

The Impact of the Uniform Partition of Heirs' Property Act: Local Lessons and the Way Forward

Speaker Biographies

Olivia Barrow Strauss is the Vice President of Housing for the JPMorganChase Policy Center. In this role, she leads federal, state and local policy strategies to advance the firm's Housing Market Affordability priorities. Before joining JPMorganChase, Olivia served as the Deputy Director for National Policy and Advocacy at the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), where she played a pivotal role in shaping a strategic influence agenda for affordable housing and impact lending. Her leadership at LIIF was instrumental in advancing national policy initiatives. Earlier in her career, Olivia was a Senior Policy Analyst at Enterprise Community Partners, where she led advocacy efforts for affordable housing and community development tax credits. Her work has consistently focused on creating sustainable and inclusive communities. Olivia has written several housing publications and actively engages in key housing policy discussions, contributing her expertise to shape the future of housing and community development. She holds a bachelor's degree in public policy and a master's degree in public administration from The George Washington University.

Sarah Bolling Mancini is Managing Director of Advocacy at the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) focusing on foreclosures, mortgage lending, and credit reporting issues. Sarah is a co-author of the report, [Keeping it in the Family: Legal Strategies to Address the Challenge of Heirs Property and Prevent Home Loss](#) and lead author of [Unmet Promise: Reverse Mortgage Servicing Challenges and How to Preserve Housing Stability for Older Adults](#). She is the primary author of [Truth in Lending](#). She is a contributing author to [Home Foreclosures](#), [Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications](#), [Mortgage Lending](#), and [Fair Credit Reporting](#). Sarah is a fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy, and a Director at the Southeastern Bankruptcy Law Institute. She served as chair of the Consumer Advisory Board of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau from 2023 to 24. Before joining NCLC, Sarah worked in the Home Defense Program of Atlanta Legal Aid, and she represented homeowners in litigation in state, federal district, and bankruptcy courts. She also clerked for the Honorable Amy Totenberg, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia. Education: J.D. Harvard Law School, B.A. Princeton University

Ashley Edwards is an Atlanta raised Georgia Peach who comes from a faith-based home where the desire to serve was instilled in her at a young age. A graduate of Georgia State University with a degree in Business Administration and a concentration in Hospitality, she earned her Real Estate license in 2011 and later her Broker License. She has served as a Realtor, Investor Specialist, Project and Property Manager, and in 2022 became a Certified Probate Real Estate Specialist to help families navigate probate and protect their real estate assets, with a growing focus in the heirs property and estate planning spaces. Ashley has also served as a Resident Services Manager supporting low to moderate income families with financial resources, housing stability, and pathways to homeownership. Over the years, Ashley's mission has shifted from selling real estate to helping property owners preserve it as part of a long-term wealth plan for their families and their communities. A proud mother of two daughters, she is committed to

building a wealth system for her own family and believes real estate is one of the most powerful tools for creating lasting financial legacy.

Jacy Fisher is a Partner at Gregory Varner & Associates in Alabama, where she focuses her practice on heirs' property resolution, estate planning, probate administration, and real property litigation. She regularly represents families navigating complex title issues, partition actions, and generational land-retention strategies, and she has extensive experience litigating partition actions under the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act (UPHPA). Jacy's work bridges private practice, public policy, and community education, and she frequently advises landowners, nonprofits, and local governments on practical pathways to prevent forced sales and preserve family land. In addition to her legal practice, Jacy serves as chief legal counsel for Clear Landing, Inc., a nonprofit initiative providing pro bono legal services and title opinions to heirs' property owners across Alabama. She is an active contributor to national training and research efforts on land tenure and estate planning, collaborating with academic institutions, the Heirs' Property Practitioner Network, and community organizations to advance equitable land retention. Through speaking engagements, publications, and peer-to-peer education, Jacy works to translate the UPHPA's legal framework into real-world solutions that strengthen families, protect generational wealth, and support community stability.

