

September 10, 2020 – History of Environmental Justice in Connecticut
Sharon Lewis, Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice



Sharon Lewis is Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ). CCEJ has worked tirelessly for more than two decades to eliminate or mitigate the environmental injustices borne by low income and communities of color and to provide a seat at the table where rules, laws, and policies regarding the environment are formulated and implemented. Sharon Lewis' work experience spans more than 40 years, split evenly between the for-profit and non-profit business sectors. She enjoyed a 20-year career with the insurance industry, beginning with the Aetna Insurance Company as an underwriter specializing in municipal insurance coverages. From there, she transitioned to the Treaty Reinsurance sector, where she designed and underwrote reinsurance products for municipalities and Fortune 500 companies. In 1998, she joined Hartford residents as they fought to close the North Hartford Landfill. She went on to work for Dr. Mark Mitchell, founder of the CT Coalition for Environmental Justice. Sharon is a life-long Hartford resident and lives in an environmental justice community in the North End of Hartford. Education: BA / MA | 1975-77 Mount Holyoke College Major: Urban Studies/Urban Planning

September 17, 2020 – Social Determinants of Health Disparities and Energy Affordability

Orlando Velasco, Health Equity Office, CT Department of Public Health

Brenda Watson, Operation Fuel



Orlando Agustin Velasco is Director of the Office of Health Equity at the Connecticut Department of Public Health. He also is a Board Member of the Hartford Health Initiative, Inc., and volunteers with the Capitol Region Medical Reserve Corps.

Mr. Velasco has committed his life to working in public health, working for over 10 years in regional and national HIV/AIDS and substance abuse community-based research projects at the Institute for Community Research in Hartford, CT; Temple University in Philadelphia and Emory University in Atlanta, and as an Epidemiologist for the City of Hartford from 2012 through 2018.



Brenda Watson is Executive Director of Operation Fuel, a statewide non-profit headquartered in Hartford CT that provides equitable support for CT residents who are experiencing difficulty in covering household energy and water utility costs. Brenda earned her Master's Degree in Public Policy Studies at Trinity College, and also attended the Women's Campaign School at Yale.

She is very active in other aspects of key decision-making at the state level, especially when it comes to advancing social services and energy management. She is a Board member of the CT Green Bank, serves on the Governor's Council on Climate Change, the Residential Sub-Committee of the CT Energy Efficiency Board, and chairs the Low Income Energy Advisory Board.

September 24, 2020 – Adaptation and Mitigation for Climate-Vulnerable Populations

Dr. Mark Mitchell, George Mason University



Mark Mitchell M.D., MPH, FACPM is Associate Professor of Climate Change, Energy, & Environmental Health Equity at George Mason University. He is the founder and Senior Policy Advisor for the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. He also co-chairs the National Medical Association's Commission on Environmental Health.

Dr. Mitchell has spent over twenty years working in the public health sector, including as Director of Health for the City of Hartford, and fifteen years working with environmental justice communities to prevent and reduce environmentally related diseases and exposure to toxic chemicals.

October 1, 2020 – Transportation and Climate Justice

Tony Cherolis, Latino Center for Progress

Maria Cecilia Pinto De Moura, Union of Concerned Scientists

Taylor Mayes, Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs



Tony Cherolis helped to establish BiCi Co. at the Center for Latino Progress, which is a program that engages youth, teens, and adults from the city and nearby towns in all aspects of bicycling, from safety to repairing their rides. In addition to the community and teaching programs, BiCi Co. is a fully functioning bike shop. He now focuses on the Transport Hartford Academy, another program at the Center for Latino Progress, which seeks to involve teen and adults in advocating for sustainable, safe, and convenient multimodal transportation. They work with residents and the city to improve pedestrian safety, advocate for more connected bike routes, and for transit system improvements.



Maria Cecilia Pinto de Moura is senior vehicles engineer in the Clean Transportation program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. She conducts research and modeling on transportation energy and emissions in support of regional policy campaigns that aim to reduce oil use and mitigate vehicle emissions. She holds a BSE in electrical engineering and computer science from Princeton University, a MS from Columbia University and a PhD in energy planning and the environment from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Prior to joining UCS, she developed long-term climate scenarios using an integrated assessment models at the Joint Global Change Research Institute/Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. Her recent work has focused on air pollution from transportation.



