

CITY OF GRANTS PASS V. JOHNSON SYMPOSIUM (FEBRUARY 22, 2025)

**HOSTED BY THE SANTA CLARA LAW REVIEW
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES AND WRITTEN MATERIALS**

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Omar Passons

Omar Passons is Deputy City Manager for the City of San Jose where his primary focus areas are leadership to prevent and end homelessness and to enhance the quality of life of all San Jose residents. Prior to joining the City of San Jose, Passons was the first person to serve as Director of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's Office of Homeless Solutions. In that capacity, he led a team to align critical services and supports offered by the County to prevent and end homelessness. This work required leadership across a range of County internal departments that addressed every aspect of the Social Determinants of Health and working to strengthen partnerships with local government and community leaders from a range of backgrounds, including those who were currently or formerly experiencing homelessness. Passons is a former construction and land use attorney and began his career evaluating public health programs at the United States Department of Health and Human Services. This combination of policy and community level engagement on land use issues provides a strong basis for addressing the complex issues involved in preventing and addressing homelessness.

Passons served on the San Diego Workforce Development Board for seven years, the Management Committee of the Urban Land Institute, the San Diego Regional Taskforce on Homelessness Continuum of Care Committee to Address Homelessness Among Black San Diegans and the Board of CDC Small Business Finance. He is a past-President of the Earl B. Gilliam Bar Association and former Board member of the California Association of Black Lawyers. He received his undergraduate and Master of Public Health degrees at the University of Arizona and his law degree from George Mason University School of Law. He is a civic leader on issues impacting economic equity, homelessness, and creating opportunities for all members of the community to lead lives of dignity.

Nicholas Conway

Nicholas Conway is an Associate Professor of Political Science at San Francisco State University and an Adjunct Professor of Law at University of California Law-San Francisco. He teaches courses on U.S. constitutional law, national judicial politics, appellate advocacy, and judicial process. His research includes the U.S. Supreme Court and public opinion, the Shadow Docket, constitutional litigation, media attention to judicial decisions, and political methodology.

Valerie Higgins

Valerie J. Higgins is a distinguished legal scholar and practitioner with over four decades of experience spanning academia, civil litigation, alternative dispute resolution, and public policy. A longtime instructor at Humphreys University Drivon School of Law and Sacramento State University, she has taught courses in Civil Procedure, Remedies, and Political Science, shaping the next generation of legal professionals and government policymakers. Beyond the classroom, she has served as an arbitrator, mediator, and pro tem settlement judge for the San Francisco and Marin County Superior Courts. Her extensive legal career includes advising state agencies, local governments, and legislative bodies on policy, governance, and legislative compliance. A published author and scholar, her contributions extend into academic writing, appellate advocacy, and creative literature.

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Laura Riley

Laura Riley is the Director of the Clinical Program at UC Berkeley Law. She is a social justice attorney with experience in veterans law, disability, and women's rights. She wrote *Homeless Advocacy*, a legal textbook focusing on the unhoused population and the legal challenges unique to them. She continues to write extensively in the area of homelessness and access to justice. Prior to joining the UC Berkeley Law, she was associate professor of lawyering skills and assistant director of academic success at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law. There she developed and co-taught a Veterans Legal Practicum and co-chaired the DEI Faculty Committee. She has also worked as managing attorney for the Los Angeles County Bar Association, project director of Bet Tzedek Legal Services, staff attorney for California Women's Law Center, staff attorney for Disability Rights Legal Center, and a clerk for the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Laura earned her B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University and her J.D. from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law.

Ron Hochbaum

Ron Hochbaum is an Associate Clinical Professor of Law at the University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law where he directs the Buccola Family Homeless Advocacy Clinic - the first of its kind to exclusively represent unhoused people who have had contact with the criminal legal system. Before joining the faculty at McGeorge, he was an Assistant Professor of Law at the University of the District of Columbia and a clinical teaching fellow at both Loyola University Chicago and Cornell University. In practice, Professor Hochbaum worked first as a Staff Attorney and then a Supervising Attorney at the Homeless Action Center in Berkeley and Oakland. His research examines the criminalization of homelessness, situating it at the intersection of scholarship on the criminalization of poverty and critical outsider jurisprudence. His work explores how anti-homeless bias and the intersections of homelessness and race, gender, disability and LGBTQIA+ identity drive our expanding definition of crime and the effort to equate homelessness with danger and criminality.

