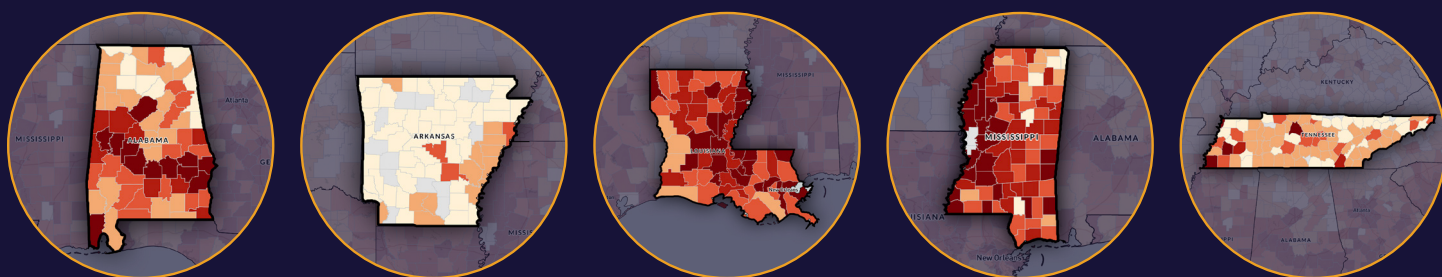


SOUTHERN POLICYMAKER ACADEMY

OCTOBER 22-23 | MEMPHIS, TN

Bridging the gap
between policymakers
and people with lived
experience to create
solutions.



Presented by:



Sponsored by:



**Check out the
Academy's HIV
resources library:**





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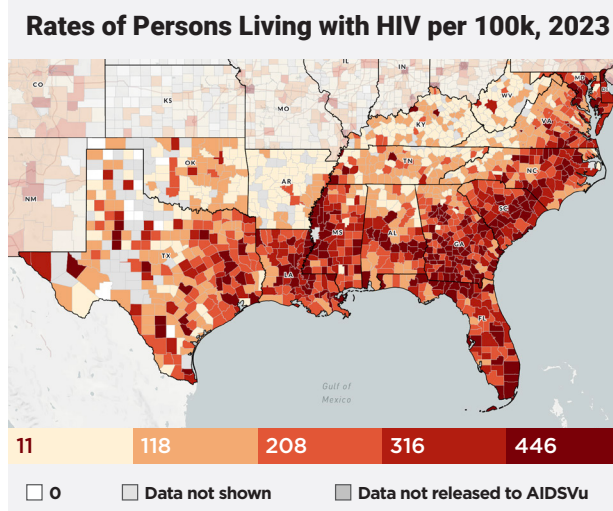
WHY WE'RE HERE

The U.S. South experiences a higher burden of HIV compared to other regions across the U.S., especially among communities of color.

In **2023**, there were **519,223 people living with HIV in the South**.

That same year, the **South made up nearly half (47%) of new HIV diagnoses**.

Systemic issues like access to healthcare, barriers to care, racial and ethnic inequities, HIV criminalization, stigma, and more contribute to HIV's negative impact on the South.



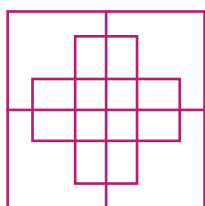
Source: AIDSVu

ABOUT THE ACADEMY

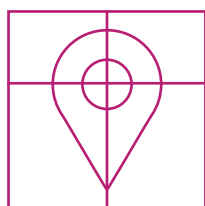
Southern Policymaker Academy is a critical meeting of the minds, where policymakers and advocates from a range of experiences come together to change the course of HIV's impact on the U.S. South.

This year, we will be focusing on policy decisions in five key states: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Your perspective and voice will be critical in helping us align on bipartisan policy solutions to challenges facing the HIV community.

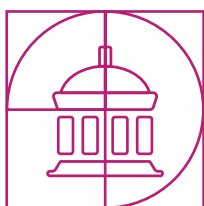
Together we'll:



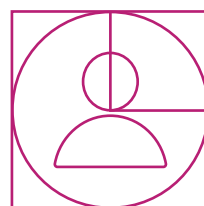
Empower leaders to make transformative change by increasing health literacy, specifically around HIV equity.



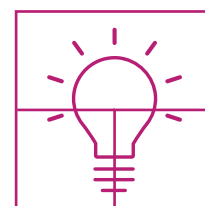
Explore solutions to regional disparities guided by experts and advocates, with meaningful guidance by people living with HIV.



Encourage more participation in and collaboration on proactive HIV-related bill making.



Identify policies and policymaking that work toward ending the HIV epidemic and benefit and reach people living with HIV.



Provide HIV impact education, awareness, and data support for leaders to guide their decision making.

Presented by **Southern AIDS Coalition**, this academy is an opportunity for the experiences and voices of those impacted by HIV to align with political leaders and move the needle in bipartisan policy action for those impacted by HIV.

Thank you for joining us as we push to bridge the gap between policymakers and people with lived experiences to create solutions for those impacted by HIV and health disparities.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION FOR YOUR VISIT TO MEMPHIS

Your safety and comfort are our top priorities during your stay in Memphis. Please be aware that both local police and federal law enforcement may be visible throughout the city. Stay calm and informed if you interact with officers.

I QUICK TIPS

- Always carry a photo ID and your phone with a charger.
 - Let a trusted person know your plans and check in regularly.
 - You have the right to remain silent, refuse a search, and ask officers to identify themselves.
 - You may record public interactions with law enforcement as long as you don't interfere.
 - If stopped, ask: "Am I free to go?" If yes, leave calmly.
 - If arrested, say: "I wish to remain silent. I want to speak to a lawyer."
-

I SAFETY REMINDERS

- Use the buddy system and stay aware of your surroundings.
 - Carry only essential documents.
 - If you feel unsafe, leave the area and call for help.
-

I KEY CONTACTS

- **Emergency:** 911
 - **Non-Emergency (Memphis Police):** 901-545-2677
 - **Advocates for Immigrant Rights:** 901-729-9560
-

Stay safe, stay informed, and enjoy a productive and positive conference experience in Memphis!

