



# A (Virtual) Toast to Health Justice

May 23, 2021

5:00-5:45 PM

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# Run of Show:

1. Why Florida Health Justice Project?, *Miriam Harmatz*
2. Master of Ceremonies, *Gordon Bonnyman*
3. Musical Guest, *Mark Mueller*
4. Spotlight on Maternal Health Justice:  
*Alison Yager, Jamarah Amani*
5. Honoree: *Florida State Representative, Nicholas Duran*
6. Spotlight on Elder Health Justice, *Miriam Harmatz*
7. Strategy Spotlight: Litigation, *Katy DeBriere, Sarah Somers*
8. Strategy Spotlight: *STORIES!*, *Jay Jefferson, Blanca Mesa*
9. Spotlight: Letter from a Health Justice Champion,  
*Dr. Gail Davidson*
10. Reflections from a Friend of FHJP, *Mary Block*
11. FHJP Board Members, *Paul Nathanson, Dr. Zinzi Bailey*
12. Thanks & Appreciation, *Miriam Harmatz*
13. Closing Remarks, *Alison Yager*



# Speaker Bios

## (in order of appearance)



Miriam Harmatz

Miriam is the founding Executive Director of Florida Health Justice Project and one of Florida's leading Medicaid advocates. She is a former senior health law attorney at Florida Legal Services and adjunct professor in the Health Law Clinic at Florida International University College of Law. She now serves as the Director of Advocacy at FHJP.

As a young child with a health issue, Miriam learned that everyone must have insurance and that healthcare is a human right. As a legal services attorney for 30 years she focused on ensuring access to healthcare for her clients.

Miriam has been lead counsel on multiple federal court cases resulting in statewide relief for Medicaid beneficiaries. These successful outcomes, including federal court cases of first impression and with national import, are the result of highly collaborative work with national experts, Florida legal aid lawyers and pro bono attorneys. On a local level, Miriam has led collaborative efforts that improved access and transparency at Miami-Dade County's publicly funded hospital.



Gordon  
Bonnymann

Gordon co-founded the [Tennessee Justice Center](#) and served as its executive director from 1996 to 2014. He continues to serve the TJC as a staff attorney where his advocacy is primarily focused on achieving access to healthcare for the poor and uninsured.

Before founding the Tennessee Justice Center, Gordon was a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands for 23 years, where he represented thousands of low-income clients in a wide variety of civil matters including housing, consumer, public benefits, disability rights, nursing home reform, juvenile procedure, civil rights, constitutional rights and health law. Gordon has written and lectured extensively, particularly on matters of health law and policy. He has served on numerous state and national boards, including the National Juvenile Law Center, National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, and the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services.

# Speaker Bios



Mark Mueller

Mark is an American songwriter. A two-time winner of the ASCAP Pop Award for writing one of the Most Performed Songs of the year, he has had three Billboard Hot 100 Top Ten singles and one #1 Adult Contemporary hit. Songs he has written have been featured on RIAA-certified gold and platinum records in four consecutive decades: the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s; and on the Billboard Top 10 charts for 30 years (1986 to 2016).

Mark is the recipient of two Emmy nominations, both in the category of Outstanding Achievement in Music and Lyrics. He wrote the words and music for the theme songs of both the original Disney's DuckTales and Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers animated TV series as well as the 2017 DuckTales reboot.



Alison Yager

Alison is the Executive Director of Florida Health Justice Project. She is an attorney with over 20 years of experience in the non-profit and government sectors advocating on behalf of women, children and marginalized individuals. She comes to Miami from New York, where she served most recently as the Director of Policy Initiatives for Maternal, Infant, and Reproductive Health at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

After graduating from UCLA School of Law's Program in Public Interest Law and Policy in 2001, Alison was awarded an Equal Justice Works fellowship to provide legal services to young people at The Door's Legal Service Center in Manhattan, and subsequently worked as a Staff Attorney serving young people experiencing intimate partner violence at Break the Cycle- New York (now Day One). From 2006 to 2014, Alison worked at HIV Law Project in New York, first as a Staff Attorney and then as Supervising Attorney for HIV Policy. She began her career as a Community Organizer for the Children's Defense Fund-NY.



# Speaker Bios



Jamarah Amani

Jamarah is a community midwife and the Executive Director of Southern Birth Justice Network, a non-profit organization working to expand the Birth Justice movement and to make midwifery and doula care accessible to marginalized communities. Her mission is to do her part to build a movement for Birth Justice locally, nationally and globally. Jamarah is the architect of the Birth Justice framework, the Black Midwives Model of Care and the Birth Justice Bill of Rights. She is also the co-founder of National Black Midwives Alliance, the only national professional association in the U.S. specifically for midwives of African descent.

