

# THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SOUTHERN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS | SEPTEMBER 2022





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**SEPTEMBER 2022**

The Southern Center for Human Rights is working for equality, dignity, and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal system in the Deep South. SCHR fights for a world free from mass incarceration, the death penalty, the criminalization of poverty, and racial injustice.

**COVER IMAGE** Rally outside of Atlanta's City Hall led by the Communities Over Cages Alliance ahead of a council vote to lease beds in the nearly empty Atlanta City Detention Center.

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**SCHR FIGHTS**  
**FOR A WORLD**  
**FREE** FROM MASS  
INCARCERATION,  
THE DEATH  
PENALTY, THE  
CRIMINALIZATION  
OF POVERTY, AND  
RACIAL INJUSTICE.



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## LET'S GET FREE!

DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

TERRICA REDFIELD GANZY

## **F**REEDOM is at the heart of SCHR's mission.

We are working to free ourselves and our communities of the chains forged by injustice. We are inspired by a vision of beauty and peace, where communities have all they need to thrive, where we support each other in being our best selves, and where accountability leads to healing.

When we lead with liberation at the center, there is no room for poverty of vision, poverty of hope, poverty of empathy. There is only room for possibility. Hope is possible. Love is possible. Health is possible. Joy is possible. Each day we work to actualize these possibilities.

Our fight to Close the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) is emblematic of the perpetual struggle for solutions over punishment, for communities over cages.

This fight began because of the audacious vision of SCHR Board member and former Executive Director of Women on the Rise Marilyn Winn. The jail, built in preparation for the 1996 Olympics, remains open but currently houses less than thirty people on any given night. Ms. Marilyn decided that the jail should close and, most importantly, that funding used to prop up the jail could instead be used to advance the Atlanta community's health.

From this vision, the Communities Over Cages Coalition, of which SCHR is a part, was formed to advocate for ACDC to become a Center for Wellness and Freedom. This effort would be a model for communities across this country on what is possible when we put holistic services at the forefront of our efforts to increase community safety.

As a result of the Coalition's efforts, in 2019, then-Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms pledged to close the jail and formed a "Reimagining ACDC Task Force" that recommended repurposing the jail into a Center for Wellness and Freedom. At that time, City Councilmember Andre Dickens sponsored the legislation to close the jail.

Unfortunately, the jail is open nearly three years later as policymakers have reversed course on these promises. This summer, Mayor Dickens supported a proposal to lease 700 jail beds in ACDC for four years to Fulton County to address overcrowding in their jail system. Thus, rather than close the jail, the City is poised to expand it, advancing the trauma of mass incarceration.

We cannot jail our way out of the jailing business. We know this because SCHR has sued the Fulton County Jail at least four times, and despite the county's creation of a new jail to house women, overcrowding and unsafe conditions remain a problem in the jail. Hundreds of people in Fulton County jails are there because they cannot afford to pay their bail, and many have yet to be indicted. Expanding the number of beds available in ACDC will not fix either of those problems, which are some drivers of overcrowding. Decarceration, however, is a solution that works.

SCHR will continue to join our community in fighting systemic practices and policies that mass produce harm and suffering; we will continue to agitate for a reimagination of what is possible, discarding strategies that have repeatedly failed and embracing solutions that uplift and heal. **We will continue this fight because, in the words of Ella's Song, "We who believe in freedom, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."**

*Throughout this report, you will read stories that demonstrate our efforts toward freedom. There is hope in this struggle, and we are honored to fight alongside you to achieve a future built not just on the absence of injustice but also the abundance of love.*

*For freedom,*



**Terrica Redfield Ganzy**  
Executive Director



# SCHR'S CEASELESS ADVOCACY LEADS TO STATEWIDE DOJ INVESTIGATION

**W**e'd like to tell you about K.M., one of the many people we've had the privilege of working with in the last year.

K.M. is an incarcerated man living with schizophrenia and depression. He was moved to one of the most restrictive housing units in the state, the "Tier II Program"—a long-term solitary confinement program—at Georgia State Prison (GSP) in southeast Georgia. For K.M., Tier II was "close to death itself."

The unit was like death itself because, with few exceptions, K.M. was trapped in a cell no larger than a parking space, 24/7, for almost two years.

The unit was like death itself because it was teeming with rats, mice, and roaches.

The unit was like death itself because the toilets were controlled by a prison staff missing more than 70% of its guards.

Unsurprisingly, K.M. attempted to take his own life, repeatedly, and he cycled in and out of GSP's version of a "crisis" unit. The first time he went to the crisis unit, he was met by a metal bed frame covered in blood. The second time, his entire "crisis" cell was covered in blood and feces. And the third time he was sent to the crisis unit, the metal bed was covered in feces, blood, and urine, forcing K.M. to create a bed on the floor using paper sandwich wrappings.

The irony of GSP is that it was built as a "special mission" prison, meaning that the stated goal was to provide enhanced services and treatment to people like K.M. with serious mental illness. The reality is that K.M.'s experience was typical of the 300 men in GSP's Tier II unit, at least 70% of whom had psychiatric disabilities. Self-injury, violence, and suicide were disturbingly common at GSP. At least 12 men died by suicide there in the last two years, and many of these suicides occurred in the solitary confinement units. In fact, of the 44 suicides that occurred between January 1, 2020, and September 14, 2021 in the Georgia Department of Corrections, 10 suicides—or more than 20 percent—happened at GSP.

**SCHR's response to GSP's suicide crisis was twofold.** First, we partnered with Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton to bring a federal civil rights lawsuit about the treatment of people held in solitary confinement. Second, we asked for immediate federal intervention into Georgia's prisons, where both suicides and homicides have continued unabated. In the nine months preceding our request, 21 people had been killed in Georgia's prisons, with six of the homicides occurring at a single prison in southwest Georgia. More people died by homicide at this prison than were killed in multi-year periods in other states' entire prison systems.

**We did not anticipate what would come next.** Within six months of being sued over the tortuous conditions at GSP, the Georgia Department of Corrections closed the prison. Simultaneously, the DOJ answered our calls—and those of many impacted people, families, and community groups—by launching a statewide investigation into the violence plaguing Georgia’s prisons and the treatment of incarcerated members of the LGBTQ+ community in the state.