HOUSEKEEPING

Where & When

DAY 1

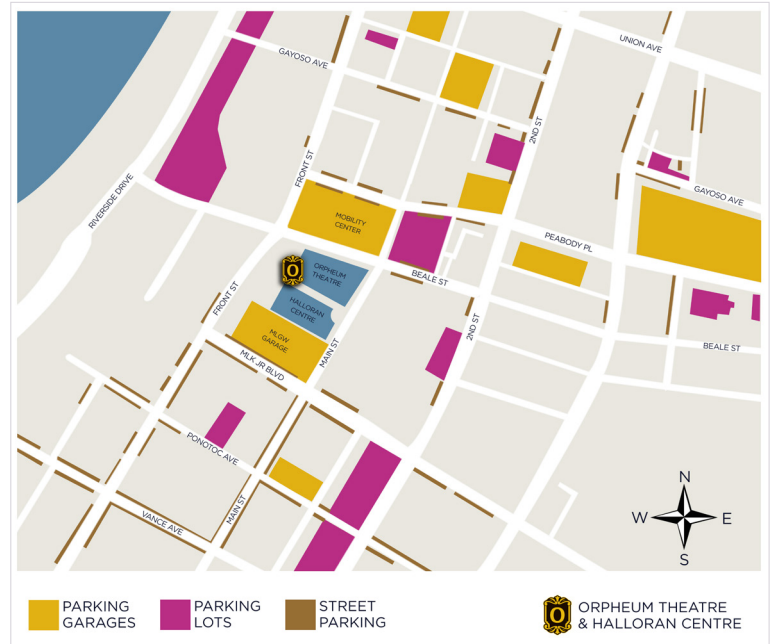
Friends for All

1548 Poplar Ave
Memphis, TN 38104
October 22, 4 pm - 7 pm CT

DAY 2

Halloran Centre

225 S Main Street,
Memphis, TN 38103
October 23, 8 am – 4:30 pm CT



Directions for Day 2

Parking options around the Halloran Centre are marked on the map.

Dietary Restrictions

Dietary restrictions shared via the registration form were shared with the caterer. Please let your server know of any dietary restrictions and they will accommodate.



Questions?

If you have any questions during the event, please visit the registration table or seek assistance from staff around the venue.

If you have questions after the event, please: visit the event website at policymakeracademy.southernaidscoalition.org or email outreach@southernaidscoalition.org.

New to HIV terminology?

Check out the UNAIDS Terminology Guidelines.



EVENT SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

The **Southern Policymaker Academy** is a critical meeting of the minds, where policymakers and advocates from a range of experiences come together to change the course of HIV's impact on the U.S. South.

Presented by **Southern AIDS Coalition**, this is an opportunity for the experiences and voices of those impacted by HIV to align with political leaders and to come together to move the needle in bipartisan policy action for those impacted by HIV.

This toolkit can be used to advocate and amplify our cause.



BELOW PLEASE FIND:



Sample social media content for LinkedIn and X related to the event



Additional resources to support you in your digital advocacy

For advocates: visit [CLICK HERE](#) to identify your local and state elected representatives. Once you have identified your representative, please direct all social media posts to your elected officials' social media accounts using the "@" function.

Ready-to-Use Social Post Templates

- Live from **#SPA25** in Memphis! Today's session on [insert topic] highlights why policymakers must act to end HIV in the South. The voices here are powerful—now we need policies to match. **#EndHIV #HealthEquity #SouthernPolicymakerAcademy**
- **@Rep/[Sen./Official Name]**, communities in [state] are ready for action. At **#SPA25** in Memphis, we're learning how [insert policy solution: e.g. expanding PrEP access, investing in housing, reforming HIV laws] can change lives. Will you join us? **#HIVAwareness #SouthStrong #SouthernPolicymakerAcademy**
- Hearing directly from community leaders at **#SPA25** in Memphis reminds us: the South has the solutions. From [insert example: "faith leaders reducing stigma" / "youth leading prevention" / "states removing barriers to PrEP"], policymakers must listen + act. **#EndStigma #HealthEquity #SouthernPolicymakerAcademy**
- The data is clear: the South carries the highest HIV burden in the U.S. But **#SPA25** in Memphis shows us the path forward—equitable policies, prevention tools, and community investments. Policymakers: it's time to act on the evidence. **#EndHIV #HIVAwareness #SouthernPolicymakerAcademy**
- Leaving **#SPA25** in Memphis inspired by the power of community + faith leadership. Together, we can reduce stigma, build bridges, and create a healthier South. Policymakers: let's turn this vision into action. **#EndHIV #HealthEquity #SouthernPolicymakerAcademy**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the impact of HIV within communities, explore **AIDSVu's resources**. These resources can also be linked in your social media content to spread awareness:

I LOCAL AND NATIONAL DATA

Read AIDSVu's [local and national data](#) to learn more about [HIV in the U.S. South](#) and the five southern focus states:

- [Alabama](#)
- [Arkansas](#)
- [Tennessee](#)
- [Mississippi](#)
- [Louisiana](#)

Visit AIDSVu's exhaustive [data on HIV testing](#)

I TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Visit AIDSVu's [Tools and Resource page](#)

- Read AIDSVu's ["Deeper Look" on HIV in the U.S. South](#)
- Read AIDSVu's ["Deeper Look" on HIV in Black Communities](#)
- Read AIDSVu's ["Deeper Look" on PrEP](#)
- Read AIDSVu's ["Deeper Look" on HIV Criminalization](#)
- Read AIDSVu's ["Deeper Look" on Transgender People and HIV](#)

Find available HIV testing and care services near you with AIDSVu's [service locators](#)

I HEALTH EQUITY

Read AIDSVu's resources on health equity:

- [Dr. Ifeoma Udoh on HIV Prevention and Health Equity for Black Women](#)
- [Health Equity & HIV](#)

AGENDA

DAY 1

Friends for All

1548 Poplar Ave Memphis, TN 38104
October 22, 2025 | 4 pm - 7 pm CT

4:00 PM CT 45 minutes	DAY 1 CHECK-IN & RECEPTION Check-in & appetizers. HIV IN THE SOUTH POSTER SESSION Discussion and posters on HIV in the South by state. <i>Appetizers, hors d'oeuvres, and refreshments will be served.</i>
4:45 PM CT 15 minutes	WELCOME TO THE SOUTHERN POLICYMAKER ACADEMY A welcome from the hosting organization of this event, the Southern AIDS Coalition. • Will Ramirez, MPA, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Southern AIDS Coalition
5:00 PM CT 45 minutes	DAY 1 OPENING PLENARY: VOICES FROM THE FIELD: LOCAL LESSONS FOR STATE ACTION This opening session will ground the Academy in the lived realities of communities across the South most impacted by HIV. Policymakers and advocates will share firsthand insights from Tennessee, highlighting how state and community-level responses can drive progress - and where challenges remain. Speakers will reflect on lessons learned from legislative leadership, community-based services, and clinical care to identify opportunities for state action that advances health equity and strengthens HIV prevention and care across the region. Moderator: • Will Ramirez, MPA, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Southern AIDS Coalition Speakers: • Rep. Torrey Harris, Tennessee House of Representatives, District 91 • Mia Cotton, MPH, COO, Friends for All • Dorcas Young Griffin, MPA, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Shelby County
5:45 PM CT 10 minutes	DAY 1 CLOSING REMARKS: A CALL FOR SOUTHERN ACTION A wrap of day one and concluding words for tomorrow by the sponsor for this event, Gilead Sciences. • Justin Rush, JD, Director U.S. Strategy and Policy, Government Affairs, Gilead Sciences
6:00 PM CT 60 minutes	NETWORKING & HIV IN THE SOUTH POSTER SESSION Freestyle Q&A, discussion, and posters on HIV in the South by state. <i>Appetizers, hors d'oeuvres, and refreshments will be served.</i>

Agenda (CONT.)