Whitney Knox Lee is the founder and managing attorney of Wills for the People LLC. She provides strategic legacy planning services and probate court representation to Black and Brown Women and their families. Attorney Knox Lee also works with families navigating heirs property in clear title for the purpose of preserving wealth for the family. Through education and estate planning services, Whitney strategizes with her clients to help them keep control of their legacy long after they are gone. In 2025, Wills for the People received an honorable mention as one of the best estate planning law firms in Georgia from the Georgia Business Journal. Whitney has over a decade of experience spanning landlord/tenant law, family law, wills and estates, disability law, and civil rights. Originally from Seattle, Whitney is a graduate of Seattle University School of Law. She has lived and practiced law in Georgia for 12 years. Whitney is a mother to two young children, and the wife of Attorney Jeffrey Lee.

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K. Scott Kohanowski serves as General Counsel of the Center for NYC Neighborhoods and its subsidiary, Sustainable Neighborhoods, a CDFI and charitable mortgage lender. In this role, Scott oversees a broad portfolio of legal, regulatory, governance, and operational matters supporting the organization's mission to preserve and promote affordable homeownership across New York. The Center advances this mission through policy advocacy, homeowner services, and innovative charitable lending programs addressing foreclosure prevention, climate resiliency, home repair, first-time homeownership, and heirs' property preservation. Previously, Scott directed the Homeowner Stability and LGBT Advocacy Projects at the NY City Bar Justice Center. There, he trained and supervised pro bono and staff attorneys, provided direct representation to distressed homeowners, and led law reform initiatives focused on housing stability and community preservation. His practice areas include foreclosure and property law, community development lending, heirs' property and tangled title resolution, deed theft and scam prevention, and nonprofit governance, with a consistent focus on racial equity and community stabilization. Scott earned his B.A. in Portuguese and Spanish from the University of Minnesota and his J.D. from NYU School of Law. He began his legal career at Morrison & Foerster LLP before transitioning to public interest law. He currently serves on the NY City Bar Association Mortgage Foreclosure Task Force and Non-Profit Organizations Committee, as well as the NY Attorney General's Deed Theft Task Force and the NY City Non-Profit Legal Services Foreclosure Prevention Task Force.

Francine Miller is senior staff attorney and adjunct faculty at the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems (CAFS) at Vermont Law and Graduate School, where she supervises students in the Food and Agriculture Clinic and leads a variety of national projects related to land and property. Fran has overseen the expansion of CAFS's Farmland Access Legal Toolkit to better serve historically marginalized communities, including developing legal educational materials on heirs' property. Fran is involved in numerous coalitional efforts to stem property loss by heirs' property owners. Fran and Mavis Gragg (NC) founded and direct the Heirs Property Practitioner Network, an association of more than 200 attorneys who provide direct services to heirs' property owners, work on policy issues, or are law school professors who work on heirs' property issues.

Thomas W. Mitchell is a professor at Boston College Law School where he serves as the founding Director of the Initiative on Land, Housing & Property Rights. He is a national expert on property issues facing disadvantaged communities. Professor Mitchell has engaged in extensive policy work, including serving as the principal drafter of the [Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act \(UPHPA\)](#), a model state statute designed to help disadvantaged families maintain their property and generational wealth. Professor Mitchell also has helped develop other state and federal property proposals designed to help disadvantaged people. In 2020, Professor Mitchell was named a MacArthur Fellow in recognition of the substantial impact his overall professional work has had in assisting disadvantaged, urban and rural property owners. In 2021, he was awarded the Howard University Award for Distinguished Postgraduate Achievement. Professor Mitchell is a graduate of Amherst College, the Howard University School of Law, and the University of Wisconsin Law School where he also served as a William H. Hastie Fellow.