To say that we are encouraged by these remarkable developments would be an understatement. But so long as Georgia continues to embrace deadly solitary confinement practices in its other prisons and pays short shrift to the safety and dignity of incarcerated people, **we will stay vigilant in our fight against incarceration practices that make a mockery of who we say we are as Americans.**

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## Holding Police Accountable for Mass Arrest of Young Adults in Cartersville, Georgia

**On March 11, 2019, SCHR filed suit against the City of Cartersville, Georgia, and members of the Cartersville Police Department, the Bartow-Cartersville Drug Task Force, and the Bartow County Sheriff’s Office, challenging the mass detention, search, and arrest of more than sixty young people who attended a birthday party on home on December 31, 2017.**

On the night of the mass arrest, Cartersville Police Officers were dispatched to an apartment complex near the party after reports of gunshots. Despite having their car windows rolled up, the officers claimed to smell marijuana when they arrived. Bolstered by a city policy that allows warrantless home entry based on the purported smell of marijuana, officers entered the home without consent, a warrant, or probable cause.

Once inside the home, the officers found less than an ounce of marijuana. Though the officers could not tie the marijuana to any individual, they detained and searched everyone at the party. These searches yielded no drugs, but an officer announced that everyone was going to jail anyway. In total, sixty-four young people were arrested and taken to the Bartow County Jail. Of the sixty-four people arrested, fifty were African American, ten were white, three were Latino, and one was Native American.

Though the charges were dismissed in the following weeks, the arrests had already been highly publicized. Mugshots were available online, and multiple people lost jobs or had to take drug tests to keep their jobs. Others suffered public ridicule, online harassment, and humiliation.

In the wake of this injustice, SCHR filed a lawsuit seeking damages on behalf of all the party guests who were detained, arrested, and charged with crimes that were dismissed just twelve days later.

**After more than two years of grueling discovery and litigation, the City of Cartersville agreed to settle the case. On February 1, 2022, the case officially settled for \$900,000.**

While the resolution of this case provides our clients with financial relief and vindication in the face of this injustice, it doesn’t take away from the horrors they experienced. “Even though the charges were dropped years ago, it’s still affecting me mentally and emotionally,” Andrea Lopez, one of the named plaintiffs, said in a statement through her attorney. “I never pictured myself going through that. It’s made me more aware of prejudice in the legal system, more aware of what happens to people every day.”

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# FINAL SETTLEMENT REACHED IN SOUTH FULTON JAIL LAWSUIT

**U**nited States Northern District Judge William M. Ray, II approved the settlement agreement proposed by the parties in, *Georgia Advocacy Office, et al. v. Labat, et al* at a final fairness hearing on March 16, 2022.

This settlement comes after nearly three years of exhaustive litigation. The original lawsuit was filed in April 2019 to challenge the Fulton County Sheriff's practice of keeping women with psychiatric disabilities in solitary confinement in the South Fulton Jail 23 to 24 hours per day, for weeks or months, with no books, television, therapeutic programming, or other opportunities to occupy their time. Class members were kept in deplorable conditions in filthy cells, many with standing water from toilets puddled on cell floors, their clothing and underwear stained with blood and feces, cell doors covered with rust, and walls smeared with feces and blood.

**Among other things, the settlement mandates the following for people with serious mental illness who are housed in the South Fulton Jail:**

- At least four hours of out-of-cell time, five days a week (one hour of which must be recreation) with an hour of out-of-cell time offered on the other two days of the week, and a reliable tracking system to ensure people with severe mental illness are receiving out-of-cell time
- Opportunities for meaningful therapeutic activities
- Access to clean drinking water, personal hygiene items, reading materials, and a sufficient supply of clothing and underwear
- A quality control process so that people are no longer served moldy, spoiled food
- Training for correctional staff supervising people with severe mental illness

To underscore how this will impact women in the South Fulton Jail, we wanted to share the perspective of our client and named plaintiff, J.N., who lived through these indescribable conditions.

"I feel really good about the settlement and am happy that I helped make a difference for people like me... Before this lawsuit, there was just nothing to do... Most people got an hour or less per day out of their cells, and some people did not get to come out at all.

... I got so tired of being locked in a concrete room all day. It felt like being a bird in a cage that can't fly anymore. It felt like nobody cared about me. I became very depressed.

... Things are much better now.... Even though we did not get everything we wanted in the settlement, it is still a major improvement. I hope that the settlement will ensure that women are treated humanely now and in the future.”

To read J.N.'s full statement, please check out our blog at [www.schr.org/news](http://www.schr.org/news).

SCHR, with our co-counsel from the Georgia Advocacy Office and Caplan Cobb, continue to monitor conditions at the jail to ensure that the settlement is followed.

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**Caption (Header):** A cell at the South Fulton Jail. Image courtesy of the Georgia Advocacy Office.

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## How does supporting SCHR's mission align with your personal and professional values?

Since I became an SCHR supporter several decades ago, I have felt intuitively that the mission of battling horrific impacts of the criminal legal system on people who are vulnerable—because of their race, poverty, disability, mental health, and/or unjust and inhumane incarceration—aligned with my values. My parents taught me to question the status quo and fight for justice, and my two now-adult sons with severe autism have reinforced my maternal need to protect the most vulnerable.



But this question forced me to articulate my values to myself. And, as I wrote them down, I saw in them every act of compassion, courage, and love that I have seen Southern Center staffers perform so heroically and selflessly over the many years I have watched them work.

- *Respect and advance a safe, dignified, fulfilling, and joyful life for every individual.*
- *Advocate for the most vulnerable.*
- *Embrace empathy. Act on compassion. Be kind.*
- *Commit to community, conscience, truth, equity, and justice.*
- *Fight selfishness, greed, hate, lies, abuse of power, and violence to civic discourse, minds, and bodies.*
- *Lead, agitate, persist, and be resilient in the constant struggle for equity, justice, and peace.*

These are my values, and SCHR lives them. Every day.

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**Maureen F. Del Duca** is the immediate past chair of the board of the Southern Center for Human Rights and an avid supporter.