DAY 2

Halloran Centre

225 S Main St, Memphis, TN 38103
October 23, 2025 | 8:30 am – 4:30 pm CT

8:30 AM CT
30 minutes

DAY 2 CHECK-IN & RECEPTION

Check-in & breakfast.

**ROOM: MAIN
RECEPTION HALL**

HIV IN THE SOUTH POSTER SESSION

Discussion and posters on HIV in the South by state.

Hot buffet-style breakfast will be available.

9:00 AM CT
45 minutes

HIV 101: STATE OF THE SOUTH – DATA & DISPARITIES

This foundational session will set the stage for the Academy by providing an overview of HIV in the South today. Following a brief welcome from the Southern AIDS Coalition, an expert provider will walk through the latest data on HIV trends, disparities, and health outcomes across Southern states. The discussion will highlight where progress has been made, where gaps persist, and what these realities mean for policymakers tasked with shaping effective, equitable responses. Participants will leave with a clear baseline understanding of the epidemic's scope and the opportunities for state leadership moving forward.

**ROOM: MAIN
RECEPTION HALL**

Welcome:

- **Will Ramirez, MPA**, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, Southern AIDS Coalition

By the Data:

- **Dr. Christa Nevin**, Assistant Professor, Pediatrics, University of Alabama Birmingham

9:45 AM CT
45 minutes

DAY 2 OPENING PLENARY: INVESTING IN STRONGER COMMUNITIES

This plenary will highlight how strategic investments at both the federal and state levels strengthen communities and improve the HIV and STI response across the South. A diverse panel of leaders will share best practices and success stories from across the country. Together, they will explore how states can leverage resources, foster bipartisan collaboration, and apply proven strategies to build healthier, more resilient communities. Participants will gain insights into practical approaches that can inform state action and advance effective, sustainable responses to HIV and other pressing public health challenges.

**ROOM: MAIN
RECEPTION HALL**

Moderator:

- **Darnell Barrington, MPH**, Senior Program Analyst, NACCHO

Panelists:

- **Elizabeth Torrance**, Director of Policy & Advocacy, AIDS Alabama
- **Amna Osman, MPA**, CEO, Nashville Cares
- **Rep. Venton Jones, MS**, Texas House of Representatives, District 100; CEO, Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network

10:30 AM CT

15 minutes

**ROOM: LOUNGE
BAR**

BREAK & REFRESH

Refreshments will be available.

10:45 AM CT

60 minutes

BREAKOUTS

**ROOM:
BOARDROOM**

STRENGTHENING HIV PREVENTION AND ACCESS ACROSS THE SOUTH

This breakout session will provide an in-depth look at HIV prevention efforts in the South with a focus on expanding access to PrEP. The discussion will cover the fundamentals of PrEP access and funding, explore data such as the PrEP-to-Need ratio, and highlight key policy developments shaping prevention in the region. Case studies will include recent legislative efforts such as Mississippi's prior authorization bill and Louisiana's successful pharmacist prescribing law. Featuring perspectives from policy experts, advocates, and pharmacy leadership, this session will equip participants with practical knowledge and strategies to strengthen prevention and reduce barriers across Southern states.

Moderator:

- **Dr. Adrienne Simmons**, Director, Government Affairs, Policy Advocacy, and Alliances, Gilead Sciences

Speakers:

- **Aisha Laws**, Chief Strategist, A LawStrategy (Virtual Attendance)
- **John Meade Jr., MPH**, Senior Program Manager: Policy, AVAC
- **Dr. Anthony Pudlo**, CEO, Tennessee Pharmacists Association

**ROOM:
CLASSROOM**

EQUIPPING YOUTH FOR HEALTHY FUTURES

This session will examine how states can strengthen opportunities for young people to lead healthier, more successful lives through practical approaches to sexual health education and HIV prevention. With a focus on ensuring resources reach those who need them most, including young women of color, the discussion will center on how tools like PrEP and age-appropriate education can help reduce health risks, support family well-being, and build stronger communities. Panelists will share effective strategies and policy approaches that promote personal responsibility, expand access to prevention, and equip the next generation with knowledge to make informed choices for their futures.

Moderator:

- **Judith Montenegro**, Latinos in the South, Latino Commission on AIDS

Speakers:

- **Christina Clark-Okarmus, MPP**, Executive Director, Alabama Campaign for Adolescent Sexual Health
- **Gabriela Hernandez, JD**, Lead Movement Lawyer, Sister Love
- **Dr. Jasper Kennedy**, Medical Director, West Alabama Women's Center

11:45 AM CT
45 minutes

BREAKOUTS

ROOM:
CLASSROOM

ADVOCATE BREAKOUT: CRAFTING THE MESSAGE: COMMUNICATIONS THAT MOVE POLICY

This session is designed specifically for advocates seeking to enhance their communications strategies to effectively engage bipartisan audiences. Participants will learn techniques for crafting clear, respectful, and compelling messages that resonate across the political spectrum. The discussion will focus on how to frame HIV-related policy issues in ways that align with shared values such as personal responsibility, fiscal prudence, and community well-being, ultimately building broader support for impactful and sustainable policy change.

Speakers:

- **Christina Adeleke, JD**, Senior Policy Manager, AIDS United
- **Maxx Boykin**, Campaign Manager, PrEP4All

ROOM:
BOARDROOM

POLICYMAKER BREAKOUT: SOLUTIONS FOR THE STATEHOUSE: POLICY CONVERSATIONS FOR LEGISLATORS

This session is designed for lawmakers seeking effective strategies to advance HIV-related policies that garner bipartisan support in their home states. Participants will explore practical approaches to building coalitions across party lines, communicating shared priorities, and navigating local and federal policymaking dynamics. The discussion will emphasize how to craft inclusive, results-driven policy initiatives that reflect community needs while appealing to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, ultimately driving meaningful progress on HIV prevention and care.

