

Community Lawyering for Environmental Justice Part 8: Title VI as a Tool for Advancing Environmental Justice

Faculty Biographies

Amy Laura Cahn, Legal Director, Taproot Earth – Amy Laura Cahn (she/they) is the Legal Director for Taproot Earth. A community-based movement lawyer with over twenty-five years as an organizer and facilitator, Amy Laura collaborates on environmental, climate, land, and food justice to support self-determination and shifting power.

Amy Laura was a Visiting Professor and Director of the Environmental Justice Clinic at Vermont Law and Graduate School, recently testifying before the House Natural Resource Committee. Prior to VLGS, Amy Laura led the environmental justice and community lawyering practices at the Conservation Law Foundation and Public Interest Law Center, where she began as a Skadden Fellow and director of the Garden Justice Legal Initiative. Amy Laura has been recognized by the Philadelphia City Council for her “dedication to the empowerment of communities through community control of land, sustainable and equitable urban gardening and farming, and the pursuit of environmental justice.” In 2004, Amy Laura co-authored a community-based study that helped overturn New York City’s lead laws. She is co-founder of Lower Manhattan’s Bluestockings Bookstore and the Gulf South Allied Funders.

Amy Laura is an adjunct lecturer at Tufts University and the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. She is a member of the Jewish Voice for Peace National Board, the Penn Law Alumni Advisory Board for Inclusion & Engagement, Alternatives for Community and Environment’s Legal Advisory, the editorial board of journal Environmental Justice, and the Title VI Alliance. She received her B.A., summa cum laude, from Hunter College and J.D., magna cum laude, from Penn Law. Amy Laura is a queer white Ashkenazi Jewish femme living with her partner and pups on Mashpee Wampanoag territory in her home state of Massachusetts.

Debbie Chizewer, Managing Attorney, Midwest Office, Earthjustice – As the Managing Attorney for Earthjustice’s new Chicago office, Debbie has been building a Midwest team and a docket of cases across three program areas — climate and energy, healthy communities, and wild lands and wildlife. This team’s work includes representation of Tribal Nations in the fight against the risky Line 5 oil pipeline and advocacy on behalf of Black, low-income communities facing disproportionate environmental harms from air and water pollution.

This work builds on Debbie’s experience over the last two decades where she advocated for environmental protection across many issues — fighting for environmental justice in the Midwest at Northwestern Law’s environmental law clinic, promoting Great Lakes health at the Alliance for the Great Lakes, and protecting wildlife and public lands in the Rockies for the National Wildlife Federation. While at Northwestern’s Environmental Advocacy Clinic, Debbie led the clinic’s representation and a legal coalition that represented a community group living on a Superfund site, contaminated with lead and arsenic, in East Chicago, Indiana. The work not only led to improved outcomes for the impacted community members but also led to the publication of the Poisonous Homes report which advocated for policy changes to protect residents living in public housing near contaminated sites.

Debbie also recently completed ten years of service, including five years as the Board Chair, for the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, a national non-profit dedicated to promoting economic and racial justice.

Debbie graduated from Princeton University and Boston University School of Law. After graduation from law school, she clerked in the U.S. District Court in the District of Delaware.

Lisa Jordan, Director, Environmental Law Clinic, Tulane Law School – Lisa Jordan is Director of the Environmental Law Clinic, appointed to the position in 2017. She has over twenty years of experience with the Environmental Law Clinic, including serving as Acting Director in 1999-2000, supervising students in the representation of clients who face threats from pollution and barriers to effective participation before governmental entities. From the beginning, Professor Jordan and her students' representation has focused on Louisiana communities disproportionately impacted by industrial pollution.

From 1996 through 1998, Professor Jordan led the Clinic's legal team in representing a grassroots citizen group and their regional and national partners in opposing air permits to Shintech Corporation for a massive polyvinyl chloride plant proposed for Convent, Louisiana, a town in the middle of Louisiana's Cancer Alley.

The Clinic's representation of these groups in the face of massive political and financial resistance and interference led to them being named Runner-Up for the National Law Journal's Lawyer of the Year award. Professor Jordan continues this important work for clients across Louisiana and other areas, as well as clients fighting to protect invaluable natural resources such as the Atchafalaya Basin. Professor Jordan has an LLM in Environmental Law and previously practiced criminal law as an assistant district attorney in Orleans Parish. She is a native New Orleanian.

Maryum Jordan, Climate Justice Attorney, EarthRights International – Maryum first worked at EarthRights from 2014-2018 where she worked in both the Amazon and U.S. offices. During this time, she developed international legal and advocacy strategies with Indigenous community leaders and grassroots organizations in Peru and Ecuador, and represented clients in human rights litigation against multinational corporations.

Before her return to EarthRights in 2022, Maryum served as counsel for the Special Litigation and Advocacy Project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. There, she supported legal and advocacy strategies in relation to cross-cutting racial justice issues including environmental racism and anti-Blackness in the U.S. immigration system. She also coordinated pro bono assistance to monitor law enforcement activity at demonstrations and to provide support to arrested protestors.

Maryum received her J.D. in 2014 from Harvard Law School where she was actively involved in the International Human Rights Clinic and the Law and International Development Society. She earned her B.A. from Harvard College where she majored in Anthropology with a focus on Peruvian archaeology.

Zoe Vogel, Public Interest Environmental Law Fellow, Environmental Law Institute,

Moderator – Zoe is currently a Public Interest Legal Fellow at the Environmental Law Institute, and previously served as a law clerk at ELI during the summer of 2022. Zoe received her J.D. with honors from Tulane University Law School, where she served as the Editor-in-Chief for the Tulane Environmental Law Journal, a student attorney with the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, and an Intersectionality Chair for the Environmental & Energy Law Society. During her time there, she also held positions with the National Wildlife Federation, the Tulane Institute on Water Law and Policy, and Louisiana’s Center for Planning Excellence. She previously earned her B.S.B. from the University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management, during which time she worked as a farm intern to better understand the lived experience of environmental policies (shoutout to Tangletown Gardens!).