# WORDS MATTER

## PAGE DUKES AND WALEISAH WILSON ON PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

### **O**ur fight for human rights begins with the recognition of our shared humanity.

In 2019, the Southern Center for Human Rights changed our mission statement to include the people for whom we work, “people impacted by the criminal legal system in the Deep South.” We’ve since incorporated person-first language in our legal writing and in conversations with clients, coalition partners, the public, and one another.

**The language we choose can reinforce or challenge systemic injustices.** For too long, institutionalized terms like “inmate,” “offender,” and “felon” have held firmly in place in our laws and our news, implicitly justifying the abuses we combat in our work. In years past, SCHR spoke the language of the courts, the legislature, and other powerful decision makers, but we found that adopting these harmful terms did not advance our work towards our clients’ freedom and instead missed an opportunity to affirm their dignity and humanity. We have learned that the words we use—to refer to our clients, to ourselves, and one another—matter.

When Communications Associate Page Dukes joined SCHR in 2019, she often still referred to people as “inmates.” “Two years Out of prison myself, I began to realize how language frames the way people think about our past, our future, and our present—what rights we lose or retain

and what kind of life we deserve—both during and after incarceration.”

That notion of “deserving” came into sharp focus in 2020, as people in prison died from COVID at a rate five times higher than those on the Outside, and states took little to no action in response. “News stories implied those of us who broke the law were less deserving of survival, and the lives of those we lost inside were reduced to their charges. Words like ‘inmate’ and ‘offender’ erased our humanity.”

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### **Person-first language simply leads with the person.**

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**Person-first language simply leads with the person:** person in prison, person with a felony conviction, person on parole. The movement began with disability rights advocates who would not be defined by their disability. Formerly incarcerated leaders at the Center for NuLeadership took up the call: “If we speak about someone as an offender or ex-offender, we make the harmful assumption that only one experience or action defines that person. And we are accepting the idea that their experience or action was rooted only in their personal responsibility, without acknowledging or addressing all the other factors that contributed to why and how they ended up incarcerated in the first place.”

Client Services Advocate Waleisah Wilson began to think about the impacts of such labels when she and Page spoke about language on a 2020 panel titled the Scarlet Letter F. “While I didn’t prefer ‘felon’ or ‘convict,’ I minimized ‘ex-offender,’ thinking, “It’s fine because of the ‘ex’. But in that moment, it clicked: I have to start thinking of myself as more than an ‘ex-convict’ or ‘ex-offender.’ That was the first moment that it resonated with me, that the language needed to be more humanizing, and I needed to start with myself.”

“If we cannot convince you to refer to us as human, all our other efforts at reform and change are seriously compromised,” said NuLeadership founder Eddie Ellis in his 2006 Letter to Our Friends.

**At SCHR, when we stand in the gap for our clients, we stand up to institutions that refuse to treat people as human beings.** For a long time, we spoke the language of those institutions, but we now recognize our responsibility to follow the example of leaders like Eddie Ellis and to lead by example in the work ahead.

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# SOUTHERN CENTER EVENTS

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At SCHR, we will always prioritize the health and safety of the people we serve, our supporters, and our staff. In response to COVID-19, ongoing vaccination efforts, and changes in policy, we have returned to in-person events and will continue to host virtual events when possible.

**We will continue to update you as we adapt to the rapidly changing environment created by this pandemic.**

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## SAVE THE DATE

### **FREDERICK DOUGLASS AWARDS DINNER NOVEMBER 10, 2022**

Willard InterContinental Hotel

The Frederick Douglass Awards Dinner is SCHR’s flagship gala to recognize and celebrate those who demonstrate exceptional courage and tenacity in the defense of human rights and equal justice. This gala allows us to illuminate allies who share our vision and commitment to a more just society. Proceeds from the Frederick Douglass Awards Dinner support SCHR’s work to protect the civil and human rights of people ensnared by the criminal legal system.

For tickets and sponsorship opportunities, visit [www.schr.org/awardsdinner](http://www.schr.org/awardsdinner)

## SAVE THE DATE

### **2022 SAN FRANCISCO BENEFIT RECEPTION DECEMBER 2022**

Location TBD

A benefit to honor the memory of Susan Ten Kwan and celebrate and pay tribute to members of the defense community for zealously challenging injustice at every turn.

RSVP to upcoming events at  
[www.schr.org](http://www.schr.org).



# STRATEGIC MOVEMENT BUILDING IN GEORGIA

## **O**ur local policy and movement building team had a busy year in 2021.

In Atlanta, we have continued to serve as an anchor partner in the Communities Over Cages Alliance, advocating to close the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) and replace it with a Center for Wellness and Equity. The coalition often had to play defense during 2021, working to stop Fulton County Sheriff Patrick Labat from obtaining control over the jail. Unfortunately, in August 2022 the Atlanta City Council voted to lease the jail to Fulton County. However, due to consistent organizing and significant community turnout, the coalition managed to amend the proposed legislation, leaving ourselves 90 days to prevent the lease from taking effect.

Additionally, after months of meeting with policymakers and pressure from the community, in November 2021, the City of Atlanta and Fulton County reached an agreement to convert part of ACDC into a Center for Diversion and Services operated by Atlanta Policing Alternatives and Diversion. While this does not close the jail's doors, it does ensure that more people will be diverted from the criminal legal system to get the critical supportive services they need, and tactically, it makes it much more challenging for additional jail space to be leased in the future.

As the campaign looks ahead, SCHR continues to offer technical assistance and policy expertise to city and county policymakers, conduct research and writing on the need for jail closure, draft legislation designed to close the jail, and work within the broader ecosystem of community organizers and advocates pushing for a transformed Atlanta.

## **Also in Atlanta, our team has worked with a coalition of grassroots organizations to formalize our protester support operations from 2020 into a more robust infrastructure to defend people working to resist state violence.**

As protests have continued, SCHR has worked with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund and others to pair arrested community members with attorneys and support them throughout their cases. These efforts have been particularly crucial as organizers continue to protest and work against the creation of "Cop City," a police training facility that the City of Atlanta intends to build by destroying part of Atlanta's South River Forest.

