

Baby Bond: Leveraging Systemic Change Through Philanthropy, Government, and Community Partnerships

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Speaker Bios

Joe Antolín (Moderator)

Asset Funders Network

President & CEO

Joe Antolín serves as the President and Chief Executive Officer of Asset Funders Network (AFN). Joe is a dynamic and entrepreneurial leader with 30+ years of experience as an advocate, mentor, litigator, and executive creating lasting impact in local and regional communities. In his role, he guides AFN's growth and the team's focused efforts to engage philanthropy to advance equitable wealth building and economic mobility across the United States.

Previously, Joe led a consulting practice, served in several executive leadership positions in nonprofit and state government, and was an active legal services individual and class action litigator. He has empowered and led teams in several organizations, provided executive coaching to nonprofit executives of color in several states, and served as a coach mentor for the racial equity national cohort of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Community Leadership Fellowship. He also served as Heartland Alliance's Senior Vice President, Heartland Human Care Services Inc.'s Executive Director, as a director at Catholic Charities of Chicago, and as the Deputy Director of the Illinois human services department.

In these executive roles, he oversaw policy change, advocacy, community engagement, and program design-implementation across issue areas including EITC and CSA, asset building for

low income households (in subsidized housing and shelters), consumer protection, income supports, implementing FSA in Chicago public housing, immigration, refugee resettlement, anti-trafficking, affordable and supportive housing, workforce training, publicly financed jobs, transitional jobs program design, equity in state health improvement planning, and early childhood development programs. His experience started as an advocate and litigator with income supports and anti-poverty program benefits at the state and Federal levels. As an attorney, he litigated for civil rights, consumer law, disability benefits, and systemic reform with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago.

Joe holds a J.D. from Columbus School of Law at Catholic University and received his Bachelor of Arts with Honors from Wesleyan University. He is licensed to practice law as a member of the Illinois Bar. He currently serves on the boards of the Illinois Public Health Institute, and Three Sisters Kitchen in Albuquerque. After decades in Chicago, he now resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Erick Russell

State of Connecticut
Treasurer

Erick Russell was sworn in as Connecticut's 84th State Treasurer on January 4, 2023. He is currently serving his first term.

Born and raised in New Haven, Russell adopted the worth ethic and financial responsibility of his parents by working in the family's small convenience store. He would become the first in his family to graduate college, earning a bachelor's degree from the University of New Haven.

Russell continued his education at the University of Connecticut School of Law. As a law student, he began to merge his talents with the values instilled by his parents. He volunteered to help low-income taxpayers navigate the complexities of federal and state tax law as part of UConn's Low-Income Tax Clinic. He also interned with the Connecticut Legal Rights Project and the administration of Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy.

After law school, Russell joined the prestigious Connecticut law firm of Pullman & Comley where he was a partner in the firm's Public and Private Finance Group. Russell represented towns, cities and the state in financing infrastructure projects, managing debt and restructuring pension obligations. In that work, Russell often interfaced directly with the Office of the Treasurer, gaining firsthand insight into how the agency operates and its potential to shape the financial future of Connecticut.

As treasurer, Russell administers Connecticut's pension funds holding over \$40 billion in assets, oversees the state's debt and cash management, collects and returns unclaimed property, and manages the Connecticut Higher Education Trust (CHET), a 529 plan that helps students and families save for higher education.

Russell continues to advocate for people traditionally left out of the political process and denied economic opportunity. He is prioritizing financial literacy, sound fiscal policy and necessary statewide investments that maximize resources while growing the economy and combating systemic inequities.

In addition to his professional responsibilities, Russell has embraced the role of mentor, particularly for young Black and LGBTQ people. In 2022, he became the first Black out LGBTQ person in American history to win an election for statewide office.

Russell continues to live in New Haven with his husband, Christopher Lyddy.