Julie Nice

Professor Julie Nice serves as the Herbst Foundation Professor of Law at the University of San Francisco School of Law. She was featured as one of the nation's top-25 law teachers in the evidence-based study *What the Best Law Teachers Do* (Schwartz, Hess & Sparrow, Harvard University Press 2013). She has received 15 awards for law teaching, including being voted six times as the Distinguished Professor of the Year at USF Law. Nice previously served as the Delaney Professor of Law at the University of Denver, where she received numerous Professor of the Year awards and several university-wide awards for teaching and scholarship. She previously taught as a clinical fellow at Northwestern University School of Law and as a visiting professor at University of Michigan School of Law, University of Connecticut School of Law, and UC Law SF (formerly Hastings). Before she began teaching, she was a public interest litigator at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago. Nice teaches and focuses her scholarly work on Constitutional Law, Poverty Law, and Sexuality Law.

Jesilyn Faust

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Dr. Jesi Faust is a lecturer at Santa Clara University, where she teaches in the Political Science Department, and at UC Berkeley, where she teaches in the Interdisciplinary Social Sciences program. She earned her Ph.D. in Global Studies from UC Santa Barbara in 2023. Dr. Faust's research explores gendered experiences of oppression, community building, and resistance. She is currently working on an article sponsored by the Unhoused Initiative, titled "Precarious Community: Gender, Sex, and Safety for Unsheltered Women." She is also working on a research project focused on measuring knowledge and beliefs about homelessness. Her work combines interdisciplinary approaches to understanding global and local inequalities, with a commitment to advocacy and community engaged scholarship.

Arturo Baiocchi

Dr. Arturo Baiocchi is an Associate Professor at the School of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento, and a Faculty Fellow at the Center for Health, Practice, Policy, and Research. His research and teaching focus on homelessness, social welfare policy, and community-based research. Dr. Baiocchi has over ten years of experience conducting various studies on supportive housing interventions, street outreach programs, joint-response teams in law enforcement, and reintegration programs for individuals transitioning from different institutions. He has also examined how communities respond to homelessness, the stigma faced by vulnerable populations, and public perceptions regarding social welfare and inequality more broadly. Over the past nine years, Dr. Baiocchi and colleagues have published various reports on homelessness in Sacramento County and statewide (e.g., for CA Dept of Social Services, CA Interagency Council on Homelessness, US Bureau of Justice, Sacramento Continuum of Care, CA Health Foundation). Recently, Dr. Baiocchi collaborated with Bright Coast Production on a documentary about Camp Resolution, an experimental self-governed encampment in Sacramento organized by 60 residents, mostly women experiencing homelessness and many disabled. The documentary examines the systemic failures leading to the encampment's creation and its closure after the Grants Pass decision in August 2024. In 2022, the Sacramento Housing Alliance honored Dr. Baiocchi with the Unhoused/Homeless Justice Champion of the Year Award.

Melissa Morris

Melissa Morris is a staff attorney with the Public Interest Law Project (PILP), a California statewide legal services support center. Melissa's work at PILP includes impact litigation, policy advocacy, and training on housing, public benefits, and homelessness issues. Prior to joining PILP in 2018, Melissa worked at the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, where, over the course of 12 years, her work spanned issues ranging from eviction defense to SSI appeals to affordable housing policy to voting rights. Melissa began her legal career in 2004 as a Borchard Foundation Center on Law & Aging Fellow at Legal Aid of Marin, where she represented low-income and senior residents of Marin County in housing, domestic violence, elder abuse, and consumer matters. Melissa received her Bachelor of Arts degree in the Comparative Study of Religion from Harvard College and her juris doctor from the University of California at Berkeley (Berkeley Law).

Esther Wilch

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Esther Wilch is a Directing Attorney at Homebase where she provides technical assistance to communities across the country to build community capacity to prevent and end homelessness. In her work with the Criminal Legal Systems Initiative, Esther focuses on the intersection of homelessness and the criminal legal system and issues impacting their shared populations. Esther facilitates community planning processes, evaluates and develops coordinated entry systems, and helps communities maintain HUD compliance while implementing systems-level change. Prior to joining Homebase, Esther worked as a criminal defense attorney for several years, spent some brief time in death penalty work, and advocated against extreme sentencing of young adults at state, national and international forums.

Isamar Dominguez

As Policy Fellow, Isamar works closely with the Director of Policy and Legislation focusing on state-level advocacy work, advocating directly with legislators and their staff on bills that impact the work of All Home.

Isamar is a Bay Area native committed to disrupting and ultimately ending cycles of poverty by empowering individuals and their families with the stability, resources, education, and support they need to heal and thrive. Having experienced housing insecurity in the Bay Area as a youth and into early adulthood coupled with her frustrations working in the field, she sees it as her responsibility to apply pressure by taking space and asking crucial questions to end homelessness.