## **SCHR's team has continued to partner with the Deep Center in Savannah and the Vera Institute for Justice to promote bail reform in Chatham County.**

Through data collection and analysis, legal research and memo writing, advocacy to policymakers, and community education events, our partnership has been building community and policymaker support for ending wealth-based detention in Chatham County.

**SCHR continues to anchor the JUSTGeorgia coalition, which supports Black-led organizing and movement infrastructure building in Southeast Georgia.** Formed in the wake of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, JUSTGeorgia has created a policy platform dedicated to combatting and ending state and racial violence in Georgia. Working through solidarity committees that support victims and survivors of state violence, JUSTGeorgia has actively supported the families of Ahmaud Arbery, Marc Wilson, Oscar Cain, and others. During the trial of Mr. Arbery's killers, JUSTGeorgia supported Mr. Arbery's family and community and did political education work around the need for systemic transformation #BeyondTheVerdict.

Most recently, the solidarity committee and legal team supported Marc Wilson through his entire legal battle. Though he was acquitted on all charges of the original indictment, he was unjustly convicted of involuntary manslaughter, a lesser-included offense that was charged during jury instructions. Mr. Wilson was sentenced to 10 years in confinement, while being denied application of the First Offender Act to the sentence, without regard to his lack of criminal history and positive character evidence.



We will continue to support Mr. Wilson and his family as he fights for his freedom through post-conviction relief after having stood his ground against racist white vigilantes who attempted to run him off the road.

**As we look ahead, SCHR's local policy team will continue to support movements to end state violence, decriminalize race and poverty, and build toward thriving communities in cities and counties across Georgia.**

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**Caption (Image 1):** Public Policy Director Tiffany Roberts speaks at a press conference hosted by JustGeorgia in support of Marc Wilson.

**Caption (Image 2):** In January 2022, the anchor team for the Close the Jail ATL campaign organized a briefing for incoming Atlanta city councilmembers.

## SCHR Launches Community Safety and Police Violence Project

SCHR was awarded a Microsoft Use of Force grant and tasked with analyzing and understanding the impacts of policing in the City of Atlanta. This is a community-based project aimed at discerning differences in policing between Atlanta's six police zones.

Led by Movement Policy Counsel Devin Franklin with the assistance of SCHR's Public Policy Unit and two fellows, the Community Safety and Police Violence team will host a series of town halls to elicit input from residents in each area in order to examine how Atlanta Police Department interactions differentiate between policing zones.

Together, the team hopes to create a set of policy recommendations for the city tailored by the experiences and knowledge of Atlanta residents. All participants will be compensated for their valuable time and input.

To learn more about this project, visit [www.schr.org/communitysafety](http://www.schr.org/communitysafety)



# SCHR AGITATES FOR JUSTICE

## THE STORIES OF JAMES MCWILLIAMS AND JABARI WILLIAMS

**S**CHR client James McWilliams—who spent nearly 35 years on death row in Alabama—was resentenced to life without parole (LWOP) in February 2021. This development comes after successful appeals in the United States Supreme Court and the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals and ends the state’s effort to obtain an unjust execution.

After being denied a mental health expert to assist in his defense, Mr. McWilliams was convicted and sentenced to death in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1986. He then spent years unsuccessfully litigating various constitutional errors at his trial. When SCHR asked the United States Supreme Court to review the case in the summer of 2016, Mr. McWilliams was extremely close to an execution warrant. However, the Supreme Court granted SCHR’s petition for certiorari in January 2017—a critical turning point in the case. The cert petition focused on the denial of a mental health expert to assist the defense at Mr. McWilliams’s capital trial. Following briefing and argument, the Supreme Court issued a 5-4 decision holding that Mr. McWilliams was denied his right to due process because he was not provided an expert who could assist in the “evaluation, preparation, and presentation of the defense.”

But the Court did not grant Mr. McWilliams complete relief. Instead, it remanded the case to the Eleventh Circuit for further proceedings. Ultimately, in 2019, the Eleventh Circuit held that the denial of expert assistance was harmful to Mr. McWilliams’s defense, and therefore a new sentencing proceeding was required.



When the case returned to the Alabama courts for resentencing, the State agreed to a sentence of LWOP instead of death. At the resentencing hearing in February 2021, SCHR explained that Mr. McWilliams had done exceptionally well over the course of his 35 years in prison; specifically, he had earned an Associate Degree, served as a rector for the Kairos Prison Ministry program, and cared for sick people in the prison’s infirmary. The court then imposed a sentence of LWOP.

While recognizing that LWOP itself is an excessive sentence, **the imposition of a sentence less than death is an important victory that ensures that Mr. McWilliams will not be executed.**

**Caption:** SCHR client Jabari Williams is pictured with his aunt, Bobbie Williams, and cousin, Chandrika Williams shortly after being released in December 2021.



**In 2012, following a trial defined by race discrimination, SCHR client Jabari Williams was sentenced to life without parole. Nearly a decade later, his conviction has been vacated and he has won his release from prison.**

Mr. Williams was charged with second-degree murder in New Orleans in 2011. During jury selection the following year, the State exercised 16 cause and peremptory challenges, all against Black people. Mr. Williams’s trial lawyer objected under *Batson v. Kentucky*, which prohibits race discrimination in jury selection, but the trial court overruled the objection.

At trial, the State then relied heavily on an eyewitness who testified that it was “very difficult for [him] to tell [Black people] apart” because “the [B]lack people have similarity.” Although Mr. Williams maintained his innocence, he was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to life without parole.

Mr. Williams unsuccessfully appealed to the Louisiana appellate courts. However, while his petition was pending before the United States Supreme Court, the Court decided the case of *Foster v. Chatman*, which SCHR handled in 2016.

In that case, the Court found that the prosecutors had engaged in race discrimination in jury selection. Because of the similarities between *Foster* and Mr. Williams’s case, the Supreme Court granted Mr. Williams’s petition and remanded the case back to the Louisiana courts for a fresh look at his claim that prosecutors discriminated in jury selection. The Louisiana Supreme Court subsequently ordered an evidentiary hearing on Mr. Williams’s *Batson* claim.

