWARD HUMAN & CIVIL RIGHTS LAW REVIEW PRESENTS
11TH ANNUAL C. CLYDE FERGUSON JR. SYMPOSIUM

REBUILDING:
CREATING EQUITABLE SYSTEMS IN TIMES OF LEGAL UNCERTAINTY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2026
10 AM–4 PM
MOOT COURT ROOM

THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING

11TH ANNUAL C. CLYDE FERGUSON JR. SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE

10:00 – 10:30 AM
WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS
C. Clyde Ferguson Tribute – Camille E. Odom, *HCR* Editor-In-Chief

10:30 – 11:30 AM
PANEL I: ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND THE FUTURE OF EQUITY
Moderator: Professor Matthew Bruckner
Panelists: Ariel Levinson-Waldman, Brittany Pope, Councilmember Janeese Lewis George

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM
LUNCH BREAK

12:30 – 1:40 PM
Introducing the Dean – John Square III, *HCR* Managing Editor
Remarks from Dean Roger A. Fairfax, Jr.
KEYNOTE: A CONVERSATION WITH NICOLE AUSTIN-HILLERY
Moderated by Dean Roger A. Fairfax, Jr.

1:50 – 2:50 PM
PANEL II: TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
Moderator: Professor Darrin Johnson
Panelists: Afua Bruce, Charlotte Burrows, Roy Austin, Clarence Okoh

3:00 – 4:00 PM
PANEL III: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE – RESTORING BALANCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE
Moderator: Professor Waterhouse
Panelists: Professor Lemir Teron, Secretary Serena McIlwain, Lydia Lawrence

4:00 – 4:30 PM
CLOSING REMARKS
Desean Waters, *HCR* Executive Solicitations & Submission Editor

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
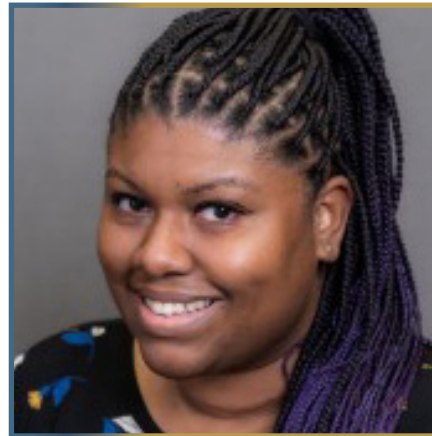

NICOLE AUSTIN-HILLERY

Nicole Austin-Hillery is a nationally recognized civil and human rights leader whose career spans transformative legal advocacy, public policy leadership, and global justice reform. As President and CEO of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, she leads efforts to advance the global Black community through policy research, education, and leadership development, expanding the Foundation's programs, partnerships, and influence across government, corporate, and international spaces. Named to ESSENCE magazine's 2024 Power 40 list, she is widely regarded as a bridge-builder across public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Previously, she led Human Rights Watch's U.S. work on systemic racism, immigration, criminal justice reform, and poverty, and served as the inaugural Director and Counsel of the Brennan Center for Justice's Washington, D.C. office, where she advanced voting rights, constitutional integrity, and justice reform before Congress and the Executive Branch. A former civil rights litigator at Mehri & Skalet and fellow at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, she is a trusted national voice who has testified before legislative bodies and been featured in major outlets including The Washington Post, TIME, and CNN. A graduate of Howard University School of Law and Carnegie Mellon University, Ms. Austin-Hillery has received numerous honors for her leadership and service and remains deeply committed to strengthening democracy and advancing equity worldwide.

PANEL I: ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND THE FUTURE OF EQUITY

Ariel Levinson-Waldman — Founding Director, Tzedek DC

Ariel Levinson-Waldman is the Founding Director of Tzedek DC, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the legal rights and financial health of low- and moderate-income Washington, D.C. residents facing abusive debt collection and consumer harm. Since its launch in 2017, Tzedek DC has provided free legal and financial assistance to more than 6,500 households, distributed Know Your Rights materials to tens of thousands of residents, and helped advance systemic reforms impacting over 300,000 people. A seasoned litigator, Ariel has handled or supervised hundreds of cases, including matters before local and federal trial and appellate courts and briefing before the U.S. Supreme Court. Under his leadership, Tzedek DC has received national recognition for innovation and impact, including the 2025 Potter Stewart Award and major grants from the Ford Foundation, MacKenzie Scott, and others. Ariel has also earned numerous individual honors for advancing access to justice and racial equity, served in senior roles across all three branches of the federal government and DC government, taught as an adjunct professor at Georgetown and UDC Law, and is a graduate of Northwestern University and the University of Chicago Law School.

