



BLACK PUBLIC DEFENDER ASSOCIATION

Our History

The unique experiences and challenges of black public defenders prompted Patrice James, a founding public defender of *Still She Rises*, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to reach out to April Frazier Camara, then Director of Defender Legal Services at the National Legal Aid Defender Association (NLADA) in the fall of 2017, to inquire about national organizations that provide support and training for black public defenders. Patrice's inquiry prompted a long-overdue discussion at NLADA about the need to form an organization that would serve as a safe space, refuge, and training ground for black public defenders throughout the country. During initial discussions at NLADA, April learned from NLADA President and CEO Jo-Ann Wallace, the idea for this organization had been discussed for many years in the black defender community. Jo-Ann recognized the long-standing desire and need for such an organization and readily supported its creation under April's leadership.

A few months later, the first planning meeting for the future organization took place at NLADA's annual conference at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, D.C. in December, 2017. There, a dozen current and former public defenders and social workers came together from the Public Defender Association for the District of Columbia, Defender Association of Philadelphia, Still She Rises, The Bronx Defenders, Legal Aid Justice Center, Harden & Pinckney, and Towson University convened to conceptualize the structure and met with leaders from the African American Project Directors Association (AAPDA), a group of Black civil legal service leaders within NLADA. A one year deadline was established for the creation of the Black Public Defender Association (BPDA), and the goal was realized only eleven months later in November 2018.

Following the initial planning meeting, a working group was formed and met monthly after work hours to develop the structure, bylaws, mission, and membership requirements for BPDA. After nearly one year of hard work, BPDA officially launched as a new membership section of NLADA in Houston, Texas on November 2, 2018. Bylaws were approved and officers elected in December, 2018 – exactly one year after that fateful initial planning meeting in the Renaissance Hotel. The organization proudly met its first goal.

Our Mission

The Black Public Defender Association aims to improve the quality of defense provided to low-income communities across the United States by creating and maintaining a national network of skilled Black public defenders that identify with and are committed to the populations they serve.

Four Pillars

Lead. Train. Advocate. Inspire

The creation of the Black Public Defender Association is based on the recognition that creating and maintaining a national network of skilled Black public defenders who identify with and come from the communities most disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system is necessary to fight against and end mass incarceration. BPDA was created to provide a safe space for black public defenders to come to receive training, support, and encouragement to support excellence in public defense.

BPDA Leadership

April Frazier-Camara	Chair
Patrice James	Vice-Chair
Brittany Mobley	National Secretary
Sylvia Smith Porsha Venable	Director(s) of Membership and Outreach
Lauren Johnson	Director of Communications
Chiquisha Robinson	Director of Social Policy and Advocacy
Heather Pinckney	Director of Skills-Based Training
Lori James Townes Keir Bradford Grey	Director(s) of Leadership & Professional Development

BPDA Founding Committee Members

Jo-Ann Wallace	Sylvia Smith
April Frazier-Camara	Chiquisha Robinson
Patrice James	Lori James-Townes
Brittany Mobley	Lauren Johnson
Keir Bradford-Grey	Courtney Dixon
Ishaah Murphy	Kevann Gardner
Byron Conway	Heather Pinckney
Erin Miles Cloud	Dinah Manning
Shannon Cumberbatch	James King