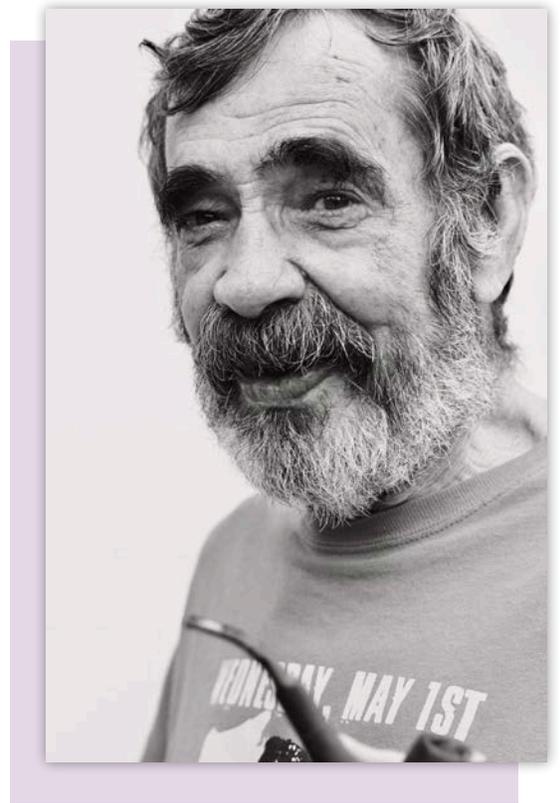
After a lengthy delay and multiple hearings, the State conceded that race discrimination occurred during jury selection. The trial court accordingly vacated Mr. Williams’s conviction. The State conducted an exhaustive re-investigation of the case, during which it discovered a new witness who corroborated Mr. Williams’s defense that he was innocent of the murder. **Finally, in December 2021, Mr. Williams reached a plea agreement with the State to a substantially reduced charge, which ensured his immediate release from incarceration and allowed him to maintain his innocence.** Mr. Williams spent the holidays—and Mardi Gras—with his mother, his aunt, and his three daughters.

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# Remembering

## PALMER SINGLETON

Palmer Singleton passed away on February 6, 2022. Below is a letter written by Sam Singleton-Freemon and Christine Freeman to friends of Palmer.



### Palmer Singleton vs. The United States

Dear Friends,

We know you are among the many friends of Palmer Christie Singleton, III, whom he loved and cared for over the years. We are writing to thank you for your support and friendship for Palmer, and to let you know of his death.

Palmer started becoming ill in the fall of 2020, was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2021, and underwent chemotherapy and immunotherapy at Emory's Winship Cancer Center. Palmer became too weak by the late spring to walk his three Alaskan Malamute Huskies, which was a regret and concern to him. Sam, his son, spent the summer in Atlanta, and helped with appointments and the dogs. In the fall, a wonderful non-profit founded by Beverly Means, Transitions Pet Care in Decatur, Georgia, provided free dog-walking services. Palmer's dear friends, Bill Rankin, Josh Moore, Phil Strykul, Ruth Richardson and David Ingram, and Susan Casey, and his wonderful neighbors on Warwick Avenue S.E. including Becky, Nicole and Brad, and others provided additional meals, dog-walking, and companionship, and hosted Sam on several visits. John, Donnie and Phil continued their friendship and support.

Due to negative impact on Palmer's kidneys, the medical therapy stopped in late October 2021. Sam, Sam's partner Colleen, and Sam's mother Christy Freeman, spent Thanksgiving and Christmas in Atlanta with Palmer. By January, it was clear that Palmer could not live on his own. He could not see well enough to read or drive, due to an issue with his cataract surgery, and he did not have the strength to take care of meals or household chores. Mary and Alex, friends from Tennessee, took in one Malamute (Elsie) and Colleen, Sam and Christy moved Palmer and his two other Malamutes to Christy's home in Montgomery, Alabama. Hospice of Montgomery, through Miss Annie, Nurse Brandy, and Nurse Nedra, provided gentle services and support. Palmer's good friend William Montross had agreed to serve as executor of his will.

Palmer's many friends reached out, wrote, called, texted, and visited. Fortunately, Sam was present to hear the many stories of his father's adventures and triumphs.

Born in 1951, Palmer grew up in Hammond, Indiana. His grandfather was the superintendent of the open hearth at the Inland Steel plant and his father had a law practice in Munster, Indiana. Palmer had one sister, Sarah, who passed away in 2019. She was also lawyer and state district court judge in New Mexico. Palmer's father had fought in World War II in Europe and was captured in Italy and imprisoned as a POW. His wartime experience made him a pacifist and Quaker. Inspired by Quaker teachings, Palmer helped found an anti-war student organization at his high school, Hammond High. His mother helped mimeograph flyers for their rallies. At one point, the district attorney investigated the students for sedition.

While in high school, Palmer began working at Inland Steel on the "pickle line." He became close with rank-and-file leaders in USW Local 1010, old-time Communist Party members who had been active since the union gained recognition after the Little Steel Strike during the Great Depression. These influences — the labor movement and pacifism — profoundly shaped Palmer's life.

Palmer never graduated high school. The stories and rumors are unclear, but Hammond High caught fire in 1967 while Palmer was enrolled there. In the highly charged atmosphere of the time, some suspected arson, but that allegation was never substantiated, and no charges were ever brought. Palmer did not participate in any arson. The fire threw the school year into tumult, cancelling classes and disrupting extracurricular activities. Palmer left high school and began his peripatetic journey. He briefly attended a boarding school in Vermont, studied with Parker Palmer at Pendle Hill in Pennsylvania, and worked as a draft resistance counselor in Portland, Oregon. He participated in antiwar protest with A Quaker Action Group (AQAG) and was arrested at the Pentagon.

Palmer volunteered for Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential campaign. He cut his hair and "went clean for Gene."

Palmer was outside the convention in Chicago that year. Police beat him and his friends and arrested Palmer. Palmer's father defended his son and his comrades on those charges, which the judge ultimately dismissed. According to Palmer, at the time the judge dismissed the charges, the judge said that if he allowed the prosecution to go forward, that would have marked the coming of fascism to America.