Taylor Mayes is Communications Coordinator for The Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, where she develops and implements strategies to coordinate with the Roundtable's Affiliates and other allies in an effort to strengthen collaboration among Connecticut's labor, environmental, and religious groups. A Connecticut native, Taylor graduated from the University of Connecticut with a degree in Environmental Studies and a minor in Political Science. She previously worked as a communications intern for the City of Hartford's Climate Stewardship Initiative and the CT Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA). During her time at UConn, Taylor found a passion in addressing environmental injustice and lack of representation of marginalized groups in the mainstream environmental movement.

Energy Justice: Thursday, October 8, 2020

Leticia Colon de Mejias, Energy Solutions, Eco Warriors



Leticia Colon de Mejias is a nationally awarded building scientist and climate equity speaker. Ms. Colon de Mejias is the CEO and founder of the Nationally awarded company Energy Efficiencies Solutions, Chair of the nonprofit Efficiency For All, Policy Co-Chair of the National Building Performance Association, a Commissioner for the state of Connecticut Commission on Women Children Elderly Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs, and Founder and President of Green Eco Warriors, a nonprofit which works to "Create a Culture of Sustainable Thinkers." She is an awarded published children's book author with several books on environmental leadership, sustainability, as well as a line of educational science based graphic texts (comic books) which feature a cast of diverse superheroes and align with national science standards. She is the recipient of many national awards, including the United States of America's Department of Energy Award for work with at risk and minority populations, National Award Building Scientist Hall of Fame, Minority Small Business of the year award, National Department of Education award, and she is a two time Capital

Workforce Partners Employer of the Year Award. Her companies have provided energy efficiency assessments and upgrades to over 14,000 CT households and completed full energy efficiency retrofits in over 10 million square feet of multifamily housing. Through the nonprofit Green Eco Warriors, she has provided climate and energy education to over 40,000 youth and families.

October 15, 2020 – EJ and the urban natural environment

Chris Donnelly, Retired, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection



Chris Donnelly worked as Urban Forestry Coordinator within the DEEP Division of Forestry from 1998 until 2020. In this position, he joined with partners in the cities and towns throughout the state, seeking to encourage a basic understanding of urban forestry and how it can help improve the quality of life in our communities. The bulk of his efforts, however, were focused on working with many of these same partners in the improvement of the practice of urban forestry, particularly at the local level. Through these efforts, Chris was able to see growth within the state, in the way urban trees are valued and are cared for, as well as an increase in the number of people who are involved with urban forestry. Education: Yale College, BS biology 1975; Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Masters of Forest Science, 1985

October 22, 2020 – Indigenous Approaches to Climate Change

Gerald Torres, Yale School of the Environment

Hosted by Ed Sarabia, Retired, State of Connecticut (American) Indian Affairs Coordinator



Gerald Torres is Professor of Environmental Justice at the Yale School of the Environment and Professor at Yale Law School. He is former President of the Association of American Law Schools and has taught at Stanford and Harvard Law Schools. Professor Torres served as Counsel to the Attorney General on environmental matters and Indian affairs at the U.S. Department of Justice. Professor Torres served on the Board of the Environmental Law Institute, the EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, and was the founding chairman of the Advancement Project. He is board chair of EarthDay Network and a trustee of the Natural Resources Defense Council. He was a consultant to the United Nations on environmental matters. Torres is a life member of the American Law Institute and the Council on Foreign Relations.



Born and raised in Juneau, Alaska, Ed spent most of his youth commercial fishing for salmon, halibut, and black cod. He grew up surrounded by his tribe, Tlingit, and culture and primarily raised by his uncles (Mother's brothers), a Tlingit traditional upbringing. He graduated from Juneau-Douglas High School and worked at the State of Alaska's Museum as a microfiche operator. Ed attended college in Tacoma and Seattle, Washington graduating from Seattle University, and then worked as a Native Counselor on the construction phase of the Alaska Pipeline and then as a vocational counselor. He became a single father and wanted to expose his children to the "outside" world and took an opportunity to move to Connecticut. Ed worked various jobs including factory work, American Indian non-profit organization, and at a grocery store. He was hired as the (American) Indian Affairs Coordinator with the State of Connecticut which allowed him to work and interact with Connecticut's tribes and members as well as a multitude of agencies, people, professionals and museums. Ed was one of five Natives who started the American Indian Spiritual services with Connecticut's Department of Corrections. Ed is now retired and lives in Rhode Island with his wife, Carol.