Moderator:

- **Rep. Venton Jones, MS**, Texas House of Representatives, District 100; CEO, Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network

12:30 PM CT
45 minutes

ROOM: MAIN
RECEPTION HALL

LUNCH PLENARY: ENGAGING POLICYMAKERS LOCAL TO FEDERAL: STRATEGIES FOR IMPACT

This plenary brings together legislative and advocacy leaders working to strengthen the HIV response through collaboration and shared purpose. A local legislator joins national public health and policy experts to discuss practical strategies for advancing prevention, care, and equitable access. Panelists will highlight how bipartisan partnerships, data-driven policymaking, and community engagement can translate ideas into achievable outcomes. Attendees will leave with insight into how cooperation across various levels of government can drive sustained progress against HIV and strengthen public health efforts nationwide.

Moderator:

- **Will Ramirez, MPA**, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Southern AIDS Coalition

Speakers:

- **Dorcas Young Griffin, MPA**, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Shelby County
- **Michael Elizabeth**, Director of Public Health Policy, Equality Federation
- **Maxx Boykin**, Campaign Manager, PrEP4All

1:15 PM CT
15 minutes

BREAK & REFRESH

Refreshments will be available.

1:30 PM CT

45 minutes

**ROOM: MAIN
RECEPTION HALL**

AFTERNOON PLENARY: THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND HIV: MODERNIZING HIV LAWS

This session will focus on the intersection of the justice system and HIV, highlighting the urgent need to modernize and reform HIV-related laws. Panelists will explore the history and impact of HIV criminalization statutes, share lived experiences and expert perspectives and discuss actionable strategies for lawmakers and advocates to update or repeal outdated policies. The conversation will emphasize bipartisan approaches to promote justice, reduce stigma, and ensure that laws reflect current science and public health best practices, helping to build safer and more equitable communities across the South.

Moderator:

- **Will Ramirez, MPA**, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Southern AIDS Coalition

Speakers:

Opening remarks from Delegate Kristopher Fair, Maryland House of Delegates, District 3A

- **Jada Hicks, JD**, Senior PJP Attorney, Center for HIV Law and Policy
- **Michael Elizabeth**, Director of Public Health Policy, Equality Federation
- **Phillip Westry, JD**, Executive Director, Free State Justice

2:15 PM CT

60 minutes

**ROOM:
CLASSROOM**

BREAKOUTS

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND PUBLIC SAFETY

This session will explore how access to essential wraparound services - such as stable housing, reliable transportation, and public safety - plays a critical role in improving health outcomes and well-being for people affected by HIV. Panelists will discuss the importance of integrating these support systems into local and state responses, highlight successful funding strategies, and share practical approaches to strengthening service delivery. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of how investing in these foundational supports not only benefits individuals but also builds stronger, healthier communities across the South.

Moderator:

- **Will Ramirez, MPA**, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Southern AIDS Coalition

Speakers:

- **Matt Martin**, Associate Director, NC AIDS Action Network
- **Rita Harcrow**, Director of Home TA, National HIV/AIDS Housing Coalition
- **Liz Kaplan, JD**, Director of Health Care Access, Harvard Health Law & Policy Clinic

**ROOM:
BOARDROOM**

HOW WE WILL END THE HIV EPIDEMIC: INNOVATIONS IN TESTING, TELEHEALTH, AND LONG-ACTING TREATMENTS

This session will spotlight groundbreaking advancements that are shaping the next phase of the HIV response in the South. Panelists will discuss innovations in rapid and community-based testing, the expansion of telehealth to increase access to care, and the latest developments in long-acting treatments. The discussion will highlight successes, challenges, and opportunities for integrating these tools, with a focus on practical strategies to help states accelerate progress toward ending the HIV epidemic. Attendees will gain insight into how embracing innovation can help break down barriers, reach more people, and support healthier communities statewide.

Moderator:

- **Dr. DeAnn Gruber**, Former Director, Bureau of Infectious Disease, Louisiana Office of Public Health

Speakers:

- **Dr. Alftan Dyson**, Head, US Strategic Medical Partnerships for ViiV Healthcare
- **Danny Harris, ThM**, Former Executive Director of Engaging Arkansas Communities

3:15 PM CT

15 minutes

**ROOM: LOUNGE
BAR**

BREAK & REFRESH

Refreshments will be available.

3:30 PM CT

60 minutes

**ROOM: MAIN
RECEPTION HALL**

CLOSING PLENARY: HARNESSING FAITH AND COMMUNITY VOICES FOR ACTION

This final session will celebrate the power of faith and community leadership in advancing the response to HIV across the South. A distinguished faith leader will share experiences and strategies for building bridges, reducing stigma, and mobilizing faith communities for meaningful advocacy and support. The session will also include closing remarks from the host organization, highlighting key takeaways and next steps for collective action. Attendees will leave inspired by the critical role that values-driven leadership and community engagement play in creating lasting change.

Opening & Closing Remarks:

- **Mardrequis Harris, MAEd**, Deputy Director, Southern AIDS Coalition

Faith Speaker:

- **Rev. Carmarion Anderson-Harvey**, Minister for Congregational Leadership, United Church of Christ
-

SPEAKERS

Speakers are organized alphabetically by last name.



Christina Adeleke, JD (she/her/hers)

Senior Policy Manager, Health Equity and Public Affairs
AIDS United

Christina Adeleke, Esq. is a social justice activist and attorney who uses her insatiable curiosity and drive to work towards creating a better world for all, especially members of vulnerable and historically underserved communities.

Prior to her time at AIDS United, Christina served as the Policy and Communications Manager for the North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NCAAN). At NCAAN, Christina meaningfully engaged with people living with HIV and impacted communities, including communities of color, rural communities, people living with hepatitis, people who use drugs, and LGBTQ+ people, and monitored state and federal legislative and administrative activity and actively participated in various policy coalitions and committees focused on issues impacting people living with or impacted by HIV. During her tenure, she spearheaded efforts on modernizing the state of North Carolina's HIV criminal law and the creation of the state's Ending the HIV Epidemic plan.

Before her time at NCAAN, Christina served as the Coalition Organizer at Equality NC (ENC), an organization dedicated to securing equality rights and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) North Carolinians.

Christina is originally from Miami, FL and is (usually) proud of her hometown. In her free time, Christina enjoys yoga, quality time with friends, exploring different food and arts scenes, antiques/ thrifting and traveling.



