

## National Conference on Housing Mobility

Who's Who

### Alexander Polikoff Memorial Award



Awardee **Elizabeth K. (Betsy) Julian** has 50 years experience as a poverty and civil rights lawyer and advocate.

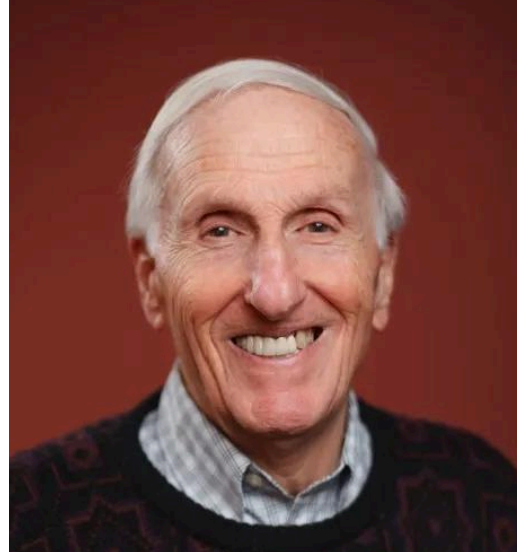
Ms. Julian was an attorney with Dallas Legal Services Foundation from 1973-1979 and with East Texas Legal Services from 1980-1981. She served as the Executive Director of Legal Services of North Texas from 1988-1990. In private practice, she was a partner in the civil rights law firm of Julian, Daniel & Villareal (subsequently Julian & Daniel) from 1981-1987, and the Law Office of Elizabeth K. Julian, 1990-1993. She established and obtained funding for the Texas

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in 1991. She served in multiple senior roles at the Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1994-1999, including as Assistant Secretary of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. In 2004, she founded the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP), a successor to the Walker Project, a fair housing non-profit organization created as part of the remedy in the Dallas Walker housing desegregation case. As of January 2019, she started her independent consulting practice, focusing on the areas of experience and expertise she has developed over her 45 year career.

She was plaintiff counsel in a number of high-profile civil rights cases during her legal career, including Walker v. HUD, DHA and City of Dallas and major voting rights cases. During her tenure as President, ICP was the plaintiff in the Supreme Court case TDHCA v. ICP, which established disparate impact claims as cognizable under the Fair Housing Act.

In addition to her work as a lawyer, she has served as a board member of numerous advocacy organizations, including being an original member of the Board of Directors of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council and most recently as a founding member of the board of MobilityWorks. She is the author of numerous published articles and has been the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions for her work in the field of civil rights and fair housing.

**Alexander Polikoff** (1927-2025) was a young ACLU lawyer when he filed the *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* case in the summer of 1966 on behalf of Dorothy Gautreaux and a class of public housing residents, challenging segregation in Chicago's public housing system. That landmark case, argued in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976, became the equivalent of *Brown v. Board of Education* in the field of housing law. Alexander was known as the "father of housing mobility" for the innovative regional housing remedy he developed as part of the remedy in *Gautreaux* – a voluntary Section 8 mobility program that brought justice and new opportunity to thousands of Chicago public housing residents. As head of the Chicago public interest law firm BPI, now known as Impact for Equity, for several decades he brought many important lawsuits, and was a leader in the field of housing mobility, writing extensively on the importance of housing desegregation and mobility and serving as a mentor to many of us in the field. This year's housing mobility award is named in his honor.



## Keynote



**Demetria McCain** joined LDF in July 2024 as its Director of Policy. In this role, Demetria leads the organization's policy team and its diverse policy advocacy portfolio, including working with senior leadership to set the strategic direction for the organization's legislative, policy and advocacy work in criminal justice, economic justice, education and political participation.

Demetria has been a sought-after commenter on affordable fair housing issues, and in 2015 she received the Texas Houser Award, which recognizes those committed to the cause of housing justice. Her many years of committed civic engagement, through Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and her church, has focused on voter registration, education and mobilization. She has served on several local and national nonprofit boards and is a graduate of New York University, Brooklyn College and Howard University School of Law.



**Julián Castro** serves as Chief Executive Officer of the Latino Community Foundation, the nation's largest Latino-serving foundation.

