Speakers at New Orleans School to Prison Pipeline Town Hall

Nancy Degan, Chair ABA Section of Litigation, Welcome

Nancy Degan, a shareholder in the New Orleans office, serves on Baker Donelson’s Board of Directors and is a member of the Business Litigation Group. She has extensive experience helping businesses and business people resolve their disputes through negotiations, trials, arbitrations and appeals. She handles bank litigation, oil and gas disputes, shareholder actions and other securities litigation, and various business torts. She is the Chair of the ABA Section of Litigation and a Loyola graduate.

Robert Garda, Professor, Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, Moderator

Professor Garda teaches contracts, commercial transactions, international commercial transactions, employment discrimination, legal methods, and scholarly writing. He is the author of numerous articles and reports on education law. His recent articles appear in the North Carolina Law Review, Florida Law Review and Journal of Law & Education. His legal scholarship covers a variety of topics including: the rights of disabled students, affirmative action, integration in K-12 education, special education spending and legal issues surrounding charter schools. His current projects concern: introducing outcome accountability into special education law, the impact of monied interests on education legislation and the changing purposes of education as recognized by the Supreme Court and embodied in recent legislation.

Professor Garda was the past national Chair of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) Section on Education Law and currently serves on its Executive Committee. He also serves as a member of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Board of Directors for the Louisiana Mental Health Advocacy Services. He has worked on projects with the Louisiana Bar Foundation and Louisiana Appleseed. He also works with national and local public interest groups on education and disability issues and is a frequent commentator in the Louisiana media on education issues. He was awarded the 2010 Good Apple Award from the Appleseed Network and the 2009 Gillis Long Poverty Law Center Public Service Award for his public service. He was also voted the Favorite Professor of the Year in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

Professor Garda joined the Loyola Law School faculty in 2002. Prior to entering academia he graduated from Duke University Law School where he served as Articles Editor on the Duke Law Journal. After externing for Justice Zimmerman of the Utah Supreme Court, Professor Garda became a partner at the Salt Lake City firm of Fabian & Clendenin focusing primarily in the areas of education law, commercial litigation, and employment law.
The Honorable Ernestine S. Gray has been serving as Judge of Orleans Parish Juvenile Court since November 6, 1984.

Eden Heilman, Director, Southern Poverty Law Center

Eden Heilman works to ensure children’s access to a public education and reform ineffective school discipline practices that push children out of school. Before joining the SPLC, She worked with at-risk children and families as a social worker. As an attorney, she has represented children in claims against schools that violated their civil rights. She has provided expert testimony about these issues, including testimony before the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. She also has authored publications examining the use of harsh discipline practices. She is a graduate from Loyola University New Orleans School of Law and Tulane University where she received her master’s degree in social work.

María Pabón López, Dean, Loyola University New Orleans, College of Law

Dean María Pabón López is an expert in immigrants’ rights (including the education of immigrant children), immigration law and diversity/multicultural matters in the legal profession. She also focuses her research on issues concerning Latinos, race and the law, and the status of women lawyers. She has published articles on topics such as the rights of immigrants in the U.S., Spain’s immigration laws, undocumented workers in the U.S. and Argentina, as well as the impact of immigrant nurses on the nursing shortage in the U.S. She has done research in the areas of family law and inheritance law as it pertains to those who are not U.S. citizens. She has also analyzed U.S. state laws affecting immigrants and hate crimes against immigrants.

A prolific author, Dean López has placed articles in journals such as the Harvard Latino Law Review, the Georgetown Immigration Law Journal, the Hastings Women’s Law Journal and the Seton Hall Law Journal. She has also published articles in Revista Juridica de la Universidad Interamericana and Revista de Derecho de Extranjeria. Her book, Persistent Inequality: Contemporary Realities in The Education of Undocumented Latino/a Children (with Gerardo R. López), was published by Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group in late 2009. Her current research projects are (1) an examination of U.S. and European immigration laws (3) the status of women lawyers in Louisiana, and (3) diversity in the legal profession during the economic downturn.
Devan Petersen, Foster Youth Advocate, New Orleans

Ms. Petersen is self-described as “a Jill of all Trades with a licenses to Massage in the state of Louisiana and a voice that shakes the politicians in the Capitol.” She is a former foster youth and works with youth who are aging out of foster care and are a part of the Independent Living Skills Program at Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans. She is a teacher and mentor. Being a former youth I have the experience that most people could not imagine. I put ideas in the brains of legislators. Ms. Petersen is a realtor assistant with Coldwell Banker Tec.