When Palmer turned 18, he refused to register for the Selective Service as an act of civil disobedience in opposition to the United States' disgusting war on the people of Vietnam. He was indicted and prosecuted. When federal agents arrived to arrest Palmer, his mother picked up a fireplace poker and held them off. Palmer went to trial in federal court. Congressman Abner Mikva read parts of Palmer's statements at arraignment into the Congressional Record:

*Singleton said he believes in nonviolence, and this involves not only not killing people but not inflicting injury to anyone in any way. "Violence complicates issues rather than clarifies them," he said. "There is a beauty and strength in pacifism. Pacifism is the constant attempt to resolve conflict through raising issues and then dealing with them in a creative manner . . . . After six years of mobilizations, after millions have voiced opposition to the killing, after a clear 73 per cent of the people see the need for immediate withdrawal from Indochina, the war goes on . . . . The only way I know to stop it is by not cooperating with selective service and the other institutions that perpetuate war, by speaking truth to power, by saying 'no' to the ways of life and things that allow us to be inhuman. We must affirm our affinity with other human beings and oppose injustice."*

The government subpoenaed Palmer's father as a witness. On the stand, Palmer's father refused to testify, saying, "My name is not Abraham and my son is not Isaac." While the judge released Palmer's father from testifying, the judge did not allow Palmer to call any witnesses himself. Palmer was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison at the Bureau of Prisons' Federal Youth Facility in Ashland, Kentucky. A classmate of his, who had fought in Vietnam, was interviewed in newspaper coverage of the trial; the classmate expressed no disapproval but noted that Palmer had courageously chosen a harder path. While in prison, Palmer participated in work strikes alongside other prisoners. He worked as a librarian in the prison law library, assisting fellow prisoners as a jailhouse lawyer. Ultimately, President Carter pardoned Palmer and other draft resisters in 1977.

Palmer was released from prison after 14 months, on the condition that he attend Sarah Lawrence College in New York. After graduating, he began working as a merchant marine. For five years, he worked as a commercial seaman on ore boats and cargo ships, sailing on the Great Lakes and throughout the western hemisphere. He was a member of the USW Local 5000 and was elected as a Ship's Delegate. He was active in Steelworkers Fightback, the insurgency within the union supporting Ed Sadlowski's candidacy for presidency of the USW in 1977. Fightback pushed for true member-control of the union and for a more militant political stance by the union against racism and in support of broader progressive causes. While Palmer and his comrades leafleted for Sadlowski's campaign outside a plant in Birmingham, Alabama, someone shot at the group. During these years, Palmer also contributed articles to Liberation News Service, covering strikes and demonstrations.

In the 1970s, Palmer lived partly out of Chicago and also out of New York City near Columbia University. He volunteered with Dorothy Day at the Catholic Worker on the Lower East Side. He became friends with Staughton and Alice Lynd. He continued to sail in small wooden sailboats of his own. Once, Pete Seeger needed the magnetic compass repaired on his sailboat, the Clearwater. A mutual friend introduced him to Palmer, who realigned the compass and spent the day with Pete and Toshi at their cabin in Beacon, New York.

FBI agents once came to Palmer's house to question him regarding the break-in at the Media, PA, FBI office, which had exposed the existence of the COINTEL program. Palmer was not involved in the burglary. Nonetheless, legend has it that he told the agents to "f\*\*\* off," and that if they thought he had anything to do with the break-in, they could prove it in court.

In 1978, Palmer entered New York University Law School on a full-tuition scholarship through the Root-Tilden-Kern public interest scholarship program. He planned to work in the labor movement, but in law school, he fell in love with criminal defense. After graduation, he first worked for the law firm of Leonard Boudin, where he worked on the cases of such diverse clients as the Socialist Workers Party, the state airline of Communist Angola, and the Iranian Central Bank after that country's revolution. He was soon accepted as a Fellow in the E. Barrett Prettyman/Stuart Stiller Fellowship program at Georgetown, which provides representation to adults and adolescents accused of crimes and provides recent law school graduates with two years of training in criminal trial advocacy and clinical teaching. As a Prettyman, Palmer represented a client accused of murder, going to trial and winning an acquittal. In Washington, Palmer met Stephen Bright, beginning a lifetime of collaboration in defending the rights of people threatened with incarceration and the death penalty.

After completion of the Prettyman program, Palmer went to the public defender office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He brought his sailboat, The Bending Cross, and continued to sail on the Great Lakes. At one point, he travelled to New Mexico, where he and his sister Sarah tried cases together, including a murder trial.

In 1984, at Steve's invitation, Palmer moved to Atlanta and joined the staff of the Southern Center for Human Rights, then called the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (aka "SPDC"). He litigated on behalf of death row prisoners throughout the South, exposing prosecutors' misconduct and the court system's injustice, and winning new trials or new sentences for numerous prisoners. It was at the Southern Center that Palmer met Christine (Christy) Freeman, with whom he had his son, Samuel Singleton-Freeman. He also taught law at Georgia State Law School and Emory Law.

In 1986, Palmer suffered a brain aneurysm from an arteriovenous malformation. He underwent two days of brain surgery, all conducted while he was wide awake. His head swelled "like a watermelon," his mother said. Yet four days later, he was walking the hospital hall and calling Christy by phone. The aneurysm left little permanent injury, other than an odd loss of feeling on his cheek and a drool when he smoked a pipe. After convalescing at his parents' home in Indiana, Palmer returned to Southern Center.

Palmer made several sideline tours away from the Southern Center, teaching at SUNY-Buffalo in the late 1980s, working as a public defender in New Hampshire and Boston in the 1990s, and joining the law firm of Michael McIntyre in Atlanta in the mid-2000s. Ultimately, Palmer returned to the Southern Center, and he retired from there around 2016.