Brittany Pope — Economic Security Supervisor, Bread for the City

Brittany Pope serves as Economic Security Supervisor at Bread for the City, whose mission is to help Washington, DC residents living with low income to develop their power to determine the future of their own communities. She leads the Economic Security team, which focuses on implementing, supporting, and advocating for guaranteed income projects and policy change. Brittany holds a master's degree in social work from Catholic University, with a concentration in Social Justice and Change. Born and raised in Washington, DC, Brittany believes in uplifting its community and striving for a just society for all.

Councilmember Janeese Lewis George — DC Councilmember, Ward 4

Councilmember Janeese Lewis George is a third-generation Washingtonian currently serving her second term representing Ward 4 on the DC Council. A proud graduate of DC Public Schools, she furthered her education at Howard University School of Law, earning her Juris Doctorate. Janeese's professional experience spans roles as an attorney, civil servant, community activist, and dedicated leader. Her policy agenda focuses on improving the lives of working families, supporting DC youth, and promoting community growth while combating racial, environmental, and economic injustices. Her unwavering advocacy earned her recognition on The Root 100 list of "Most Influential African Americans" in 2022. She is a member of the Washington Bar Association and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated. Outside of her professional pursuits, she values time spent with her husband Kyle, their baby boy Pierce, and dog Sully.

PANEL II: TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Afua Bruce — Principal, ANB Advisory Group

Afua Bruce is a leading voice at the intersection of technology, data, and social impact. With a career spanning the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, she has advised organizations on leveraging technology responsibly to drive meaningful change. Afua is the Principal of ANB Advisory Group, where she helps organizations across sectors strengthen their technical and data strategies. Prior to founding ANB Advisory Group, Afua held senior science and technology roles at the White House, the FBI, and IBM. Afua is a sought-after speaker and author, known for her insights on ethical technology, responsible AI, and innovation for social enterprises. Her newest book, The Tech That Comes Next, explores how communities and technologists can collaborate to build a more equitable future. Afua was honored with a statue in the If/Then Exhibit, highlighting women in STEM, which was displayed in the Smithsonian. She sits on the board of Code the Dream and is a member of the Center for Democracy and Technology's Advisory Council. Afua holds a degree in Computer Engineering from Purdue University and an MBA from the University of Michigan.
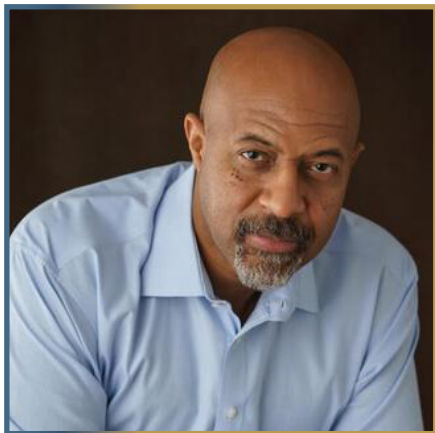
Charlotte Burrows — Former Chair, U.S. EEOC

From 2021-2025, Charlotte A. Burrows served as Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which is the United States' leading agency charged with enforcing federal laws against employment discrimination. As EEOC Chair, Burrows launched the EEOC's first initiative on artificial intelligence in employment and spearheaded drafting of the agency's Pregnant Workers Fairness Act regulations. Previously, she served as Associate Deputy Attorney General with the U.S. Department of Justice and before that, as an advisor to the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy on the Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, where she worked to pass the Genetic Information Non-discrimination Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, among other laws. Burrows is currently a fellow with the New York University School of Law, focusing on AI and civil rights.

PANEL II: TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Clarence Okoh — Senior Attorney, TechTonic Justice

Clarence Okoh is a civil and human rights attorney working at the intersection of race, technology, and the law. He has been recognized for his leadership in groundbreaking, multidisciplinary campaigns against AI rights abuses, including the defeat of one of the first-documented school-based predictive policing programs in the United States. He currently serves as Senior Attorney for Civil Rights & Technology at TechTonic Justice, a new national digital justice organization focused on the impact of AI and automation on low-income communities. He is also a co-founder of the NOTICE Coalition: No Tech Criminalization in Education, a national network of advocates fighting against AI surveillance and algorithmic discrimination impacting vulnerable youth. He has worked across a range of civil society organizations, including the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP), and the Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology.

