

Recovery and Re-Entry of Formerly Incarcerated Women

Susan Burton

Track: Opening Presenter

CE: CPA/BBS/BRN (1.5)

MCLE TBD

Narrative

Susan Burton will share her personal story of how after the tragic accidental death of her five-year-old son, she turned to drugs and alcohol which led to nearly 20 years revolving through cycles of incarceration. Drawing on her personal experiences, she founded **A New Way of Life Re-Entry Project (ANWOL)** in Los Angeles in 1998 - dedicating her life to helping others break the cycle of incarceration. ANWOL provides resources such as housing, case management, employment, legal services, leadership development and community organizing on behalf of, and with, people who struggle to rebuild their lives after incarceration. Susan is widely recognized as a leader in the national criminal justice reform movement. Released in 2017, her memoir, *Becoming Ms. Burton* received a 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in the category of Biography/Autobiography. *Becoming Ms. Burton* is also the recipient of the inaugural Goddard Riverside Stephan Russo Book Prize for Social Justice. Susan is leading an initiative to develop a replication model to assist other communities with providing culturally authentic reentry supports to assist individuals with histories of incarceration and/or convictions. Susan's presentation will include the topics of recovery from substance misuse, building re-entry programs and services for women and families, family reunification, women and trauma, sentencing disparities and advocacy.

BIO

Following the tragic accidental death of her five-year-old son, Susan Burton's world collapsed. Her loss snapped the final tether of resilience burdened by a past of pain and trauma. She descended into an emotional abyss of darkness and despair, yet was not offered the resources needed to heal. Without support, she turned to drugs and alcohol which led to nearly 20 years revolving through cycles of incarceration.

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Susan is widely recognized as a leader in the national criminal justice reform movement. A past *Soros Justice Fellow*, *Women's Policy Institute Fellow* and *Community Fellow* under the *California Wellness Foundation's Violence Prevention Initiative*, Susan has served on the state's *Little Hoover Commission* and the *Gender Responsive Strategies Task Force*. In recognition of her leadership, she was appointed by *Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas* as a member of the *Los Angeles County Sybil Brand Commission for Institutional Inspections*. In this

role she is authorized to inspect Los Angeles County correctional facilities and advocate for the health and well-being of people housed there.

Susan is a co-founder of *All of Us or None (AOUON)* and the *Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People's Movement (FICPM)*, both national grassroots civil rights movements comprised of formerly incarcerated individuals, their families and community allies. In collaboration with *UCLA's Critical Race Studies Program*, she launched the *Employment Rights Re-Entry Legal Clinic* which has grown to be the largest of its kind in Southern California. Susan has earned numerous awards and honors for her work. In 2010, she was named a *CNN Top Ten Hero* and received the prestigious *Citizen Activist Award* from the *Harvard Kennedy School of Government*. She is a recipient of both the *Encore Purpose Prize* (2012) and the *James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award* (2014). In 2015, on the 50th Anniversary of Selma and the Voting Rights Act, Susan Burton was named by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of eighteen New Civil Rights Leaders in the nation. Released in 2017, her memoir, ***Becoming Ms. Burton*** received a 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in the category of Biography/Autobiography. *Becoming Ms. Burton* is also the recipient of the inaugural Goddard Riverside Stephan Russo Book Prize for Social Justice.

ANWOL's mission is to advance multi-dimensional solutions to the effects of incarceration. Since its founding, more than 1,000 women and children have found safety and support in five re-entry homes. Over 300 women have been reunited with their children. Through a household goods distribution center, more than 3,500 formerly homeless individuals have been able to acquire items needed to establish their own homes. Since its inception in 2007, ANWOL's legal department has provided pro bono services to assist thousands seeking relief from the burden of criminal histories. Those services have helped enhance job opportunities by expunging criminal records and offering access to occupational licenses. As a result of leadership building activities, hundreds more have been educated and empowered to speak in advocacy around issues that directly affect their lives.

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe pragmatic steps to facilitate community reentry post incarceration.
2. Identify strategies for overcoming system obstacles and establishing a successful non profit organization.
3. Identify strategies for identifying and overcoming legal obstacles to successful reentry and access to support services.