Dana Peterson, Deputy Superintendent of External Affairs, Recovery School District, New Orleans

Dana Peterson is the Deputy Superintendent of External Affairs for the Recovery School District, a special district of the Louisiana Department of Education charged with an unprecedented challenge and opportunity to tackle and transform chronically underperforming schools in Louisiana. As a member of the Superintendent’s executive team, Peterson is tasked with crafting strategies for parent and stakeholder engagement and developing effective communication strategies for key Recovery School District policies and initiatives. Prior to joining the Recovery School District, Dana served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of FirstLine Schools, a mission-driven, non-profit charter school management organization dedicated to creating and inspiring great public schools in New Orleans. While serving as Board Chair of FirstLine Schools, Peterson led the charge to build community support for the transformation of Joseph S. Clark High School in the historic Treme community in New Orleans. FirstLine Schools forged a unique partnership with the Clark High School alumni, educators, parents, and community members to develop a community engagement process that created a shared vision for a cohesive school community with increased academic performance of its students as its primary goal. Dana is one of the founding members and served as Chairman of the Charter Board Council of New Orleans. Dana holds a Bachelor’s of Science Degree in Economics from the University of Houston. He is married to Karen Carter Peterson, a member of the Louisiana State Senate. They live in New Orleans and are active members of Blessed Trinity Catholic Church.

Rahsaan Ishon, Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children

Rahsaan Ison is “a student at The New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, was nominated by Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children. After an upsetting personal experience, Ison started working with Gina Womack of Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children to establish a chapter of Dignity in Schools, a national campaign working against push-out and harsh discipline policies in schools. Ison has been building a New Orleans youth group organized around suspension and expulsion. As a musician, he also has been working on a CD of music focused on the frustrations of school push-out. (excerpted from Inside New Orleans Community News). Ison was a 2014 recipient of the Sargent Shriver Youth Warriors Against Poverty Leadership Award.
Christopher Bowman, Counselor to the District Attorney at the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office

Sarah Redfield, Professor of Law, Co-Chair ABA Joint Task Force Reversing the School to Prison Pipeline, Moderator

Sarah E. Redfield is Professor Emerita at the University of New Hampshire School of Law and Affiliate Professor at the University of New Hampshire College of Education. Her primary practice and teaching area is education law (including special education). Her primary research focus is diversity and inclusion in the legal profession and along the education pipeline. Her recent research and scholarship focuses on implicit bias and group dynamics at all levels. She is currently the co-chair for the American Bar Association Coalition on Racial and Ethnic Justice Town Halls initiative on the School to Prison Pipeline, a member of the Section of Litigation Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and a member of the Criminal Justice Section Racial & Ethnic Justice & Diversity Committee.

Professor Redfield is a nationally known author and presenter. She was a lead author for the ABA Section on Litigation’s Toolbox on Implicit Bias and lead consultant for the ABA project on Achieving an Impartial Jury. Her recent writings include textbooks in education and special education law and various articles and chapters on jury selection as well as articles on implicit bias, diversity, and related issues.

The Honorable Joseph B. Landry, New Orleans Municipal Court

A New Orleans native, Judge Landry’s history in the legal profession spans more than three decades. He graduated from Loyola University New Orleans, College of Business in 1978 and its College of Law in 1981. While at Loyola, he served as President of the Student Bar Association. After being admitted to Practice in 1981, he worked in private practice representing individuals, families, and corporations in both State and Federal Courts. He served as an Assistant City Attorney prosecuting City ordinance violations. He was elected in 2009 to the bench of Municipal Court and re-elected in 2010. He serves on the Loyola College of Law Visiting Committee and has served on other school, foundation, and corporation Boards.
Rosa K. Hirji, Attorney & Co-Chair, ABA Section of Litigation
Children’s Rights Litigation Committee

Rosa K. Hirji is an experienced attorney for educational, civil and disability rights of youth, including court-involved youth. She represents youth and their families at all levels of administrative proceedings and in state and federal court. As a founding member of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court Education Panel, she is regularly appointed to represent young people in foster care, juvenile hall, and other institutionalized settings. Rosa brings to her cases direct experience as a former teacher with the Los Angeles Unified School District; and understands the challenges students face in the classroom. Her practice has a public interest orientation that strives to obtain relief that brings a wider impact for youth and communities.