Julián's deep commitment to the future of this nation is woven into his DNA. Raised by his mother Rosie Castro, a civil rights and Chicana activist, and his grandmother, Victoria Castro, on the westside of San Antonio, Texas, Julian grew up with a profound understanding of what it meant to love and serve community. Inspired by a legacy of leaders working to safeguard our democracy and strengthen community, Julian has dedicated his life to public service.

Julián was elected to the San Antonio City Council in 2001 at age 26, then was elected Mayor of San Antonio in 2009. The youngest mayor of a Top 50 American city at the time, Julian revitalized and transformed San Antonio into one of the country's leading economies. In 2014, President Barack Obama appointed Julián U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, where he served until the end of the Obama administration.

In 2020, Julián ran for the Democratic nomination for President.

Julián earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Stanford University and a law degree from Harvard Law School. His memoir, *An Unlikely Journey: Waking Up From My American Dream*, was published by Little Brown in 2018.

Julián is the proud father of a daughter, Carina, and a son, Cristián. Julián's brother Joaquin currently represents Texas' 20th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives. In his free time, Julian loves spending time and traveling with his family.

**Shaun Donovan** is the Chief Executive Officer of Enterprise Community Partners and one of the nation's foremost leaders in housing and community development. Over his 30-year career in public service, he has focused on expanding opportunity and advancing equity for people and communities often left behind.

Shaun served in President Barack Obama's Cabinet for all eight years, first as secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2009–2014) and later as director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (2014–2017). At HUD, he led the federal response to the foreclosure crisis, chaired the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, advanced landmark fair housing protections, and oversaw strategies that cut veteran homelessness in half. At OMB, he managed national investments and regulations that reduced inequality, expanded healthcare access, improved education, and fought climate change. Earlier, he was commissioner of New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development and served in the Clinton administration as deputy assistant secretary for multifamily housing at HUD and acting FHA commissioner.

After a 2021 mayoral run in New York City, Shaun became a Ford Foundation senior fellow and currently serves as a trustee of the Urban Institute, Regional Plan Association, National Alliance to End Homelessness, Greater NY, and Rethink Food, in addition to advising Opportunity Insights.

Shaun holds bachelor's and master's degrees in public administration and architecture from Harvard University. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, landscape architect Liza Gilbert, and their two sons, Milo and Lucas.



**Pete Cimboric** is the Managing Director for Research & Innovation at the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). In this role, he leads internal analytics, research, and reporting, while advancing the organization's technical capabilities. Pete also provides technical assistance and consulting to housing mobility programs and voucher administrators nationwide. Previously, he worked with the ACLU of Maryland, supporting the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit and other fair housing initiatives.

**Valerie Comenencia Ortiz** is an Attorney at Relman Colfax, where she focuses on challenging discrimination in housing, lending, and employment. Valerie has represented organizations, classes, and individuals in a variety of complex civil rights matters, including cases challenging source of income discrimination, categorical bans on justice-involved individuals, exclusionary zoning policies, predatory lending practices, and noncompliance with accessibility requirements. Prior to joining the firm, Valerie represented workers, consumers, and other plaintiffs in employment discrimination, consumer protection, and antitrust class actions at Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein. Valerie clerked for Judge Jesus G. Bernal on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

**Adria Crutchfield** is a recognized leader in affordable housing and community development, with experience across federal, state, and local government. Since 2019, she has served as Executive Director of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). BRHP advances housing choice for over 4,300 families seeking access to quality schools, safe neighborhoods, and economic opportunity through the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, which combines supportive services with over \$90 million in annual rental assistance for those leasing in the private market.

Adria serves as the chair of the Mobility Works Board of Directors, is a member of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council's Regional PHA workgroup, and previously contributed to the Biden-Harris HUD transition team, Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott's housing transition committee, and Maryland Governor Wes Moore's housing policy transition committee.

She holds degrees from Washington University in St. Louis and American University and is an alum of Coro Leadership New York and The Leadership Baltimore.

**Lauren DiMartino** is a Baltimore-based attorney at Brown, Goldstein & Levy, representing clients in civil rights matters, including fair housing, education and disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights, police misconduct, and workplace discrimination. She also handles appeals and commercial litigation. Her client-centered practice emphasizes ensuring diverse communities can thrive, with a focus on the Fair Housing Act and its role in addressing discriminatory conduct and systemic segregation at the intersection of housing, economic mobility, and public education.