While in Buffalo, Palmer befriended the folk singer Ani DiFranco, who later became a supporter and fundraiser for Southern Center. DiFranco wrote about Palmer in her autobiography, *No Walls and the Recurring Dream*:

*Even before I understood what Palmer had spent his life doing, I experienced his commitment to nonviolence as a vibe thing. I don't know a lot about Buddhism, but I think of him as having Buddha nature. A sort of cranky version . . . . In the case of Palmer, he seemed clear that the best way to begin healing the violence of society was by extending a hand to the people on the very bottom, the ones living in cages with little to no human rights. The ones facing their own deaths at the hands of the state.*

Palmer's son Sam was born in 1990. Although Palmer and Christy separated, they remained close friends. Sam and Palmer adored each other. Sam followed Palmer's example, working as an organizer in the immigrant rights movement in Wisconsin before attending Georgetown Law on a full-tuition public interest scholarship. He will work as a public defender after law school.

During his professional career, Palmer befriended, instructed and trained hundreds of criminal defense attorneys. He spoke on Democracy Now, debating the death penalty. He represented clients in capital trials in Mississippi, in capital post-conviction in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, and in clemency proceedings in Georgia. He and his clients facing execution won clemency from the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole, a heartbreakingly rare outcome. He argued before state and federal appellate courts and co-wrote briefs that won relief from the U.S. Supreme Court. Having been a prisoner himself, he felt deeply for prisoners caught in the injustice and moral bankruptcy of the American prison system and the death penalty. Some of Palmer's clients were ultimately executed, despite his strong efforts, and he grieved their deaths deeply.

Palmer admired people who had taken great risks for principle. He honored the courage of John Brown, the wisdom of Eugene Debs, the commitment of Dorothy Day, the struggle of the union rank-and-filers he organized alongside, and the sacrifice of the peace activists he knew who had chosen prison with him.

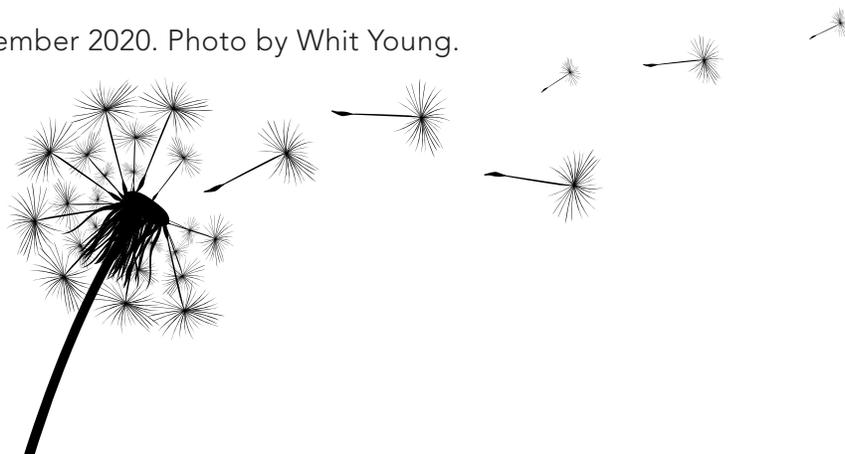
Throughout his adult life, as anyone who knows Palmer will attest, he loved dogs, and especially Alaskan Malamutes and Siberian Huskies. He fostered dozens of dogs (if not more), eventually founding a small non-profit organization, Howling Dog Rescue, that cared for northern-breed dogs abandoned by their owners in Georgia. Palmer turned his small Ormewood Park house and its wooded one-acre lot into a licensed kennel, caring for sometimes nine or more dogs at a time. He walked his dogs daily around Atlanta, at places like the Carter Center, Grant Park, or Glenwood Park. Neighbors and children loved him and his pack. He had warm and honest conversations with almost everyone he encountered, knew the names of all his friends' children, and was dubbed by some "the Mayor of Warwick Street." He knew and cared for his neighbors, and his neighbors for him, in a way that seems rare today.

With Palmer's house run by dogs, he ate almost all of his meals at restaurants. Workers and other patrons at places like The Earl, Grant Central East and West, Home Grown, Lotta Frutta, Burger Win, Thumbs Up, Emerald City Bagels, and elsewhere knew him and loved him. He was always ready to discuss waiters' musical projects, to advise dog-owners or pipe-aficionados, and even sometimes to provide legal representation to his friends in the community. He was a good tipper.

Palmer loved football, especially his father's Michigan Wolverines. He owned a hundred pipes and seemed to always have two lit. He loved his dogs like a parent, training them sternly (Jig and Fram won ribbons in competitions) but gently, calling each "Angel." He could quote great literature and great law, answer random legal conversational questions with full paragraphs. He laughed loudly, and was the most loyal friend anyone could have. Despite being color-blind, he could rewire a house. He built sturdy furniture and was an excellent woodworker.

With his son Sam, Christy, and his dogs Fram and Jig by his side, Palmer left us on the evening of February 6, 2022. We miss him terribly, we dream of seeing him again, and we go forward in the hopes that our own actions will honor and not disappoint him.

—  
**Caption:** Palmer in September 2020. Photo by Whit Young.



**SAVE THE DATE**

**FREDERICK  
DOUGLASS  
AWARDS DINNER  
RETURNS!**

**11 ♦ 10 ♦ 2022**

**AT THE  
WILLARD INTERCONTINENTAL  
DOORS AT 6:00 PM**



**HONOREES**

SCHR is pleased to present the **2022 Frederick Douglass Awards** to deserving honorees whose efforts to advance human rights and equal justice light the path to a more just society.



**KELLEY HENRY**

*Chief, Capital Habeas  
Unit, Federal Public  
Defender*



**ROLANDA HOLMAN**

*Advocate and  
Sister of Pervis  
Payne*



**ANDREW HUNDLEY**

*Executive Director,  
Louisiana Parole  
Project*

# SOUTHERN CENTER EVENTS

The Southern Center for Human Rights was thrilled to return to in-person events this spring with our annual Justice Taking Root Benefit Reception in Atlanta, Georgia.

We were thankful to share space with our supporters who make our work possible, honored to share recent victories, overjoyed to bask in the wisdom of award-winning author Dwayne Reginald Betts, and thankful to share and honor the memories of our former colleagues and dear friends Marissa McCall and Palmer Singleton.

We've included a few photos from the evening below, and you can view a full album on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/southerncenterforhumanrights](https://www.facebook.com/southerncenterforhumanrights).





# DONOR SPOTLIGHT TSAN MERRITT-POREE

Tsan Merritt-Poree is a Partner at Cobalt LLP.