Dr. Darrick Hamilton

Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy

Founding Director

Professor, The New School

Darrick Hamilton is a university professor, the Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy, and the founding director of the Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School. Considered one of the nation's foremost scholars, economists and public intellectuals, Hamilton's accomplishments include recently being profiled in the New York Times, Mother Jones magazine and the Wall Street Journal and being featured in Politico Magazine's 2017 *50 Ideas Shaping American Politics and the People Behind Them* issue. Also, he is a member of the Marguerite Casey Foundation in partnership with the Group Health Foundation's inaugural class of Freedom Scholars.

Hamilton has been involved in crafting policy proposals, such as Baby Bonds and a Federal Job Guarantee, which have garnered a great deal of media attention and served as inspirations for legislative proposals at the federal, state and local levels. He has served as a member of the economic committee of the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force; he has testified before several senate and house committees, including the Joint Economic Committee on the nation's potential policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic-induced health and economic crises; and he has advised numerous other leading Members of Congress, as well as various 2020 presidential candidates.

Mendi Blue-Paca

Fairfield County's Community Foundation
President & CEO

Mendi Blue Paca is President & CEO of Fairfield County's Community Foundation. She joined the Foundation in 2018 and previously served as the Foundation's Chief Community Impact Officer and VP of Community Impact. In her previous roles, she led grant making, programs, policy advocacy, and major community leadership initiatives to close the opportunity gap in Fairfield County. Mendi oversaw the Foundation's Center for Nonprofit Excellence, Fund for Women & Girls, Immigrant Success Fund and Thrive by 25 initiatives. She also served as the key liaison for cross-sector collaborations with nonprofits, funder partners, external constituent groups and local elected officials.

Mendi began her career as a registered broker and compliance officer at Goldman Sachs & Co. Mendi was a strategy manager at the Center for Effective Philanthropy; growth and innovation advisor to the president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts; and a summer associate at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, which has been repeatedly rated the country's top law firm.

She has served as a strategic consultant to dozens of the largest U.S.-based philanthropic organizations, including the Bill and Melinda Gates, Ford, William and Flora Hewlett, W.K. Kellogg, Robert Wood Johnson, David and Lucile Packard and Walton Family foundations. In 2013, after living in Boston, New York City, Washington D.C. and Madrid, Spain for thirteen years, Mendi returned to her home state, CT, where she held public sector leadership roles and managed political campaigns. In these capacities, she secured millions of dollars in competitive state, federal, foundation, individual and corporate resources.

Mendi holds a bachelor's degree in economics *cum laude* from Harvard College, a Juris Doctorate from Harvard Law School and

a Master's in Business Administration from Harvard Business School. She is Board Chair of Partners for Educational Leadership and a board member of Harvard Business School Community Partners of CT. She is passionate about entrepreneurship, maternal and reproductive health, and mental health awareness. Mendi lives with her husband, Marcus, daughter and doodle in Trumbull, where in her spare time she loves entertaining and trying new recipes.

Alexandra Cawthorne Gaines

JPMorgan Chase & Co

Executive Director for Financial Health and Wealth Creation

Alexandra Cawthorne Gaines is the Executive Director for Financial Health and Wealth Creation for the JPMorgan Chase Policy Center. In this capacity, she works with colleagues to leverage the firm's subject matter expertise, data assets and business insights to identify and develop policy proposals and strategies that drive inclusive economic growth and reduce barriers to mobility. Before coming to JPMorgan Chase, Alexandra served as vice president of the Poverty to Prosperity Program at the Center for American Progress (CAP), where she oversaw the development of policy and advocacy strategies to reduce poverty. Prior to her time at CAP, Alexandra provided leadership and strategic directed the human services program at the National Governors Association, which focused on state policies and programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. She also previously served as a Legislative Assistant in the US Senate for the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs.

Alexandra has a career distinguished by service to organizations that push for policy solutions to the day-to-day challenges faced

by low-income individuals, families, and communities. She has served in advisory roles to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Results for America and the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. She currently serves on the board of directors for two national organizations—Social Current and the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce.

Alexandra earned her Bachelor's degree at Vassar College and a Master's degree in Legislative Affairs from The George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management.