Lauren clerked for Judge Martha Craig Daughtry on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals and served as a Legal Fellow at the University of Colorado School of Law's Byron White Center for the Study of American Constitutional Law. She graduated from the City University of New York School of

Law with a concentration in Social Justice, Equality, and Civil Rights. Before law, she worked in marketing and later as an academic counselor in New York City community colleges. She is admitted to the bars of New York, Maryland, and New Jersey.

**Melissa Fiffer** is the Senior Research Scientist for the Children's Environmental Health Initiative (CEHI) at the University of Illinois Chicago. Her role includes leading epidemiologic studies on social and environmental drivers of health disparities such as segregation, air pollutants, greenness, and climate. She also serves as Co-Director of the Geospatial Data Analysis Core of the UIC P20 Center for Climate Health Equity (CECHE). She brings 11 years of experience working for the federal government, primarily in the U.S. EPA's Office of Atmospheric Programs. She got her start as a Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) in HUD's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control. She is passionate about advancing interdisciplinary science to tackle complex environmental challenges and inform evidence-based programs and policies to protect public health and reduce inequities. Melissa holds a PhD in Environmental Epidemiology from the Harvard School of Public Health and a master's degree in Environmental Health from the Duke Nicholas School of the Environment.

**Erik Gartland** is a Research Analyst on the Housing and Income Security team at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Since joining the Center in 2020, he has supported the team with timely analyses of housing hardship and federal rental assistance data while continually working to center equity and housing justice in the team's research practices and products.

**Crystal Godina** is a Research Manager at Learning Collider, where she leads housing-focused research projects that bridge academic insight with real-world impact. In her current role, she partners with public agencies, nonprofits, and technology platforms to test and scale solutions that reduce barriers to housing and support moves to high-opportunity areas.

Crystal's housing experience spans research, policy, and program implementation. She previously served as Senior Fellow for Housing Stability with the City of Chicago's Department of Housing and Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice, where she led the Housing Stability Community Response Team to develop community-driven solutions for eviction prevention. Earlier in her career, she contributed to housing and economic mobility research at the University of Chicago's Inclusive Economy Lab and began her public service as an AmeriCorps VISTA with the University of Miami's Office of Civic and Community Engagement, supporting projects that expanded access to affordable housing and strengthened neighborhood resources.

She believes in the power of cross-sector partnerships to remove barriers and expand housing opportunities for all.

**Daniel Gubits** is a Principal Associate at Abt Global. He conducts research in the areas of housing, homelessness, workforce development, child welfare, and disability policy. He specializes in the design and analysis of random assignment evaluations. In 2018, Dr. Gubits was a recipient of the Vernon Memorial Prize from APPAM for the best article published in its *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. He currently leads the impact evaluation of the comprehensive housing mobility-related services implemented in HUD's multi-site Community Choice Demonstration. Dr. Gubits holds a Ph.D. in economics from the Johns Hopkins University, and M.P.Aff. and M.B.A. degrees from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Diane L. Houk**, a fair housing attorney for more than 40 years, is a partner at the New York City civil rights firm Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel LLP where she represents individuals and organizations in housing discrimination matters. Before joining the firm, she co-founded the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) in New York City in 2004 and served as its first Executive Director for five years. Her recent cases include *Spooner and FHJC v. Pelican Management*, *Broadway Triangle Community Coalition v. New York City*, *Natl. Fair Housing Alliance v. Facebook*, and *FHJC v. Parkchester Preservation Corp.*

Before moving to New York City, Diane worked in the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division for thirteen years. She was lead counsel in more than 30 federal housing discrimination cases, including *U.S. v. Yonkers* and *U.S. v. Jacksonville* in which she negotiated and implemented settlement agreements that included mobility housing counseling programs. Named Special Litigation Counsel in 2000, she focused on systemic discrimination in land use, zoning, and affordable housing. Earlier, she practiced civil rights law in Milwaukee, WI.

**Reverend AJ Johnson** is the Senior Pastor of The Urban Hope Refuge Church in Hartford, Connecticut, where he unites worship and activism to advance justice and community uplift. Beyond the pulpit, he serves as the Director of Neighborhood Organization at the Center for Leadership and Justice, leading initiatives such as *Small Business Night Out* for minority entrepreneurs and *Calling All Brothers*, a mentorship and leadership program. He also co-founded Brothers Johnson 1929 Hat Company, symbolizing strength and distinction.

