

Perlmutter
Center for Legal Justice
at Cardozo Law

SEEKING
JUSTICE FOR THE
UNJUSTLY
INCARCERATED

Perlmutter
Freedom Clinic
at Cardozo Law

Perlmutter
**Forensic Science
Education Program**
at Cardozo Law

February 2024 Annual Report

Prepared for The Laura and Isaac Perlmutter Foundation



CARDOZO
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Perlmutter Center for Legal Justice: Fall 2023 Semester Report of Activities

After the tremendous success of its inaugural year, the Perlmutter Center for Legal Justice continued into the fall 2023 semester with many more achievements and firsts. Below is a summary of the PCLJ's activities and updates over the past semester.

United Justice Coalition's 2023 Summit:

On December 1, the PCLJ was invited to participate in the United Justice Coalition's 2023 Summit at the Javits Center in New York City. The UJC is a charitable organization that works across disciplines to raise awareness around key social justice issues and the need for criminal justice reform. The Summit convened leaders, experts, advocates, and individuals across various fields who are committed to advancing justice. The Summit featured eight different panels on a variety of different criminal justice related topics, including Family Matters, Mental Health and Criminal Justice, Sentencing Alternatives, Exposing Parchman Screening, Anti-Recidivism, Hate Crimes, Probation and Parole, and Civic Engagement. The PCLJ hosted a booth at the summit that provided information and opportunities about the Center's activities and operations and Cardozo as a whole. The three brochures that were distributed at the booth are attached in the appendix. Both Josh and Derrick were chosen as panelists at the Summit for two different panels along with other experts and advocates in the field.

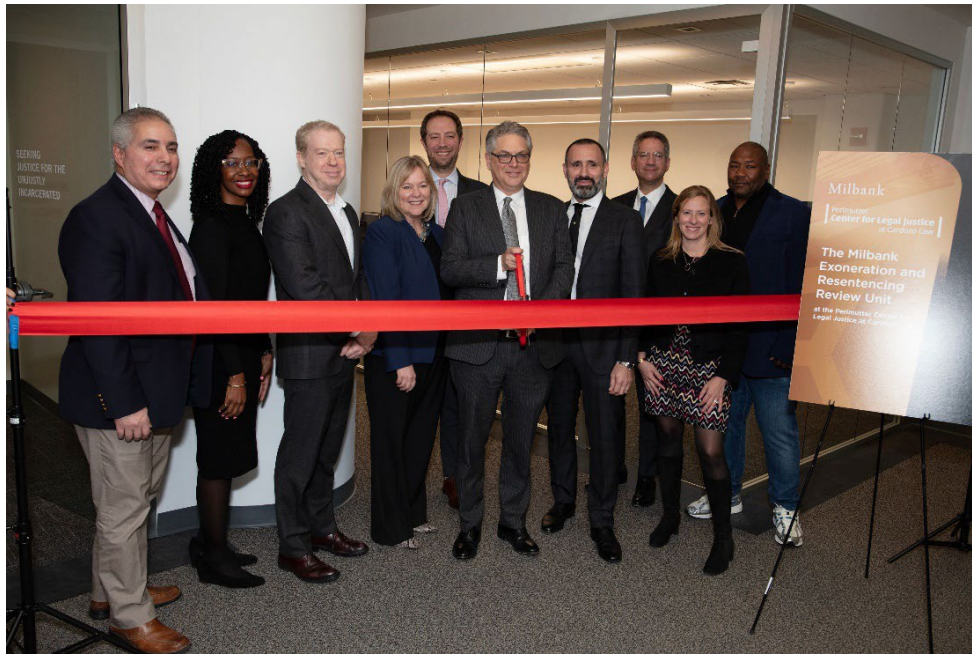
Josh spoke on the 'Family Matters' panel along with Dr. Patrice Collins, Victor Dempsey, Danroy "Dan" Henry Sr., Violet Martin, and Nicole Paultre-Bell, and moderated by Amna Nawaz. The panel discussed the effect of the carceral state on the family and friends of those that are incarcerated, killed by gun and state sanctioned violence, or victim to police and prosecutorial misconduct. The panelists explored the idea of a system that values human dignity and prioritizes healing and restoration rather than punishment and how it can be achieved.

Derrick spoke on the 'Mental Health & Criminal Justice' panel with Dr. Jay Carnett, Elliott Connie, Laura Evans, and moderated by Charlamagne Tha God. The panel discussed the criminalization of mental illness, the inadequacy of mental health treatment in prisons, and the impact of mental health stigma on incarcerated individuals. The panelists urged for reform and shared innovative strategies and solutions for a more compassionate and effective approach in addressing mental health within the criminal justice system. Derrick spoke specifically about his mental health journey while incarcerated and the insufficient support and resources he received during his time in prison.