Roy Austin — Director, Howard Law Artificial Intelligence Initiative

Roy L. Austin, Jr. is the Inaugural Director of the Howard Law Artificial Intelligence Initiative. He was previously Vice President of Civil Rights and Deputy General Counsel at Meta. Before joining Meta, Austin was a partner at two law firms. He also has experience as an Honors Trial Attorney with the Criminal Section of the US Justice Department's Civil Rights Division; Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Division; an Assistant United States Attorney in DC; and the White House Domestic Policy Council's Deputy Assistant to the President for the Office of Urban Affairs, Justice and Opportunity.

PANEL III: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE — RESTORING BALANCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Secretary Serena McIlwain — Maryland Secretary of the Environment

Secretary Serena McIlwain was confirmed as the Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) 11th Secretary in March 2023. Prior to this appointment, McIlwain was undersecretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. A lifelong resident of the Washington, D.C. area, McIlwain worked in the federal government for 30 years, spending the first half of her career as an operations administrator and leading large organizations with billion-dollar budgets. Midway through her career, she transitioned to managing policy issues in the energy and environmental sector, holding senior executive positions at both the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). McIlwain was Chief Operating Officer/Deputy Assistant Secretary at DOE in the Office of Fossil Energy. At the EPA, she served as Assistant Regional Administrator in Region 9, San Francisco. With a broad and diverse background in the public sector, working for six executive branches of government, the legislative branch of government, and serving as a Fellow for a United States Congressman, McIlwain uses her experience to lead MDE. The Secretary's priorities include ensuring that Maryland is positioned to meet its aggressive climate goals, strengthening environmental protection efforts by ending systemic environmental injustices, restoring and protecting the Chesapeake Bay, and leading with the purpose of achieving organizational excellence.

Professor Lemir Teron — Howard University

Lemir Teron is an Associate Professor at Howard University in the Department of Earth, Environment, and Equity. He holds a Ph.D. in Energy and Environmental Policy from the University of Delaware and completed a NOAA-funded postdoctoral fellowship at Florida A&M University, where he also taught at the College of Law. His work centers on advancing public science and environmental justice, with research interests spanning environmental health, energy policy, and community forestry. Dr. Teron has received numerous honors, including the 2019 Distinguished Faculty Member for Teaching Excellence Award from SUNY ESF, recognition as a 2020 Unsung Hero at Syracuse University's Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, and the 2022 Champion of Diversity Award from the YWCA of Syracuse and Onondaga County. He currently serves on the New York State Climate Impacts Assessment Energy Workgroup, is a Member Scholar at the Center for Progressive Reform and was named a 2022–2023 Nathan Policy Fellow at the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

PANEL III: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE – RESTORING BALANCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Lydia Lawrence — Conservation Director, Nature Forward
Lydia (she/they) is the Conservation Director at Nature Forward, leading the organization's advocacy and community outreach across the DC-metro region. They spearheaded Nature Forward's data center reform campaign, leading Nature Forward's fight for sustainable data center development in Northern Virginia and Maryland. In addition to data center reform, Lydia oversees Nature Forward's advocacy and community empowerment work on clean water and clean air. Prior to their work at Nature Forward, Lydia founded and led Fairfax NAACP's Environmental and Climate Justice Committee. They currently serve as a Gubernatorial Appointee for Virginia's Council of Environmental Justice.

THANK YOU

The *Howard Human & Civil Rights Law Review* extends our deepest gratitude to all who made the 11th Annual C. Clyde Ferguson Symposium possible. We are especially honored by the presence and support of the Ferguson Family, whose legacy continues to inspire our commitment to justice and equity.

We would like to sincerely thank:
Dean Fairfax for his leadership, guidance, and continued dedication to uplifting the mission of this Symposium.

Our Faculty Advisors and Howard University School of Law for their unwavering support and partnership.

Our Keynote Speaker and Distinguished Panelists for lending their voices, expertise, and passion to today's critical discussions.

Our Guest Organizations and Attendees for joining us in this collective effort to rebuild and reimagine equitable systems in times of legal uncertainty.

Together, we continue the pursuit of justice.

(continued)