Rosa was appointed in 2012 as co-chair of the Children’s Rights Litigation Committee of the Section of Litigation, American Bar Association. She has been an active member of the ABA since 2003 and served as the chair of the Education Subcommittee. She is a member of the editorial board of the Children’s Rights Litigation Newsletter. In 2004, she was awarded Outstanding Committee Chair Award by the American Bar Association.

Jason P. Nance, Levin College of Law, University of Florida

Professor Jason Nance is an Associate Professor of Law and the Associate Director for Education Law and Policy at the Center on Children and Families and the University of Florida Levin College of Law. He teaches education law, remedies, and torts and focuses his research and writing on education law, school discipline, students rights, and the school to prison pipeline. In addition to earning a J.D. at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, he has a Ph.D. in education administration from the Ohio State University, where he also focused on quantitative methodology. Before he attended graduate school and law school, he was a public school math teacher in a large, metropolitan school district.

Rosie Washington, Executive Director, Micah Project, New Orleans

The Micah Project is a faith-based organization established in 2007 by clergy who wanted to see real change in their communities. Micah works with its 16 member congregations to create innovative solutions to the plethora of problems faced by those living in the Greater New Orleans area. Micah is a member of the PICO National Network, an organization whose mission is to provide families and grassroots leaders with a voice in the decisions that shape their lives and communities, and of PICO Louisiana, PICO’s state-wide chapter. Micah is a non-partisan, non-denominational, multiracial, multicultural collective of clergy and congregations that are united together for a common good.
Student Leaders and Students, SUFEO, Stand Up For Each Other, New Orleans

**Stand Up for Each Other!** (SUFEO!) is a collaboration of the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, law students from Loyola University New Orleans and Tulane University and Young Adults Striving for Success that has stepped up to help kids stay in school. SUFEO! addresses the disproportionate impact of suspensions and expulsions on students by teaching youth ways to exercise their statutory right to administrative hearings. Law students, young adults, and parents learn how the process works and how representation operates in juvenile administrative hearings. This collaboration presents a great opportunity for law and pre-law students interested in trial, advocacy and public interest work to serve the community. This group is our contribution in combating the pipeline. SUFEO! represents youth from various schools in New Orleans who are being suspended or expelled. When students are pushed out of school, they are more likely to be picked up by the criminal justice system. This further imbeds the School to Prison Pipeline that national organizations, such as ACLU and NAACP, currently advocate against. During the 2010-2011 school year, SUFEO saw roughly 21 cases. A vast majority of the cases were resolved with intervention at the school level. SUFEO also provided technical assistance to neighboring parishes.

Gina Womack, Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children

Ms. Womack is a Louisiana Public Defender Board member and co-founder and Executive Director of the non-profit group Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children (FFLIC).

Ms. Womack began her activism working for the Juvenile Justice Project in the late-90’s and in September 2001, co-founded FFLIC. FFLIC works to improve the lives of young people involved in the juvenile justice system, targeting the school-to-prison pipeline, incarceration policies, and other juvenile justice issues. One of the organization’s biggest successes was the passage of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2003, which led to the closing of the Tallulah Correctional Center, which had a national reputation of abuse and other problems. FFLIC credits its success to its members - empowered parents, family members and other allies who have had first-hand contact with Louisiana's juvenile justice system. In its January-February 2012 issue, Louisiana Life Magazine recognized Gina Womack as its Louisianan of the Year in the Civic Activist Category.
Meggan Garvey, Managing Director of Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights

Meg Garvey brings the experience and perspective of a mental health advocate, investigator and attorney to her work as managing director of Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights where she has been supervising staff and developing strategic initiatives since 2012. Prior to joining LCCR, Meg worked as a supervising attorney with the Orleans Public Defenders, where she began in 2006, as part of that office’s landmark post-Katrina justice system reforms and community advocacy. Meg has worked as a capital appeals investigator for the Habeas Corpus Resource Center and as a residential case manager for adults in group homes as well as in SROs in San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood. Meg began her advocacy career in 1996 while working as a residential aid in a group home for adults with severe and persistent mental illness, and ever since has been working to address the causal and correlative roots of families’ interactions with the justice system. Her dream is to see that all of New Orleans’ kids have fun and safe childhoods on their way to becoming happy, healthy adults.