Michael Neal is a senior fellow and practice area lead in the Housing Finance Policy Center at the Urban Institute. He is also a research director and researcher with the Initiative on Land, Housing and Property Rights at Boston College Law School. Neal's research on wealth building broadly focuses on housing and the financial and economic systems that support it, as well as the mechanisms that exclude some communities from homeownership and optimal wealth-building opportunities. Neal's research has been published in *Cityscape* and the *Journal of the Center for Policy Analysis and Research*. His research findings have appeared before the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the US Treasury Department, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the US Senate Banking Committee, and the Mayor's Housing Task Force in Newark, New Jersey. He has also presented his research at the American Economic Association's Annual Meetings, the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Annual Conference, and the Urban Affairs Association Annual Conference. Neal is a JPMorgan Chase Fellow and a member of the Social Science Advisory Board at the Poverty and Race Research Action Council. He also serves on the Technical Data Advisory Committee at the Black Wealth Data Center and on the HBCU Wealth Building Initiative Advisory Board at the National Urban League. Neal was a past participant in the Race and Stratification Working Group at the National Bureau of Economic Research. At Urban, Neal is part of the William and Gail Gorham Scholar/Analyst Program and a Gorham Mentor, class of 2025. He is also a Harry Hatry award winner for mentorship, a former Equity Scholar, a past recipient of a President's Award for Communications Innovation, and a former Fleishman Award winner. Neal has a bachelor's degree in economics from Morehouse College and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Pennsylvania. He has also studied economics at St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, and finance in the Graduate School at Princeton University.

Sarah Stein is a senior adviser on affordable housing and neighborhood stabilization on the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's Community and Economic Development team. Prior to joining the Atlanta Fed, Stein was an attorney representing seniors and low-income Atlantans on housing matters with Atlanta Legal Aid. There, she spearheaded the Generational Poverty Law Project, developing educational and clinical programming to address long-term homeowner displacement and to help low-income families build generational wealth. She has legal expertise in the areas of fair housing, residential real estate finance, property law, property tax, estate and probate matters, and affordable housing. Previously, Stein was a research fellow with Emory University. Stein holds a JD degree from the Emory University School of Law and an MA from the Emory University Laney Graduate School. She earned her BA in modern studies at the University of Virginia.

Tammy T. Thompson is an internationally recognized poverty expert and the President and CEO of Catapult® Greater Pittsburgh. With more than 20 years of experience as a certified Housing Counselor, she has dedicated her career to advancing financial education within the economic development sector. Through her companies, T3 Media and T3 Consulting, Inc., Tammy has produced impactful media and led transformative programs for organizations across the Pittsburgh region. A highly sought-after speaker, she shares her journey from poverty to prosperity to inspire individuals and institutions to reimagine what is possible. Tammy is a proud alumna of Point Park University and resides in Pittsburgh, where she is raising her granddaughter and continuing her mission to uplift and strengthen the communities she serves.

Ryan Thomson is an Associate Professor of Rural Sociology at Auburn University. He currently serves as the President of Clear Landing, a nonprofit that provides pro bono legal services to heirs' property owners in Alabama. Ryan co-authored the USDA Multi-State HATCH Project SERA-49 focused on heirs' property and co-founded the Alabama Heirs' Property Alliance, a collaborative effort between Alabama's land grant colleges.

Janneke Ratcliffe is vice president for housing finance policy and leads the Housing Finance Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Over a career that spans industry, the nonprofit sector, academic research, and the federal government, her work focuses on increasing access to financial systems that foster economic security and prosperity. Ratcliffe came to Urban from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, where she served as assistant director, leading its Office of Financial Education. Previously, she was executive director of the University of North Carolina Center for Community Capital, leading "transformative research on how mortgage markets and financial services can better promote financial security and economic opportunity." Ratcliffe has also served at GE Capital Mortgage, the Center for American Progress, and Self-Help, where she was instrumental in high-impact programs in affordable and Community Reinvestment Act mortgages and community development finance. Ratcliffe serves on the National Advisory Council of the National Housing Council (for a three-year term beginning 2024) and on the Consumer Affairs Advisory Council of the Mortgage Bankers Association, Fannie Mae's Affordable Housing Advisory Council for 2024-25, and the National Community Stabilization Trust Board of Managers. She is also a member of the Federal Housing Finance Agency Federal Advisory Committee on Affordable, Equitable, and Sustainable Housing.