October 29, 2020 – Mapping Vulnerable Populations
State of Washington TBA

November 5, 2020 – Addressing the Needs of Persons with Disabilities in Climate Planning

Marissa Rivera and Stephen Byers, Disability Rights Connecticut



Marissa Rivera is the daughter of two Deaf parents and raised in a bilingual household. While in Colorado, she graduated from Front Range Community College with an Associate in American Sign Language Interpreting. She graduated a B.A. in Communication Studies from the sole Deaf liberal arts college in the world, Gallaudet University, in Washington, D.C. She interned at Capitol Hill for Congressman Mark Takano and assisted with the Congressional Deaf Caucus. Upon graduation, Marissa signed up with AmeriCorps and served her yearlong term in Montana. In her role as an Abuse and Neglect advocate at Disability Rights Montana, she advocated for the rights of individuals subjected to seclusion in the state hospital and individuals awaiting psychiatric evaluations for the court system. She also interviewed prisoners with disabilities at the State Prison about their care. At the end of her service, the

National AmeriCorps program formally recognized her as the “Most Engaging with People with Disabilities” in honor of Senator Tom Harkin.



Since graduating from Marquette University Law School in 1982, Steve Byers has been a public interest lawyer devoting his career to representing the most vulnerable among us. He has worked in Wisconsin, Indiana, & Bridgeport, Connecticut. Repeatedly recognized for excellence in providing legal services to those in most need, he joins DRCT to use his advocacy skills and knowledge for the benefit of disabled residents of Connecticut.

November 12, 2020 – State Climate Justice Laws and Policies

Marianne Engelman Lado, Environmental Justice Clinic, Vermont Law School



Marianne Engelman Lado directs the Environmental Justice Clinic at Vermont Law School, which focuses on community lawyering and civil rights enforcement in the environmental justice context. She also serves as Lecturer at both the Yale University School of Public Health and Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, and she co-chairs the Equity & Environmental Justice Working Group of the GC3. She has decades of experience working on issues of environmental justice, civil rights, and disability rights, including service as senior staff attorney at Earthjustice, General Counsel at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, and staff attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. Marianne lectures widely and has taught graduate, law and undergraduate level courses. She holds a B.A. in government from Cornell University, a J.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, and an M.A. in Politics from Princeton University. Her most recent publications include “No More Excuses: Building a New Vision of Civil Rights

Enforcement in the Context of Environmental Justice.”

November 19, 2020 – Intergenerational Climate Justice

Sena Wazer, Sunrise Connecticut

Alex Rodriguez, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters

Jaysa Hunter-Mellers, Young Voices for the Planet



Sena Wazer is a 16-year-old climate justice activist who has been fighting for the environment since she was 5. She is currently co-director of Sunrise Connecticut and is going into her junior year at UConn studying Environmental Studies. She is a member of the Governor’s Council on Climate Change’s Equity and Environmental Justice Working Group, serving as chair of the group’s Mitigation Subcommittee. She lives in Storrs, Connecticut, with her family.



Alex Rodriguez is a Community Organizer with the CTLCV - CT League of Conservation Voters. As an Organizer, Alex builds relationships with diverse populations at the grassroots level to advocate for sustainability, environmental justice, and voting rights. For more information on CTLCV’s organizing efforts, check out conservationeducation.org.



15-year-old [Jaysa Hunter-Mellers](#) galvanizes audiences with a courage and wisdom that belie her age—engaging peers, educators, and policymakers in the fight for environmental justice and for [equitable civic education in schools](#). She passionately advocates for youth and adults alike to participate in their own governance take action and speak truth to power. At 10 years old, Jaysa’s dynamic speeches at rallies and her testimony at City Hall helped shut down the coal-fired power plant that was contributing to her asthma. Her story is told in the short film, “[Words Have Power](#)”, one of thirteen award-winning [Young Voices for the Planet \(YVFP\) films](#), documenting youth solutions to the climate crisis and other environmental and social justice issues. Jaysa is a [TIME for Kids - Kid Hero for the Planet](#) and the recipient of YVFP’s “[Youth Award for Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement](#)”

in honor of the late Rep. John Lewis.