Rev. Elder Carmarion D. Anderson-Harvey (she/her/hers)

Minister for Congregational Leadership
United Church of Christ

Rev. (Elder) Carmarion D. Anderson-Harvey is an ordained minister, pioneering leader, and passionate advocate for marginalized communities. She is the former Alabama State Director with the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, DC, where she made history as the first transgender person of color to serve in a senior leadership role in the organization's history.

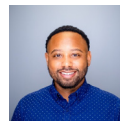
A steadfast champion for equality, Rev. Carmarion has helped shape local, state, and national policy, including through strong engagements with the White House. Her nationally recognized work advances justice, inclusion, and access to respectful, culturally competent outcomes.

As a dynamic public educator and speaker, she has been featured on numerous platforms—including documentaries, national publications, and media engagements—to raise

awareness and drive transformative change. Rev. Carmarion's lived experience and ministry call have been highlighted on CNN's United Shades of America with W. Kamau Bell and in an Emmy Award-winning interview with Dyllon Burnside, featured in the Prideland documentary.

She is ordained through The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (TFAM). She is a Committee on Ministry (COM) Privilege-of-Call candidate with the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. Rev. Carmarion currently serves as an Associate with First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Birmingham, Alabama, and was recently named Minister for Congregational Leadership with the United Church of Christ National Ministries Staff.

Originally from Dallas, Texas, with deep family roots in Natchez, Mississippi, Rev. Carmarion is a proud mother and grandmother. Her unwavering commitment to inclusion and social justice reflects her calling to help create a more just, loving, and equitable world for all.



Darnell Barrington, MPH, CHES (he/him/his)

Principal Consultant
HIMPACT Health Equity Consulting

Darnell Barrington, MPH, CHES is a seasoned public health professional and health equity strategist with over a decade of experience advancing community-centered initiatives. He brings deep expertise in supporting local and state health departments with the implementation of high-impact special projects and federally funded programs. Darnell has held leadership roles at the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), Southern AIDS Coalition, and the Virginia Department of Health, where he has championed innovative, equity-driven solutions across the HIV prevention and care continuum.



Maxx Boykin (he/him/his)

Campaign Manager
PrEP4All

Maximillian Boykin is an experienced coalition and campaign manager. Currently he is the manager of the Save HIV Funding Campaign and the Movement Director for Black South Rising. From 2021 to 2024 he served as a Senior State Campaigns Manager at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, supporting long-term advocacy campaigns within the State Priorities Partnership. Boykin, also known as Maxx, was the policy and organizing manager at the Black AIDS Institute and the national leader of the Black Treatment Advocates Network (BTAN) before

Speakers (CONT.)

joining CBPP. In his heart, he is an organizer, activist, and believer in “we have to be the change we want to see.”

Maxx has been a part of creating multiple coalitions including Resist Reimagine Rebuild Coalition, HIV Racial Justice Now!, Black South Rising, Black United Leadership Initiative and along with his Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leaders team, created the Organizing Health Institute as a part of Reimagine Health: an action-tank that worked to connect, train and help support social justice campaigns with people working to improve their communities health.

He has been an organizer for a wide array of issue-based, political, and union organizing. His first two years were in election organizing, starting in Savannah, Georgia, on local campaigns, later moving to Virginia to work on four winning campaigns including state senate, governor, and presidential races. In Illinois, he has worked on the Fight for 15 campaign and the Get Covered America campaign around healthcare access before spending almost three years at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. There he worked to design, train, and build both local and national advocate networks centering those living with HIV and black communities to address ending HIV the epidemic through tackling structural barriers, including tackling the state budget crisis and increasing care access. He has always worked in primarily Black and marginalized communities and loves working with his people to make sure they are uplifted and liberated.



Christina Clark Okarmus, MPP
(she/her/hers)

Executive Director
Alabama Campaign for Adolescent Sexual Health

Christina Clark Okarmus (she/her) leads the Alabama Campaign for Adolescent Sexual Health (ACASH) as its Executive Director. With over 14 years working in adolescent sexual health, Christina is committed to the right of young people in to receive comprehensive sexual health education. She cares deeply about the ability of all people to have the knowledge, skills, and access to services to take care of their health.

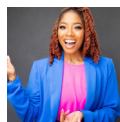
During her tenure at ACASH, Christina started the first Youth Advisory Council program, developed an online sex ed foundation course called the Sex Ed Professional Learning Series, and successfully stopped anti-sex ed legislation from passing in 2024 and 2025. Christina serves as chair of the Alabama Department of Public Health Family Planning Advisory Committee and is a member of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT), Doula Training International, and Pi Gamma Mu. She has her Master of Public Policy from the University of Northern Iowa and her Bachelor of Science in Political Science from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.



Mia Cotton, MPH
(she/her/hers)

Chief Operations Officer
Friends For All

Mia Cotton is Chief Operations Officer at Friends For All (formerly Friends For Life), a Memphis-based organization delivering comprehensive medical and supportive services for people affected by HIV/AIDS. She began her career in 2007 with Methodist Le Bonheur, leading street outreach and case-finding within the Latinx community. Mia joined Friends For Life in 2010 as a Case Manager and advanced through successive leadership roles. She holds a BA in Spanish from the University of Memphis and an MPH from Walden University. Mia previously co-chaired the Ryan White Planning Council the Memphis & Shelby County Homeless Consortium Planning Committee. With 17+ years of experience, she champions equitable, dignified care and addresses social determinants of health across the Mid-South.



Dr. Alftan Dyson
(she/her/hers)

Head, U.S. Strategic Medical Partnerships
ViiV Healthcare

Alftan Dyson, PharmD, AAHIVP, FNPhA, serves as Head of Strategic Medical Partnerships at ViiV Healthcare, where she leads collaborations with health professional associations, medical institutions, and other key stakeholders to drive innovation and advance ViiV's mission. Previously, she was Regional Medical Lead for Rukobia and US Health Equity Medical Engagement Lead, spearheading medical planning, scientific communications, and stakeholder training while fostering partnerships to address disparities and increase disease awareness.

Since joining ViiV in 2019 as a Medical Science Liaison for the US Southeast, Alftan has held key roles, including Acting Director on the Global Public Health and Innovation team and US Medical Director for Rukobia. Prior to ViiV, she served as Director of Pharmacy Services at Medical Advocacy and Outreach in Montgomery, AL, overseeing pharmacy operations and 340B compliance.

Dr. Dyson earned her Doctor of Pharmacy from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in 2013 and completed a residency at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2014. She is a life member of the National Pharmaceutical Association (NPhA), serves on the NPhA Foundation Board, and chairs the American Academy of HIV Medicine's Council on Racial Equity. In her spare time, Alftan enjoys traveling the world with her partner, Dorian, and exploring new cultures.

Speakers (CONT.)