Rev. Johnson's leadership has been recognized with numerous honors, including the Connecticut Bar Association's Citizen of the Law Award, Hartford Business Journal's *40 Under 40*, and recognition among the 100 Men of Color. His organizing work has been featured in national outlets and tied to movements like Fight for 15, Moral Monday, Ban the Box, and No More Slumlords. A speaker on social justice and community action, he is also a devoted husband and father of two.

**Dr. Eunjee Kwon** is the West Shell, Jr. Assistant Professor of Real Estate at the University of Cincinnati. She is an applied microeconomist specializing in urban and real estate economics. She has published in *Regional Science and Urban Economics* and the *Journal of Urban Economics*, with her work also featured in *Freakonomics Radio*, *Time*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. She has presented her

academic work at the NBER, HUD, the World Bank, and Fannie Mae, and is the recipient of the Homer Hoyt Dissertation Award and the AREUEA Dissertation Award.

**Sandra Park** is the Chief of the Civil Rights Bureau at the Office of the New York State Attorney General, where she leads the enforcement of federal, state, and local civil rights laws protecting New Yorkers from discrimination in education, employment, housing, law enforcement, voting, and public accommodations. Sandra previously worked in the national ACLU Women's Rights Project, engaging in litigation, policy advocacy, and public education to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls. Much of her work focused on holding institutions accountable for perpetuating violence and discrimination in housing, law enforcement response, and schools. She also successfully litigated an U.S. Supreme Court case invalidating the patenting of human genes. Sandra began her legal career as a Skadden Fellow at the Legal Aid Society of New York. She clerked for U.S. District Judge Alvin Hellerstein of the Southern District of New York and graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College and NYU School of Law.

**Craig Pollack** is the Katey Ayers Endowed Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the School of Nursing. He is a practicing internal medicine, primary care physician. His research examines the intersection of health and housing, focusing on policies that help families live in high-quality, affordable homes in thriving neighborhoods. Dr. Pollack has studied long-term health outcomes from the Moving To Opportunity experiment and is currently analyzing the effects of Baltimore's housing mobility program on childhood asthma, as well as fielding a health survey of participants in HUD's Community Choice Demonstration.

**Valerie Rosenberg** became the inaugural executive director of Mobility Works in 2022. She is now focusing on strengthening its member network, expanding its areas of practice, and creating opportunities for mobility participant leadership in its advocacy efforts. She joined Mobility Works from the field of philanthropy, where she was Chief of Staff of two private foundations, providing nimble leadership across the foundations' programs, operations, communications, and organizational development. Previously, she was Vice President of the Public Housing Community Fund (formerly the Fund for Public Housing) and Deputy Director of Public/Private Partnerships at the New York City Housing Authority, where she cultivated strategic investments in public housing communities. She has also worked in policy development and analysis, advocacy, education, and direct social service provision. Valerie holds a BA from Brandeis University and an MPP from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Barbara Sard** has been involved in efforts to promote the use of housing vouchers to expand geographic access to greater opportunities, especially for low-income children, as a legal services lawyer, policy analyst, and as Senior Advisor to HUD Secretary Donovan early in the Obama Administration. After 20 years leading the housing policy work at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities she retired in June 2019, but has remained involved in housing mobility issues as a board member of Mobility Works and the National Housing Law Project, and as a consultant.



**Thomas Silverstein** is a national leader in multiple approaches to advancing fair housing and community development, including impact litigation, amicus participation, regulatory and legislative policy advocacy, and the provision of technical assistance to states, local governments, and public housing authorities. Prior to becoming Executive Director at Poverty & Race Research Action Council, Thomas was Director for the Fair Housing and Community Development Project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, where he led the Project's impact litigation docket, using the Fair Housing Act to foster the development of inclusive communities, expand access to opportunity, and fight displacement. Additionally, he currently serves as Visiting Clinical Lecturer in Law at the Yale Law School and previously taught a fair housing clinic at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

**Noémie Sportiche** is a researcher at Mathematica and postdoctoral associate in Harvard's Department of Economics. Her research is motivated by the principle that housing policies should be designed to promote a more just society that improves people's opportunities for upward social mobility, good health, and general well-being. As a consequence, much of her recent work focuses on evaluating the impacts of state policies that override local zoning rules on housing markets, neighborhood choice, and the well-being of program beneficiaries. She has particular expertise on the health and housing market impacts of fair share housing policies such as Massachusetts Chapter 40B. Dr. Sportiche has a PhD in health policy from Harvard University and previously worked as an urban planner for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in Massachusetts. Her work has been supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Joint Center for Housing Studies.

