

# Exploring Prosecutor Plea Bargaining Decisions in Philadelphia

## Speaker Biographies

**Steve Austin** is the participatory defender at Mothers in Charge. He has devoted his life to being a front line advocate for improved prison conditions. He has served as a Peer Specialist, where he facilitated violence prevention, anger management, character development, thinking for a change, citizenship and batterers classes for over 30 years for youth and adults. After 42 years in prison, he was released in 2017, and he became connected with Mothers In Charge where he immediately began volunteer work facilitating Participatory Defense; a community organizing model designed to help people with cases understand and navigate the criminal justice system. He quickly became the Director of the program. While doing this, at the tender age of 60, he received his Associate of Art Degree in Human Services from Harcum College. With a National Institute of Corrections certification, he is also a CLE trainer for Philadelphia attorneys, a tenacious criminal justice reform advocate, a proponent of "NO CHILD IS BORN BAD" and committed to the abolishing of life without parole sentencing for juveniles in the United States.

**Leigh Courtney** is a senior policy associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where she works primarily on issues related to mass incarceration and criminal justice system reform. Before joining Urban, Courtney led performance measures development and data analysis at CSR, Incorporated on behalf of the Office for Victims of Crime. As a research intern, she contributed to a report at The Sentencing Project on parole rates for people with life sentences and tracked advances in youth justice reform nationwide for the National Juvenile Justice Network. As an AmeriCorps VISTA with the Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice Project, she helped build new community-based restorative justice initiatives for youth. Courtney holds a BA in sociology/anthropology and Spanish from Denison University. She received her MPP from the University of Maryland School of Public Policy, where she prepared a policy analysis for the Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention on strategies for safely reducing the state's pretrial jail population.

**Jennifer Ferone** is an associate research director at ISLG leading a portfolio of research projects and working with the Research Director around strategy and development for the research department. Jennifer has extensive experience in the development and management of criminal justice research in applied settings, most recently, leading work to enhance data and analytic capacity and conduct research around racial and ethnic disparities across prosecutorial decision-making in Kings County, designing a process evaluation to assess implementation of the New York State Criminal Justice Reform Legislation, and managing a research consortium that aims to advance the Safety and Justice Challenge research agenda. At ISLG, Jennifer has also engaged in performance measurement work for both the Safety and Justice Challenge and Criminal Justice Investment Initiative. Prior to joining ISLG, Jennifer worked at the Vera Institute of Justice managing research focused on system involved young people in New York City. She received two M.A. degrees in criminal justice from John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Rutgers University and is A.B.D. in criminal justice at Rutgers University.

**Oren Gur** is the Director of Research and the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. Oren joined the DAO in 2018 to use data, research, and criminological theory to plan and implement policy to transform Philadelphia's legal system. Dr. Gur has led grants of more than \$4.9 million during his time in the DAO, including to create the DATA Lab, a new unit that supports policy, practice, and research into the impact

of prosecutorial discretion on individuals and communities. Oren's work has included prosecutor-led bail reform, sentencing reform to reduce mass supervision, harm reduction policies for people who use drugs, and the interagency "100 Shooting Review" report on shootings and gun violence, and facilitated independent research on topics including bail reform, accidental drug overdoses and criminal justice contacts, the resentencing of juvenile lifers, diversion for misdemeanor offenses, and more.

**Kris Henderson** is the Executive Director of Amistad Law Project. They grew up in East Orange, New Jersey-- a majority Black, working class community. Their educational career began in East Orange's underfunded schools, continued at a private Christian School and led to boarding school in New England for high school. Their diverse educational experiences and the realization that a quality education is possible but often incredibly expensive, led them to work towards making sure we all have what we need. They are a movement lawyer, a co-founder of Amistad and a co-founding member of the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration. They are on the steering committee of Free The Ballot! Incarcerated Voter Family Network and on the board of directors of Black Youth Project 100. They are a 2018 Law for Black Lives and Movement Law Lab Legal Innovators Fellow and a 2019 Soros Justice Fellow.

**Andreea Matei** is a policy associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her work focuses on a variety of topics related to criminal and juvenile justice reform. Specifically, she works on projects related to prosecutorial decisionmaking, quality of public defense, and youth alternatives to justice involvement. She believes in creating safety, rehabilitation, and accountability outside the criminal justice system and investing in communities supports and services. Before Urban, she worked with the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan as a Civil Liberties Fellow. She collaborated with the policy team to advocate for issues related to juvenile life without parole, bail reforms, and other state criminal justice issues. Matei holds a BA in history and political science from the University of Michigan and an MPP from the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan.

**Janine Zweig** is associate vice president for justice policy in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her work addresses issues related to violent victimization, primarily intimate partner and sexual violence. It includes applied and basic research, with an eye toward contributing useful information to policymakers and practitioners to solve problems and better assist victims, as well as to the general body of knowledge. Zweig conducted several studies that addressed provisions of the Violence Against Women Act and the Prison Rape Elimination Act. She has also written and spoken on the policies and practices around sexual assault medical forensic exam payment, victims' access to the exam, and the exam's role in investigation and prosecution; on criminal justice, local victim service agency, and social services responses to domestic violence and sexual assault victims; on policies and programs to prevent and respond to sexual victimization in prisons, jails, and juvenile justice facilities; on the role of technology in teen dating violence and abuse; and on the role of victimization in the development and persistence of substance use and mental health issues and offending behaviors. Zweig has published in practitioner periodicals and scholarly journals, and her work has been featured in the Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor. She received the Hugo G. Beigel Award for outstanding research based on a longitudinal study of the effects of sexual victimization in the Journal of Sex Research. She earned her PhD in human development and family studies from Pennsylvania State University.