

## TWO CIVIC LEADERS JOIN PLSE'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**OCTOBER 15, 2018.** Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) announced today that two well-respected community leaders with very differing perspectives on the criminal justice system have joined its Board of Directors.

**Nicole Hunt** is the President of UNITEHERE LOCAL 634, a union that represents over 2,000 public sector school cafeteria employees and student climate staff working for the School District of Philadelphia. “We see the effects of the criminal justice system each and every day, in the lives of our members and their families,” she said. “And I have personally witnessed what has happened to my sons’ friends who have been arrested and had all hope taken from them of being allowed to do what they are capable of doing. That’s just not right.”

**The Honorable Karen Yvette Simmons** is in her third term as a Judge of the Philadelphia Municipal Court. In her career as a judge, she has held thousands of hearings in criminal matters and firmly established her reputation as a “tough but fair” judge. “The law prescribes punishments for offenses,” she said, “but forever after those sentences have been fully served, criminal records continue to mark them as ‘criminals’. That makes it impossible for people to succeed who have learned from their mistakes and turned their lives around. As a society, we have to change that.”

Since its founding in 2012, PLSE has represented almost 3000 low-income Philadelphians in court as they seek to delete criminal records of arrests that did not lead to convictions. Today, PLSE prosecutes more expungement petitions than any other non-profit in the country. This fall, PLSE is beginning to represent clients in seeking pardons from the Governor for convictions – most of them resulting from plea bargains, and most resulting from bad choices made more than ten years ago.

“Because low-income communities in Philadelphia have disproportionately high arrest rates – as high as 60% - records of arrests and convictions not only lock individuals and their families in poverty, but whole neighborhoods,” explained Ryan Allen Hancock, chair of PLSE’s Board of Directors. “We are lucky indeed to have these two civic leaders join us as we try to chart a new course for our organization, and a new neighborhood economic development strategy for the City of Philadelphia.”

ABOUT PLSE: PLSE provides free legal representation to low income residents of Philadelphia whose criminal records are holding them back from achieving their potential as productive, contributing citizens. The services include seeking expungements in criminal court and pardons from the Governor, educating elected and community leaders, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed legislative reforms. PLSE was twice recognized in 2017 as an exemplary non-profit, with both a 2018-19 Barra Award, and the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation’s Goffman Award.