**Michael Elizabeth
(they/she)**

Director of Public Health Policy
Equality Federation

Mike is the Director of Public Health Policy at Equality Federation. In this role, they lead our Public Health Department, which mobilizes our state partner organizations to leverage their advocacy capacity to influence Public Health policy and ensure effective implementation of those policies, with a focus on HIV and other health issues that disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ communities.

They have spent the last 14 years rooted in LGBTQ+ political and community organizing ranging from LGBTQ+ policy work with state and local elected officials in Texas to HIV advocacy fighting against HIV Criminalization laws and for adequate public health funding and culturally competent prevention services. Most recently, Mike was elected as Vice Chair of the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus.

Mike is very proud of their role as former President of the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus, growing the organization to be one of the most diverse and largest membership-driven LGBTQ+ civil rights organizations in the South, which held local elected officials accountable to the LGBTQ community while helping elect pro-LGBTQ+ candidates.



**Kristopher Fair
(he/him/his)**

Delegate, District 3
Maryland House of Delegates

Kris is serving his first term in the House of Delegates, representing District 3. Kris is a House Ways and Means Committee member and its Subcommittees on Education and Election Law. Kris is the current Chair of the Maryland Legislative LGBTQ Caucus, legislative co-chair of the transit caucus, and member of the veterans, women's, and Latino caucuses. He also represents the House on the Washington Council of Governments Transportation Planning Board.

Kris has been recognized for his many local civic contributions as an active member of local nonprofit organizations, small businesses, and government agencies. A former member of the Frederick County Democratic Central Committee, he has received many awards and honors, including Maryland LGBT Chamber Community Leader of the Year, the Frederick County Chamber of Commerce Equality Award, and Frederick County Democratic Volunteer of the Year.

His legislation, the Carlton R. Smith HIV Modernization Act of 2025, passed this year and built on over 13 years of hard work from HIV advocates towards repealing Maryland's HIV criminalization statute.



**Dr. DeAnn Gruber
(she/her/hers)**

Former Director, Bureau of Infectious Disease
Louisiana Office of Public Health

DeAnn Gruber, PhD, LCSW, has worked in the HIV field for more than 35 years. She was the Director of the STI/HIV/Hepatitis Program for the Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health (LDH OPH) (2010-2019), Chairperson of NASTAD (2016-2017), and Director of the Bureau of Infectious Diseases for LDH OPH (2016-2025). Her areas of expertise include administration, policy, program planning and evaluation, and grantsmanship.



**Rita Harcrow
(she/her/hers)**

Director, NHAHC HOME TA Center
National HIV/AIDS Housing Coalition

Rita Harcrow has dedicated more than two decades to advancing affordable housing, community development, and health equity at the local, state, and federal levels. She recently joined the National HIV/AIDS Housing Coalition (NHAHC) as Director of the HOME TA Center, where she leads efforts to expand technical assistance, training, and resources that help communities create and sustain housing solutions for people living with HIV.

Prior to NHAHC, Rita served as Deputy Regional Director for HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (Region IV), and she led HUD's Office of HIV/AIDS Housing, managing the Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) program—growing the office and its portfolio during her nine-year tenure as Director.

Her earlier career spans more than 20 years in rural Alabama, where she led a Ryan White HIV medical clinic and developed housing programs funded by HOME, CDBG, and HOPWA.



**Danny Harris, ThM
(he/him/his)**

Former Executive Director
Engaging Arkansas Communities

Danny served for 4 years as the Arkansas HIV Planning Group Community Co-Chair and as Executive Director of Engaging Arkansas Communities, during which he developed innovative HIV initiatives and HIV prevention programs. Currently, he coordinates EHE emergency assistance programs for PLWHA. He is a father of 5 children and grandfather of 4 which are the joy of his life.

Speakers (CONT.)



Mardreques Harris, MAEd
(he/him)

Deputy Director
Southern AIDS Coalition

Mardreques Harris, MAEd is a native of Somerville, TN and currently resides in Atlanta, GA. He serves as the Deputy Director of the Southern AIDS Coalition (SAC) and is proud to be the organization's longest serving employee. Mardreques is a graduate of Tennessee State University in Nashville, TN and completed his Master of Arts in Education with a focus in Community Health from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He has a public health background with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS that spans well over a decade. His experience extends across the spectrum, inclusive of clinical research, community-based organizations, state government, and national affiliations. His greatest joy comes with doing regional work that focuses specifically on the Southern U.S. and being able to amplify the resilience that comes with being a Southerner.



Torrey Harris
(he/him/his)

Representative, District 91
Tennessee House of Representatives

Representative Torrey C. Harris is a proud community leader and advocate for Justice Rights, Public Education, Children & Families, and Foster and Adopted Youth in Tennessee. He believes everyone deserves the same opportunities to reach their fullest potential.

Elected in 2020, Representative Harris is the first and only openly LGBTQ+ State Elected Official in Tennessee. A native of Memphis, he now serves his third term in the Tennessee House of Representatives for District 91, after previously serving in District 90 before redistricting.

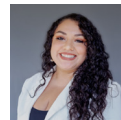
His colleagues have elected him to key leadership roles including Tennessee House Democratic Floor Leader, Chair of the Shelby County Delegation, and Ranking Member of the Children & Families Committee, Secretary of the Tennessee Black Caucus. Nationally, he serves as an At-Large Member of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators.

Before public office, Harris was a Vice President at Friends for Life (now Friends For All), the largest HIV/AIDS support organization in the Mid-South. He also serves as Board Chair of CHOICES Center for Reproductive Health, which offers abortion care, midwifery, and LGBTQ+ wellness services and Representative Harris was a 2025 Southern AIDS Coalition Honoree.

Currently, he is CEO of a government relations firm that helps nonprofits gain equitable access to government funding and legislative support and a Non-Profit Consultant for raising capital campaign dollars.

In his free time you will catch him serving all mankind either with as a brother of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, The Academia Society, NAACP, or..playing spades – running bostons and people off tables across the country – so feel free to meet him in the lobby after this! Just joking....but serious...

For over a decade, Rep. Harris has championed progressive equality and inclusion, mentoring young leaders and challenging unjust policies. He lives by the mantra: "Our prime purpose in this life is to help others, and if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."



Grabiela Hernandez, JD
(she/her/hers)

Lead Movement Lawyer
SisterLove, Inc

Grabiela D. Hernandez, J.D., is an advocate and movement lawyer committed to using the power of law to advance human rights and drive social transformation. Through legal action and policy reform, Grabiela advances social movements that are led by those most directly impacted, focuses on building and exercising collective power, and engages in advocacy within the legal system while simultaneously reimagining it.

