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April 19, 2017

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Shriver Center Names 44 New Race-Equity Fellows, Racial Justice Network Director

As federal threats raise the stakes of racial justice advocacy, national network grows

CHICAGO, IL — The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law has announced the selection of 44 Fellows to participate in the 2017 Racial Justice Training Institute (RJTI), as well as a new Racial Justice Network Director. RJTI is a national leadership program that equips and coordinates anti-poverty advocates to address the role that racism plays in causing and perpetuating poverty. Kimberly Merchant, a seasoned advocate with 20 years of experience practicing law, will provide strategic oversight and direction for RJTI, as well as other advocacy and training initiatives.

These announcements come amid mounting federal threats to justice and opportunity for all, including racially charged rhetoric, anti-immigrant policies, and a broader agenda that would threaten the physical and financial well-being of millions of people of color and people with low income—all of which have raised the stakes of anti-poverty and racial justice advocacy.

“RJTI ensures that race is considered foremost in efforts to eradicate poverty,” said [Ellen Hemley](#), Vice President of Training Programs at the Shriver Center. “In the face of new federal threats and deep societal divisions, challenging racism and affirmatively advancing racial equity have perhaps never been more important. The capacity and expertise that Kimberly Merchant brings will be indispensable moving forward.”

The RJTI, with generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Pritzker Foundation, and the Public Welfare Foundation, includes a combination of online and in-person training completed over a six-month period. Working in teams, and with support from skilled faculty, RJTI participants will gain the skills and knowledge necessary to advance racial justice in areas including immigration, housing, education, employment, and healthcare, among others.

Following the training, Fellows will join a growing national alumni network of advocates working to advance a coordinated racial justice agenda, led by the Shriver Center’s new Racial Justice Network Director.

“The Shriver Center has been on the front lines of advancing justice for 50 years now, and their leadership is needed now more than ever,” said Merchant, who is joining the Shriver Center after six years at the Mississippi Center for Justice, serving most recently as the managing attorney at its Delta Office as well as the director of education law. Merchant is also a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Leadership Network Fellow. “I am proud to lead our Racial Justice Network at such a pivotal moment.”

Entering its fourth year, RJTI has cultivated 117 advocates representing 62 organizations in 23 states. The RJTI alumni network continues to work in concert on several issues, including education equity and fair housing. RJTI Fellows have also provided innovative advocacy approaches and civil litigation strategies in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

This year’s cohort includes public interest lawyers, legal aid attorneys, communicators, and fundraisers. 2017 Fellows have experience in a wide range of advocacy areas, including economic justice, criminal justice





reform, employment and labor reform, immigrants' rights, and consumer protection, among others. Overall, nearly two thirds of Fellows are people of color, and 68% are women.

“Our program’s diversity is particularly important given the current political and policy landscape,” said Hemley. “The challenges ahead might be arduous, but together, we have the potential to develop solutions we could not begin to imagine on our own.”

The full list of Fellows can be found below.

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The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law provides national leadership in advancing laws and policies that secure justice to improve the lives and opportunities of people living in poverty. We specialize in practical solutions. We advocate for and serve clients directly, while also building the capacity of the nation’s legal aid providers to advance justice and opportunity for their clients. www.povertylaw.org

2017 RJTI Fellows

Portia Allen-Kyle, ACLU of New Jersey, NJ
Nefertiti Ankra, The Legal Aid Society - NY, NY
Kori Ashley, Legal Action of Wisconsin, WI
Nadia Aziz, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA
Patricia Baird, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan, MI
Mariel Block, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA
Pamela Bridge, Community Legal Services - Arizona, AZ
Lorray Brown, Michigan Poverty Law Program, MI
Trevor Brown, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, IL
Becca Brune, Nebraska Appleseed, NE
Alison Brunner, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA
Jamie Burke, Brooklyn Defender Services, NY
Lucero Chavez, Public Counsel - California, CA
Richard Eppink, ACLU of Idaho, ID
Cassandra Goodman, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County, CA
Nicole Goodson, Legal Aid and Defender Association, MI
Steve Hernandez, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA
Kevin Herrera, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, IL
Joshua Hirsch, Public Counsel - California, CA
Pamela Hoekwater, Legal Aid of Western Michigan, MI
Lauren Holzer, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County, CA
Jennifer Johnson, Legal Action of Wisconsin, WI
Peter Koneazny, Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee, Inc., WI
Jeanne LoCicero, ACLU of New Jersey, NJ
Kait Madsen, Nebraska Appleseed, NE
Mitch, University of Wisconsin Law School, WI
Leo Morales, ACLU of Idaho, ID
Anna Moss, Legal Services of South Central Michigan, MI
Anya Mukarji-Connolly, Brooklyn Defender Services, NY





Alisa Parker, Legal Services of South Central Michigan, MI
Keerthi Potluri, ACLU of New Jersey, NJ
Ruby Renteria, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA
Kevin Reyes, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County, CA
Jennifer Riley-Collins, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, IL
Stanley Silas, Community Legal Services - Arizona, AZ
Adan Soltren, The Legal Aid Society - New York, NY
Tamara Steckler, The Legal Aid Society - New York, NY
Shantell Steve, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, IL
Joon Sung, Lakeshore Legal Aid, MI
Nisha Vyas, Public Counsel - California, CA
Lambreni Waddell, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County, CA
Matthew Warren, Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA
Alicia White, Brooklyn Defender Services, NY
Omaid Zabih, Nebraska Appleseed, NE

2017 RJTI Faculty and Coaches Include:

Daryl Atkinson, U.S. Department of Justice; Southern Coalition for Social Justice, NC
Anita Earls, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, NC
Dorcas Gilmore, Consultant, MD
Ellen Hemley, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, MA
Luz M. Henríquez, Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, MO
Janerick Holmes, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, IL
Alan Jenkins, Opportunity Agenda, NY
Gavin Kearney, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, IL
Terry Keleher, Race Forward, IL
Bill Kennedy, The Race Equity Project, CA
Kimberly Merchant, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, MS
Candace Moore, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law, IL
Mona Tawatao, Western Center on Law and Poverty, CA
Kate Walz, Sargent Shriver National Center