Isamar holds a B.A. in American Studies from the University of California Berkeley including an intensive startup incubator in Europe. She has continued fueling her work and education through participating in local community organization training programs. Outside of All Home, she is a licensed Mortgage Loan Originator with the hope to increase homeownership and landlords' participation in housing for the unhoused. In her efforts to increase affordable housing options, she is a tiny home builder and loves all things construction.

Robynn Cox

Dr. Robynn Cox is an associate professor in the School of Public Policy at the University of California, Riverside, faculty affiliate at the UC Riverside Presley Center for Crime & Justice, fellow at the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics and senior scholar at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis' Opportunity and Inclusive Growth Institute (OIGI). Her research interests include the fields of crime, health, labor, housing, and social and racial inequality. Her research has primarily focused on understanding the social, economic, and health consequences of mass incarceration policies. Her work has been published in various journals including *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Neuropharmacology*, *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Cityscape*, *Journal of Labor Research*, *Southern Economic Journal*, and *Review of Black Political Economy*. Most recently, Cox was invited to be a member of the advisory committee for the National Academy of Medicine's Culture of Health Program (CoHP). In AY 2018-2019 she was awarded a visiting scholar position at OIGI and was selected as a Kelso Fellow at the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations' Institute for the Study of Employee Ownership and Profit Sharing. In addition to the Federal Reserve and Rutgers University, Cox's research has been supported by the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, the Russell Sage Foundation, the NIA, the USDA Food and Nutrition Services, and the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research.

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Prior to her appointment at UC Riverside, Cox held faculty appointments at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and the Economics Department at Spelman College. She was also a postdoctoral associate in the Department of Economics at Duke University. She earned her master's and doctorate degrees in economics from Georgia State University, where she was awarded the Andrew Young Fellowship. Cox completed her undergraduate studies at Duke University, where she obtained her AB in economics and Spanish and Latin American studies.

Adam Cowing

Adam Cowing is an Assistant Clinical Professor of Law and teaches in the Community and Economic Development Clinic at UCI Law. Before coming to UCI Law, Professor Cowing was a fellow and lecturer at Yale Law School, where he taught in the Community and Economic Development Clinic. Prior to teaching, Professor Cowing worked at Bocarsly Emden Cowan Esmail & Arndt LLP, a law firm specializing in affordable housing and community development law. He also served as a staff attorney at Public Counsel in Los Angeles, where he represented low-income tenants and tenant organizers. Before law school, Professor Cowing worked on political campaigns.

Erika McLitus

Erika leads SPUR's work on neighborhood initiatives, including reimagining downtowns to become economically and socially diverse and resilient, transforming public spaces, and improving housing affordability through production and anti-displacement strategies. She is committed to empowering historically marginalized communities and providing tools to help Bay Area residents reshape the urban spaces that define how we live and work.

Prior to joining SPUR, Erika worked for the Oakland Housing Authority and the Solano Transportation Authority. She holds B.A. degrees in urban and regional planning and English literature from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In their spare time, they enjoy exploring San Francisco, running, and dabbling in a variety of creative outlets.

Jeffrey Hare

Jeffrey Hare is an attorney, mediator, and professor at San José State University. He currently teaches land use and planning law and environmental law with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning/Environmental Studies at San José State University, and is a member of the Board of the California Chapter of the American Planning Association. His background and experience working in both the public and private sector to solve complex matters allows him to assist parties in finding creative and effective solutions to a wide range of issues. He received his juris doctor from Santa Clara University School of Law.

WRITTEN MATERIALS

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The Supreme Court case, *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, that was decided on June 28, 2024:

https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-175_19m2.pdf

This article was written by the keynote speaker, Omar Passons, a couple of months before the Supreme Court decision. This article provides context on case precedent and to the three Grants Pass ordinances that were at issue:

<https://medium.com/@omarpassons/homelessness-and-johnson-v-city-of-grants-pass-what-the-case-is-and-is-not-d113cd238b18>

Constitutional Interpretation and Criminalization

This article discusses the constitutional interpretation issues at the heart of this case :

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/cert/23-175#:~:text=After%20cross%2Dmotions%20for%20summary,Clause%2%80%9D%20of%20the%20Eighth%20Amendment%20>

Research and Data

This document highlights data on California homelessness:

<https://shou.senate.ca.gov/sites/shou.senate.ca.gov/files/Homelessness%20in%20CA%202023%20Numbers%20-%201.2024.pdf>

Community Leader and Practitioner Perspectives

This page highlights local Bay Area legal advocacy for the unhoused:

<https://baylegal.org/what-we-do/strategic-priorities/homelessness/>

Public Policy

This article from the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR) discusses specifically California homelessness, along with causes and policy considerations:

<https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/homelessness-california-causes-and-policy-considerations>