Grabiela leads the Justice, Law, and Policy Project (JLPP) at SisterLove, Inc., where she uses the law as a tool to challenge systemic oppression and advocate for the rights of underserved and vulnerable populations. In her role as Lead Movement Lawyer, Grabiela mobilizes the law to challenge injustice - conducting legal research and analysis, drafting comprehensive policies that reflect the needs of underserved communities, builds strategic legal partnerships for collective power, and empowers communities with rights-based education on intersecting civil and human rights.

As the founding lawyer of the JLPP at SisterLove, Inc., Grabiela has a deep commitment to justice, and is developing a legal model rooted in movement lawyering, where legal tools are used in partnership with grassroots organizers to challenge entrenched power structures and uphold the rights and dignity of those most impacted by injustice. Grabiela brings both legal expertise and a deep belief in community power to her role. Through her work, Grabiela is helping to redefine what it means to harness the law in service of justice and liberation.

Grabiela earned her B.A. in Political Science with honors from Florida International University and received her Juris Doctorate from Emory University School of Law in 2023. During law school, she clerked for the Honorable Judge Rachel Krause

Speakers (CONT.)

at the Fulton County Superior Court and worked with Mosaic Georgia, where she supported civil litigation for families of survivors of sexual assault. She joined SisterLove through the If/When/How Lawyering for Reproductive Justice Fellowship before assuming her current role as Lead Movement Lawyer.



Jada Hicks, JD
(she/her/hers)

Senior PJP Attorney
The Center for HIV Law and Policy

Jada Hicks, Senior PJP Attorney, (she/her) earned her Juris Doctor from North Carolina Central University School of Law. While at NCCU she was certified in Civil Rights and Constitutional Law. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Criminology from North Carolina State University. Prior to joining CHLP, she served as an inaugural Judicial Fellow for the Administrative Office of the Courts. While there she provided independent and confidential legal research and writing support to the more than 370 judges in North Carolina's Superior and District Courts. Previously, Jada worked as an Assistant District Attorney for the Pitt County District Attorney's Office. She prosecuted cases ranging from drug offenses to DWIs.



Venton Jones, Jr., MS
(he/him/his)

Representative, District 100
Texas House of Representatives
CEO, Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network

State Representative Venton Jones (Dallas) is currently serving his second term in the Texas House of Representatives. Representative Jones serves as a Vice-Chair of the House Committee on Corrections and as a member of the House Appropriations Committee. In addition to his committee appointments, He serves as Whip of the Texas House Democratic Caucus, Vice Chair of the Texas House LGBTQ Caucus, Parliamentarian of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, and Legislative Chairman of the Aggie Caucus.

He is the Founder and CEO of the Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network (SBPAN), where the mission of the organization is to improve health, social, and economic conditions impacting Black communities in the U.S. South. Since the beginning of his career, Representative Jones has been a tireless advocate working to improve healthcare access, fighting for marginalized communities and middle-class families, and protecting voting rights.



Liz Kaplan, JD
(she/her/hers)

Director of Health Care Access
Harvard Health Law & Policy Clinic

Elizabeth focuses her practice at CHLPI on issues impacting access to care and prevention for HIV, hepatitis C, and other chronic and complex conditions. Prior to joining CHLPI, she worked as an Assistant Attorney General for Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey. There, she represented a variety of state agencies, including MassHealth, in institutional reform and other litigation. She also has experience working in a medical-legal partnership, where she provided direct legal services to low-income clients with chronic conditions such as HIV and mental illness. Her work spanned a variety of areas, including legal issues related to Medicare, Medicaid, and the rollout of the Affordable Care Act.

Elizabeth clerked for the Hon. Margot Botsford of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. She earned her JD from the University of California, Berkeley Law School, and her BA from Williams College. She is a licensed member of the Massachusetts Bar.



Dr. Jasper Kennedy
(he/them)

Medical Director
West Alabama Women's Center

Jasper Kennedy is a board certified family physician. He grew up in north Alabama, attended medical school at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and completed residency at the University of Washington. He currently serves as Medical Director of WAWC Healthcare, a sliding scale clinic in Tuscaloosa, Alabama which provides quality prenatal care, routine gynecologic exams, gender affirming care for adults, and testing, prevention, and treatment for STIs and HIV.



Aisha Laws
(she/her/hers)

Chief Strategist
A LawStrategy

Aisha Laws is a strategic visionary and industry disruptor known for breaking silos and delivering bold, cross-sector solutions. With expertise spanning public health, policy and legal strategy, and high-stakes event production, she specializes in crafting innovative strategies that don't just meet expectations—they redefine them.

Speakers (CONT.)

Aisha brings a unique ability to draw insights from diverse fields, challenging outdated norms and sparking collaboration where others see limitations. Her work has guided organizations through complex challenges with agility, clarity, and measurable impact. Whether orchestrating a policy-driven event, designing a high-impact campaign, or shaping thought leadership narratives, Aisha's approach is data-driven, people-centered, and built for lasting influence.

Also known as "Mama", Aisha's free time is consumed by raising fierce humans, spending time with her husband, cooking gourmet dishes from across the globe, canning and traditional food preservation.



Matt Martin
(he/they)

Associate Director
NC AIDS Action Network

Matt Martin has been with the North Carolina AIDS Action Network's since August 2016 and currently serves as the Associate Director, leading the organization's policy and advocacy initiatives. Matt is a graduate of Western Carolina University and holds a B.S.Ed. and B.M. in Instrumental Music Education with a minor in Religious Studies. After teaching Middle School Band in the NC Public School system for two years, Matt left education to follow a passion for advocacy and activism. When not working, you can typically find Matt reading dystopian novels and drinking entirely too much coffee.

Matt currently is based in Raleigh, North Carolina.



John Meade, Jr., MPH
(he/him/his)

Founding Member
PrEP in Black America

John W. Meade, Jr. is a nationally recognized LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS prevention advocate with more than a decade of experience in public health practice, policy, and advocacy. His work is grounded in a commitment to advancing health equity, with a focus on addressing the social determinants of health that drive disparities in HIV prevention and care.



Judith Montenegro
(she/her/hers)

Program Director
Latinos in the South

Judith Montenegro joined the Latino Commission on AIDS and their Latinos in the South program in 2013 as their Director of Community Organizing and in 2016, she became the Program Director. As a Mexican immigrant living in North Carolina, Judith is passionate about working with immigrant populations focusing on immigration reform, and improving health care access for Latine communities.