A community organizer from the age of sixteen, Jamarah has worked with several organizations across the United States, the Caribbean and in Africa on various public health issues. As a birthworker and activist, Jamarah has been tackling issues of racial justice, including the epidemics of Black maternal and infant morbidity and mortality for over fifteen years. Jamarah is the recipient of the 2019 Trailblazer Award from the City of Miami.



Nicholas X. Duran

Representative Duran was elected in November 2016 to the Florida House of Representatives for District 112. Rep. Duran is the ranking Democratic Member of the Health and Human Services Committee, and is on the Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee, as well as the Appropriations Committee, Finance and Facilities Subcommittee, and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee. Over the years he has served in a variety of leadership roles for health care policy and community engagement. Currently he is the Executive Director of the Florida Association of Free and Charitable Clinics.

Nick serves on the board of directors for the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, Epilepsy Florida, Miami-Dade Public Health Trust, and is a member of Leadership Florida. He previously served as a board member for The Children's Trust, and was the immediate past chair for the University of South Florida Covering Kids and Families State Coalition. He is a graduate of The University of Florida and New York Law School. Representative Duran is a native South Floridian.

# Speaker Bios



Katy DeBriere

Katy is Florida Health Justice Project's Legal Director, and is one of the state's leading experts in Medicaid law. She also serves as a contract attorney at Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, and was previously the managing attorney of the Northeast Florida Medical Legal Partnership (NFMLP). Katy has played a lead role in developing a statewide MLP network.

Katy began her legal career in 2008 as an Equal Justice Works fellow. She can claim several state court of appeals successes, two 42 U.S.C. 1983 suits, and a successful facial constitutional challenge to a state statutory scheme for the commitment of persons with developmental disabilities. Katy was recently responsible for the state's remedial actions to ensure continuous Medicaid enrollment for young people exiting foster care. Her legal work at FHJP was awarded the First Runner-Up for the Florida Bar Foundation's prestigious Goldstein-Van Nortwick Award for Excellence in 2020.



Sarah Somers

Sarah is Managing Attorney of the National Health Law Program's (NHeLP) Chapel Hill, North Carolina office. She specializes in litigation and litigation support intended to advance access to quality health care for low income and other underserved people.

Working with health and poverty law advocates across the country, she engages in litigation, research, writing, and training on the Medicaid program, Medicaid managed care, Medicaid services for children, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Affordable Care Act, among other issues. She is also a co-author of *An Advocates Guide to the Medicaid Program* (May 2011). Before coming to NHeLP, she worked for the Native American Disability Law Center on the Navajo Nation, where she represented children in special education and Medicaid cases.

# Speaker Bios



Jay Jefferson

Jay is FHJP's multimedia specialist. He has over 20 years of experience in multimedia production and communication technologies. He has served in the roles of Distance Learning Project Manager, Production Manager, Content Manager, Technology Coordinator, Training Facilitator and Education Lobbyist.

Jay serves on the Executive Boards and Committees of several non-profit entities, including the Florida State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Miami-Dade County Council PTA, African American Children with Learning Disabilities, Coconut Grove Drug-Free Community Coalition, and Coconut Grove Ministerial Alliance. Jay's work in the community earned him the PTA President of the Year Award from the Miami-Dade County Council PTA and Miami-Dade County Public School's Family of the Year Award.

Jay is deeply committed to FHJP's mission of supporting health care as a human right and the belief that America cannot have health justice without racial justice or racial justice without health justice.



Blanca Mesa

Blanca is FHJP's Outreach and Communications Specialist. She is an attorney, journalist, and communication expert. Blanca, a former public benefits attorney with Legal Services of Greater Miami, also worked as the Communications Director for the Mayor of Miami-Dade County. She additionally served as a licensed federal navigator for the Affordable Care Act healthcare marketplace. Blanca helped develop and manage a story bank of over 150 Floridians in the coverage gap willing to speak with the press.

Blanca has a strong history of public service and community involvement. In 2016, she was named "Best Citizen" by Miami New Times and in 2017, Miami Today newspaper honored her as "Best of Miami" for her community environmental work. Blanca works on documenting the stories of individual low-income Floridians willing to engage in outreach and education regarding Medicaid, as well as other safety net programs that impact the social determinants of health.



# Speaker Bios



Mary Block

Mary Block received her MFA in poetry from NYU's Creative Writing Program. Her poems have been featured in Best New Poets 2020 (UVA Press), *Serious Daring* (Oxford University Press), and excerpted in Paul Farmer's *Fevers, Feuds, and Diamonds* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) among other publications. She is at work on a full-length collection.