**Q How did you first become interested in supporting the work of the Southern Center for Human Rights?**

A I was married later in life, and around that time, my then-husband had his first death-row client—who he still works with to this day and is very close to exonerating—we became aware of SCHR. We realized that we had all the things that we needed. Therefore, we asked our guests to donate to a charity instead of giving us something that we didn't need, and we chose SCHR. Afterward, we received a beautiful handwritten note from Steve Bright. He told us how the money would not only fund the support of three interns but also help buy them suits. I was hooked, not only to the work but to the people who steward the funds that sustain the critical mission of SCHR. From then on, anytime I had to buy a gift for a wedding or to celebrate a birth, any such milestone, we would donate and often it was SCHR.

**Q What part(s) of SCHR's work is most compelling to you?**

A I have so much respect for lawyers that represent the invisible, the most forgotten, warehoused, and destitute in our society; those that have often been railroaded. The clients that are served by SCHR represent those that are so often unaware of their rights and don't have the resources, and even if they did, they are up against a system that is designed from its inception to incarcerate them. I'm most passionate about the lawyers that are going into the prisons and jails and remembering that these people still deserve representation, kindness, and most importantly, deserve justice.

**Q Why have you chosen to support SCHR so consistently?**

A I believe that SCHR does the most with the least. We support other organizations; however, we maintain that SCHR is very special because you squeeze so much out of every dollar, and we aren't paying for fluff, so more people can be helped.

**Q Would you encourage others to support SCHR? If so, what would you tell them?**

A I absolutely would, and I do—I tell them that I am learning through my children and the world. Whether it's through pronouns or other terminology that has roots in oppression. I need to find a new way to say this, and the reason I say that is because SCHR is a "boots on the ground" organization. I want to say boots on the ground and in the trenches because these are war terms, I think it's important to understand that sometimes we must fight for justice and what we believe in. SCHR is just that—a grassroots, boots-on-the-ground organization. Not only has SCHR been around for decades, but they've also managed to maintain that aggressive, no-nonsense, in-the-trenches perspective and drive. This is not an organization that outsources, isn't spending frivolously on marketing and PR, and is a group that helps those that aren't "sexy." They're helping people who are in prison, who are Black and brown and poor—who normally people just say, "Lock them away...who cares."

I encourage people by saying, "They help the invisible."

# Planned Giving

## GROW A LEGACY WITH THE SOUTHERN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

We know how busy life can be, and sometimes we can lose sight of some of the bigger to-do items. **You may be surprised to learn that only 30% of U.S. adults have a will.** You don't have to see your name on a *Forbes* list to need a will. A will allows you to share your gifts and resources with your family, friends, and the causes you care about. What you leave behind can impact people for generations to come, and it can help ease the burden for your loved ones and give them peace of mind.

If you are looking to take that next step, the good news is that we can help. SCHR is partnering with FreeWill to offer our supporters a new easy-to-use tool, which provides you the opportunity to create a legacy plan for free. This tool is open to anyone, whether you include a gift to SCHR or not.

**Visit [www.freewill.com/schr](http://www.freewill.com/schr) to begin the process!**

If you would like to talk with us more about your planned giving and how an estate gift can help us deepen our fight for equality, dignity, and justice throughout the Deep South, please feel free to reach out to our Development Director, **Laurette Sirkin**, at [lsirkin@schr.org](mailto:lsirkin@schr.org).



# NEW STAFF AT SCHR

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**ABBY COOK** is a Microsoft Use of Force Communications Fellow for the Southern Center for Human Rights, where she assists in communication and outreach for the public policy team.



**W. DEVIN FRANKLIN** is Movement Policy Counsel at the Southern Center for Human Rights. He joined SCHR in March 2022 after working as a Senior Assistant Public Defender at the Office of the Circuit Public Defender-Atlanta Judicial Circuit for over 12 years, zealously advocating on the behalf of nearly 1,500 indigent, accused persons charged with felony offenses.



**TYLER GAY** serves as a Microsoft Use of Force Policy Research Fellow for the Southern Center for Human Rights. At SCHR, Tyler assists the Public Policy Unit with researching, analyzing, and producing work projects relative to the best practices and reforms to address police violence and the use of force in the city of Atlanta.



**BHUPALI KULKARNI** joined the Southern Center for Human Rights in 2022 as an Investigator in the Impact Litigation Unit. Prior to working at the Southern Center, Bhupali worked as a Case Manager for the National Abortion Federation and organized around prison abolition in their free time.



**PAULINA LUCIO MAYMON** joined SCHR's Capital Litigation Unit in 2022 as an Equal Justice Works Fellow sponsored by Greenberg Traurig LLP and UPS. Her work focuses on providing parole advocacy to people in Georgia who were sentenced to life in prison as children.

To learn more about our team, visit [www.schr.org/ourpeople](http://www.schr.org/ourpeople).



**TANIKA L. NICHOLAS** joined the Southern Center for Human Rights as the Justice Reform Partnership Strategist in April 2022. As a formerly incarcerated woman, Tanika strives to be the catalyst for change to overcome the stigmas and stereotypes associated with formerly incarcerated people.



**CHRISTINA REMLIN** is the Director of the Impact Litigation Unit at the Southern Center for Human Rights. She brings to SCHR extensive class action, civil rights litigation experience fighting educational neglect, violence, inadequate medical care, inappropriate conditions, over-institutionalization, and unconscionable conditions of confinement in precedent-setting cases on behalf of system-involved youth in the Deep South.



**NICOLE ROBERTS** joined the Southern Center for Human Rights in 2020 as the Intake Coordinator.



**LAURETTE SIRKIN** is the Development Director for the Southern Center for Human Rights. She is a consummate development professional with vast experience and thrives on telling the story of an organization to foster engagement and make an impact in her community.



**BECKIE MYERS SPENCER** joined the Southern Center for Human Rights in April 2022 as a Paralegal and Executive Assistant to the Executive Director. Prior to joining SCHR, Beckie worked as a Paralegal and Office Manager for R. Gary Spencer, P.C.

# STAFF

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**MICHAEL ADMIRAND**

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