Milbank LLP and PCLJ Partnership

Milbank LLP recently awarded the PCLJ a \$1 million gift to establish the Milbank Exoneration and Resentencing Review Unit at the Perlmutter Center for Legal Justice at Cardozo Law. This four-year partnership will help combat inequities in the US criminal justice system with a focus on wrongful conviction, excessive sentencing, and clemency. This gift and partnership will help the Center grow its staff and expand its caseload given the high volume of requests it has received since it launched in 2022. The new partnership is off to a strong start with Milbank and PCLJ already beginning work on four new cases together. The gift will be funded by the remainder of attorneys' fees that Milbank received as part of a settlement in a long-running racial discrimination lawsuit brought by Milbank and LatinoJustice PRLDEF. One of the newly renovated conference centers will also be named in honor of the Milbank firm and marks the first new named building space in the *Rise Up for Cardozo* campaign in honor of the school's 50th anniversary in 2026.

On February 12, Cardozo hosted an event in the lobby to publicly announce and celebrate the gift and newly formed partnership. The event was attended by PCLJ staff, students, and clients, Cardozo faculty and staff, and Milbank LLP staff. The speakers included Dean Melanie Leslie, Milbank Chairman Scott A. Edelman, Josh Dubin, and Derrick Hamilton. The event gave both Milbank and the PCLJ an opportunity to debut the partnership and gift to the public and discuss their shared commitment to defending and freeing individuals who have been wrongfully convicted.



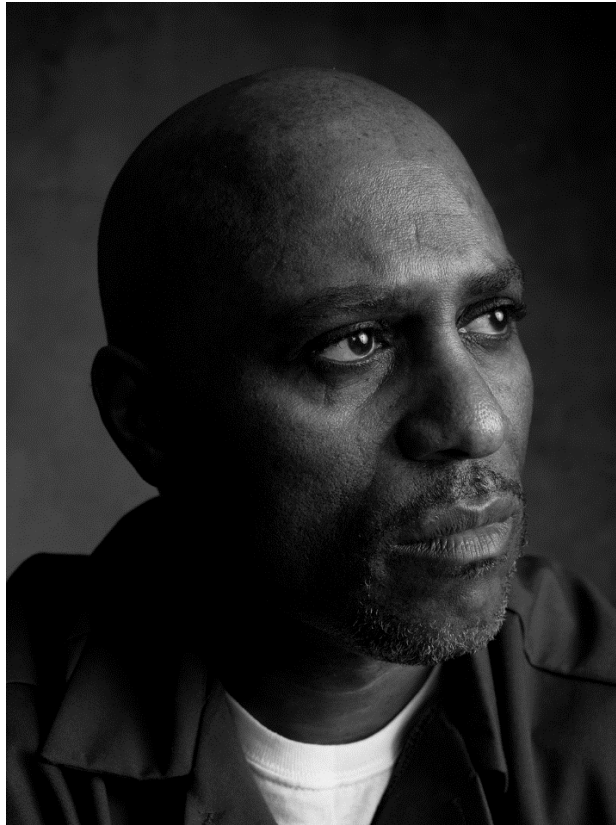
The ribbon cutting ceremony for The Milbank Exoneration and Resentencing Review Unit at the Perlmutter Center for Legal Justice at Cardozo Law.

Upcoming Activities:

PCLJ Sponsorship at American Academy of Forensic Sciences

The PCLJ is sponsoring the keynote speech by Bryan Stevenson at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences 76th Annual Conference from February 19-24 in Denver, Colorado. Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. Under his leadership, EJI has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill, and aiding children prosecuted as adults.

As a result of this sponsorship, PCLJ promotional photos and videos will be displayed on screen as attendees enter and depart the keynote presentation and the PCLJ logo will be promoted on signage outside of the ballroom where the event is being held. Some of the promotional photos will feature Bruce Bryan, the PCLJ's first client, photographed by Rick Wenner, a prominent entertainment and editorial photographer, as a part of his project 'Bruce Bryan – The Dandelion'. A few photos are included below by Rick Wenner.



Bruce Bryan photographed by Rick Wenner.

PCLJ Town Hall

The PCLJ is planning a town hall forum to take place at Cardozo on April 1st. The forum will present on and discuss the status of the Wrongful Convictions Act, the Clean Slate Act, and other provisions and matters pertaining to policy reform that families and the community at large would like to engage in.

The Wrongful Convictions Act (S. 215 / A. 2878) would provide expanded opportunities to seek justice for those who have been wrongfully convicted. Some of these expanded opportunities include the right to counsel for postconviction procedures, enable innocent people who pled guilty to qualify for postconviction review, create a procedure to review scientific evidence that contributed to a wrongful conviction when new information surfaces, allow for post-conviction discovery, and remove procedural roadblocks to relief. Currently, the legislation has been passed by both houses of the New York State legislature, but Governor Kathy Hochul vetoed the bill on December 23, 2023, despite pressure from experts and advocates across the state.

The Clean Slate Act (S. 7551A / A. 1029C) allows New Yorkers to be eligible to have conviction records automatically sealed 3 years from sentencing for misdemeanors and 8 years from sentencing for felonies, not including time incarcerated. These timeframes are carefully calibrated to allow people with conviction records to move forward with their lives and access jobs, housing, and higher education. The Clean Slate Act was signed by Governor Kathy Hochul on November 16, 2023.