**Philip Tegeler** is Senior Counsel (and former executive director) with the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC), a civil rights policy organization based in Washington, DC. PRRAC's housing policy work has focused on the implementation of civil rights mandates in the major federal housing programs, including the Housing Choice Voucher program and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit. Philip has written extensively on the application of civil rights law to housing and education policy, including, most recently, "Section 8 in the Courts: How Civil Rights Litigation Helped to Shape the Housing Choice Voucher program," *Cityscape* (2024) (co-author), and "Supporting school integration through the federal Housing Choice Voucher program," in *Integration and Equity 2.0: New and Reinvigorated Approaches to School Integration* (American Institutes of Research, 2023). Prior to PRRAC, Philip was Legal Director at the Connecticut ACLU, and currently serves on the Board of the Open Communities Alliance (CT).

**Mark Thiele** is a houser who stands in awe of his community. Since 2022, Mark has led NAHRO through record-breaking federal advocacy campaigns, sold-out conferences, new training tools, and expanded industry partnerships. His steadfast belief in the essential work of PHAs and the need to invest in them grows as he tirelessly travels the country meeting members and hearing their stories.

Prior to NAHRO, Mark served the Houston Housing Authority for over 11 years, as Interim President and CEO, Senior VP, and VP of the HCV Program. Under Mark's leadership, HHA was

not only a high performer, but also earned the coveted MTW designation and played a significant role in Houston's award-winning efforts to end homelessness.

Mark serves on the board of the National Public Housing Museum and previously served on NAHRO's board as VP of the Community Revitalization and Development Committee and President of the Texas Chapter, among other roles.

**Kate Walz** is the Executive Director of Uptown People's Law Center, a Chicago legal nonprofit that works with communities impacted by the criminal legal system to restore human and civil rights to people in prison and returning residents. She has spent the vast majority of her career working for nonprofit institutions dedicated to housing justice, criminal legal system reform, and civil rights. She has extensive high impact litigation, policy, and community-driven advocacy experience. Kate previously served as the Associate Director of Litigation at the National Housing Law Project ("NHLP"), where she led the organization's work concerning federally assisted housing preservation, crime-free and nuisance property ordinances, gender-based violence, and immigrant access to housing. Prior to joining NHLP, Kate was at the Shriver Center on Poverty Law for almost 20 years, serving as the Center's Vice President of Advocacy, and before that, leading the housing team.

**Wenfei Xu** is an assistant professor in GIScience and Urban Data Science in the Department of Geography at UCSB and the Director of the Urban Data Research Lab. Her research examines how housing policies, practices, institutions, and technologies have influenced urban inequality, with a focus on methods in spatial data science. She works on topics in social-spatial stratification, segregation, race and ethnicity, data science, mapping, and neighborhood change in the United States. She was previously an assistant professor at Cornell University and a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Chicago, Mansueto Institute for Urban Innovation. She holds a Ph.D. in Urban Planning from Columbia University, dual M.Arch and MCP degrees from MIT, and a B.A. in economics from the University of Chicago. Before her doctorate, Wenfei was a data scientist at the Department of Homeless Services and at CARTO.

**Sunia Zatterman** has over thirty years of experience in affordable housing issues at the federal, state, and local levels. She is the Executive Director of the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA), and she serves on the board of the Emerald Cities Collaborative. In 2010, Sunia was nominated for the Hanley Award for Vision and Leadership in Sustainable Housing. She has also served as the Executive Vice President of the Housing Research Foundation, Board Trustee of Global Communities (formerly CHF International) and the National Housing Conference as well as the advisory boards of Affordable Housing Finance and Housing and Development Reporter. Sunia holds a master's degree in urban planning from Princeton University and a bachelor's degree in history from Barnard College.