Dr. Christa Nevin
(she/her/hers)

Assistant Professor, Pediatrics
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Christa Nevin is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) with a secondary appointment in the Department of Pediatrics, Division of Adolescent Medicine. Her clinical efforts are focused on the provision of care to children, adolescents and adults living with HIV. As Director of the UAB 1917 HIV Clinic, she leads a multidisciplinary HIV team of dedicated professionals from a wide range of medical specialties, and contributes to administrative and clinical expertise in the delivery of HIV outpatient care to >3,800 persons with HIV.



Amna Osman, MPA
(she/her/hers)

Chief Executive Officer
Nashville CARES

Amna Osman is the CEO of Nashville CARES, one of the leading comprehensive HIV and sexual health service and advocacy organizations in the South. With over 25 years of public health leadership, she has advanced health equity, shaped policy, and driven impact at the local, national, and global levels.

Speakers (CONT.)



Dr. Anthony Pudlo
(he/him/his)

CEO
Tennessee Pharmacists Association

Dr. Anthony Pudlo earned his Doctor of Pharmacy degree from Drake University in 2007 and went on to complete a community pharmacy residency at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. He has extensive experience in clinical pharmacy, having served as a Clinical Coordinator and Regional Clinical Manager with Kerr Drug/Kerr Health in Asheville, NC, where he collaborated with patients and physicians to prevent and manage chronic diseases.

Prior to his current role, Dr. Pudlo spent nearly a decade as Vice President of Professional Affairs at the Iowa Pharmacy Association. During his tenure, he provided clinical resources to pharmacists, fostered relationships with state agencies and healthcare organizations, and championed safe and effective medication use across Iowa.

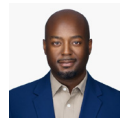
In August 2021, Dr. Pudlo began his role as Chief Executive Officer of the Tennessee Pharmacists Association (TPA). As CEO, he leads TPA in advancing, protecting, and promoting high-quality, pharmacist-provided patient care throughout Tennessee.



Will Ramirez, MPA
(he/him/his)

Director, Public Policy & Advocacy
Southern AIDS Coalition

Will Ramirez is a public health policy strategist and coalition builder focused on strengthening HIV systems of care in the U.S. South. He serves as Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at the Southern AIDS Coalition, where he leads multi-state efforts to improve access to services, inform public policy, and support cross-sector collaboration in the HIV response. Will also serves on the San Antonio HIV Health Services Planning Council and is the co-founder of Project Compassion, a nonprofit focused on growing community resilience to disasters both man made and natural. His work is rooted in public service, systems-level thinking, and meaningful community engagement.



Justin T. Rush, JD
(he/him/his)

Director U.S Strategy and Policy, Government Affairs,
Gilead Sciences

With over a decade of experience in partnerships, policy, and public affairs, I am a seasoned professional who combines a passion for social equity and diversity with a unique blend of public, corporate, and academic expertise. As Director, US Strategy & Policy I lead the development and execution of strategic policy initiatives at the state level to advance the company's mission and vision to end HIV for everyone, everywhere.



Dr. Adrienne Simmons (she/her/hers)

Director, Government Affairs, Policy Advocacy
and Alliances
Gilead Sciences

Adrienne Simmons, PharmD, MS is Director of U.S. Policy Advocacy and Alliances at Gilead Sciences, where she leads strategic partnerships with HIV provider organizations to advance health policy. Based in Washington, DC, Adrienne brings expertise in public health, policy, and pharmacy. She previously served as a Public Health Analyst at the HRSA HIV/AIDS Bureau, supporting HIV care and managing Ryan White Program funding. Prior to that, she was Director of Programs at the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable, working to eliminate policy barriers to hepatitis care. Her pharmacy background includes work as a pharmacist at UNC Medical Center, where she completed a Health-System Pharmacy Administration and Leadership residency focused on improving medication access and care delivery across inpatient and outpatient settings.

Speakers (CONT.)



Elizabeth Torrance, MPH
(she/her/hers)

Co-Director of Policy & Advocacy Organization
AIDS Alabama

Elizabeth Torrance is the Co-Director of Policy and Advocacy at AIDS Alabama, where she leads statewide and federal advocacy efforts to protect and expand funding for HIV prevention, care, and housing programs. She also serves as Project Director for Enroll Alabama, overseeing a team that helps hundreds of Alabamians access affordable healthcare coverage through the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid/CHIP. With a background in biomedical sciences and a Master of Public Health from Baylor University, Elizabeth has built her career at the intersection of health policy, community engagement, and direct patient care. She has organized statewide HIV advocacy campaigns, mobilizing hundreds of advocates at the Alabama State House, and served as State Lead for AIDSWatch in Washington, D.C. Her work focuses on ensuring equitable access to healthcare, advancing HIV funding strategies, and addressing the social determinants of health through collaborative advocacy.



Phillip Westry, JD
(he/him/his)

Executive Director
FreeState Justice

Phillip Westry is the Executive Director of FreeState Justice, a Maryland-based nonprofit organization that provides legal services, advocacy, and community education for the LGBTQ+ community. Under his leadership, FreeState Justice has become one of the few Black-queer-led legal organizations in the country, expanding its reach and deepening its impact across Baltimore City and the Greater Washington region.

Phillip first joined FreeState Justice in 2021 as Legal Director. He became Executive Director in 2022, guiding the organization's statewide efforts to deliver pro bono legal services, build community partnerships, and advance policy reforms that promote safety, housing stability, and dignity for LGBTQ+ Marylanders. A public interest attorney and advocate for equitable housing and social justice, he previously provided legal assistance to Baltimore residents facing foreclosure, eviction, and consumer debt. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

Phillip's leadership centers sustainability, equity, and collective care—grounded in the belief that when Black LGBTQ+ people thrive, all communities move closer to liberation.



Dorcas Young Griffin, MPA
(she/her/hers)

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Shelby County

Mrs. Griffin was appointed as Deputy Chief Administrative Officer in January 2024. She has worked for Shelby County Government for 18 years in various roles including as HIV Public Health Coordinator, Ryan White HIV Program Administrator and Director for the Division of Community Services. Prior to joining Shelby County, Mrs. Griffin worked for the University of Memphis Center for Community Building and Neighborhood Action, Glorious Future Head Start and The Church Health Center. She has extensive experience in grants management, leadership, program planning, development, and implementation. Mrs. Griffin holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; a Master of Public Administration from the University of Memphis; and is currently a PhD student in Urban Affairs at the University of Memphis. Her community involvement includes serving on the Board of Directors for St. Mary's Episcopal School, the Children's Foundation of Memphis, the Memphis and Shelby County Crime Commission and the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis. She is also a graduate of the New Memphis Fellows Program and the Leadership Memphis Executive Program, and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

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