Mary is an advisory board member at Friends of Zanmi Beni, a Miami-based nonprofit supporting a residential home for children in Haiti, and is a volunteer with Florida Health Justice Project. She lives with her family in her hometown of Miami, Florida on a unique street—Irvington Avenue—where she is a neighbor of FHJP founder Miriam Harmatz.



Dr. Gail Davidson

Gail is a retired physician and the widow of Tom Gidwitz, a major financial supporter of Florida Health Justice Project. During her long practice in Massachusetts, Gail profoundly appreciated the fact that, for many years, she and her fellow physicians were able to take care of any patient--regardless of their income or employment status.

As Tom was bravely fighting leukemia, he provided FHJP with their largest single donation. Tom's matching gift of \$10,000 raised \$22,000 to help the fight for health justice in a state where so many people--especially people of color-- cannot get needed medical care and/or have to worry about catastrophic bills.

# Speaker Bios



Paul Nathanson

Paul is FHJP's President of the Board, and a national leader in the world of legal services and elder justice. He has dedicated his career to ensuring that legal services lawyers on the national, state and local level can effectively fight senior poverty and address barriers for those who face the largest disparities in health and wealth.

Paul founded Justice in Aging (formerly the National Senior Citizens Law Center) and was the Executive Director from 1972-1980. He then served on the faculty of the University of New Mexico (UNM) Law School, and as director of UNM's Institute of Public Law. He is now emeritus. He returned to lead Justice in Aging from 2008-13 and currently serves as special counsel.

Paul is a past president of the American Society on Aging and a founding member of the ABA Commission on Law and Aging. He has also served as National Secretary of the Gray Panthers and is a past Chair of the Board of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare.



Dr. Zinzi Bailey

Zinzi is a member of the Board of FHJP. She is a social epidemiologist focused on the health impacts of and policy solutions for structural and institutional racism, the use of data in equitable policy and management, and cancer health disparities. She is the CEO and Managing Director of Health Equity Research Solutions, LLC and based at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine's Jay Weiss Institute for Health Equity at the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center. Prior to these positions, she was the Director of Research and Evaluation at the Center for Health Equity in the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Zinzi serves as an Associate Director to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program and a mentor for the Health Policy Research Scholars program, also funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

She received her B.A. from Princeton University, an MSPH from Emory University and her ScD from Harvard University.

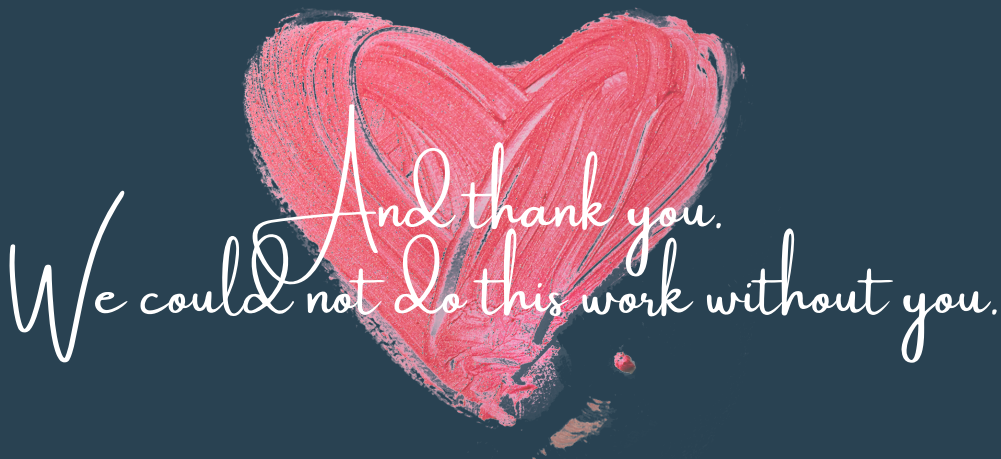
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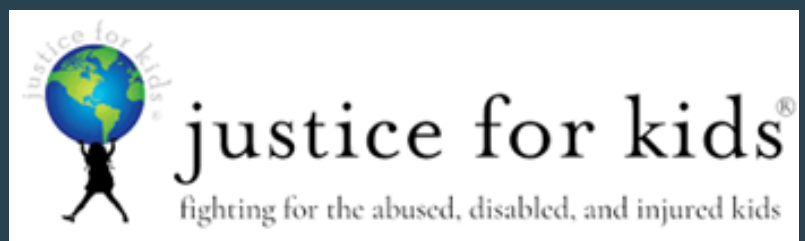


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