

Bethlehem Police Reform & Reinvention Advisory Committee

Consultant

Jasmin Brandow



Jasmin S. Brandow is a facilitator committed to empowering people through intentional conversations about identity, awareness, and impact. She has a B.A. in Sociology from University at Albany, SUNY, and an M.A. in Political Science from Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public Affairs. During graduate school, Jasmin completed a fellowship with the Center for Women Government and Civil Society and wrote a policy on respect and interpersonal behavior for NYS Office of Mental Health. From 2007-2012, she worked with the NYS Office of Court Administration, including Offices of Workforce Diversity, Alternative Dispute Resolution, and Court Improvement Programs, where her efforts were focused on policies and projects related to preventing workplace violence, increasing access to justice, and addressing disparities in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In 2015, Jasmin co-founded HumanKind Workshop to develop and share learning experiences that bring people together around topics like culture, bias, humility, and healing. She is also co-founder of Sol & Luna LLC, a small business designing yoga products to support mindfulness practices for children and families.

Community Members

Jennifer Ansong

My name is Jennifer and I live in Glenmont, NY. I have lived in Bethlehem my entire life. I am currently a fourth year undergraduate at the University of Buffalo where I am studying biology and music. I also work at my university's Intercultural and Diversity Center where I plan programs and advocate for underrepresented students on campus. I chose to serve on the Advisory Committee because I believe the Committee has the power to mend the racial divide in the community around the police, K-12 education, and other institutions. I want to be a part of that change so that Bethlehem can be a more welcoming community to future generations of people of color. I look forward to the work the Committee will do because I think Bethlehem is full of people who want to address its problems and solve them. I love this town and I always want it to be better.

Darnell Douglas

Darnell Douglas is a longtime Bethlehem resident and alum of Bethlehem Central High School. He and his wife have three children, two of which still attend Bethlehem Central Schools. He received his undergrad at Manhattan College and was a track athlete throughout his college career. He decided to bring his passion for track and field back to BCHS in 2007 and became a coach for the track and field team, which he proudly coaches to this day. Darnell received his Master's in School Counseling from Russel Sage College in 2013 and joined the BCHS Counseling Department in 2015. He has an immense passion for all things track and standup comedy so if you know any good knock-knock jokes, pass them on. He enjoys staying active and taking adventures to new places with his family. Darnell is excited to be a part of this committee and is looking forward to contributing to a better future for our community.

Xavier R. Fitzsimmons Cruz

My name is Xavier and I live in Delmar. I joined this panel as an advocate for youth civic engagement and police reform. In an effort to add people from diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds I am well suited for this position. I am confident my experiences as a life-long resident of Bethlehem for twenty years, co-founder of Bethlehem For Social Justice, BOCES Educator, and youth activist will add to the work of this committee.

People may email me at xfitzsimmonscruz@albany.edu

Jaye Holly



Understanding that it is from our differences that we draw our strength, Jaye Holly has been a lifelong advocate and activist for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). She works for the Sanctuary Institute, serving as a trainer and consultant to human-service organizations that are working to build trauma-informed cultures. Her job takes her all across the country, working with agencies large and small, as they create environments that support healing and resilience for their communities. Additionally, she operates Jaye Holly Consulting, working with organizations on identifying and addressing their EDI challenges, as well as other training needs.

Jaye attended Marist College in Poughkeepsie for her Bachelor's Degree in psychology. She received her Master's in Human Resources Development from McDaniel College (then Western Maryland College). Recently, she completed a certificate program from Cornell University in Diversity & Inclusion.

As a child growing up in the Midwest, Jaye watched her parents navigate the racial challenges of the 1960s by working to empower themselves and others. She learned that activism was the antidote to hopelessness. She carries that spirit with her today, through her professional life as well as her volunteerism. Throughout her life, Jaye has served on many boards of directors for non-profits, including In Our Own Voices here in Albany. She is quite active with her church, the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, where she has served on the Social Responsibilities Council as well as on the Inclusion Team. She is also a member of Bethlehem Indivisible.

Although Jaye is not a native of Bethlehem, she and her wife Judy have been delighted to call Delmar their home since 2008. They are the proud parents of a very energetic beagle-mix named Oscar. If Jaye had any spare time, she would like to use it for reading, baking, playing Scrabble and doing Zumba.

Zhiying Li



I am very excited and honored to have the opportunity to contribute to a positive change in our community.

I am Chinese. I came to the US for graduate study in the field of life sciences more than twenty years ago and stayed since. My family and I moved to the capital region three years ago due to job relocation. We chose to live in Delmar for one of the most common reasons: the school district. Our two kids are at Eagle Elementary.

The pandemic gave me a chance to be a lot more informed about things happening around me locally, nationally and internationally. As a result, I found myself becoming more and more interested in being involved in activities that my neighbors and friends (who I got to know in the past three years) are involved in. As a minority member of the community, I am very much interested in contributing positively in community affairs that matter to every member of the community, on behalf of all Chinese residents who I may or may not have gotten the opportunity to know in person. I believe this reform and reinvention task is one of such important issues.

As advised by the Governor and stated by our town board, the Police Reform and Reinvention Advisory Committee aims to foster collaborative work relationship and community involvement. Building collaborative work relationship is a key element in ensuring progress. Engaging community openly and positively is the first step in achieving the trust needed to pave the road for reaching fairness, equity and justice built upon mutual understanding and respect.

As a scientist, I would like to contribute positively on data analysis and related issues such as data collection, trouble-shooting and others, if assistance as such is needed. As a member of a minority group, I would like to share information and comments from Chinese immigrants' perspective, to increase the diversity of the committee. As a mature and healthy adult, I would do my best to contribute people power to support the committee's decisions and actions, whenever needed.

As the whole nation reflects on the passing of RBG, one particular comment from the NYTimes caught my attention, "Judge Ginsburg's ... role" when serving on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit "sprang from deep convictions that in a healthy democracy, the judicial branch should work in partnership with the other branches, rather than seek to impose a last word that left no room for further discussion." I believe forming the advisory committee and working toward building a collaborative relationship to serve the bigger and better good of the community is one of such actions a healthy democracy could take. I applaud the town board's action in this regard and look forward to moving forward with all the other committee members in assisting our town and our police in achieving the goal of reform and reinvention.

Donald Robbins



Don Robbins is a 30-year resident of Bethlehem (Slingerlands). Don recently retired from a 40-year professional career which included senior staff positions with the New York State Assembly and senior executive positions in two State agencies: the NYS Division of Substance Abuse Services and the NYS Department of Social Services. Don also spent 13 years in the private sector as Director of Operations for WellCare of New York a regional managed health care company, Government Analyst for the Law Firm Hinman Straub and, Vice President for Regional Government Affairs at Magellan Health a national health care provider.

Don and his wife Pamela Clark Robbins are the parents of two sons Matthew and Tyler both of whom attended Bethlehem schools, and the grandparents of four- one of whom attends Slingerlands Elementary School. Pam is the President of Policy Research Associates a Delmar based firm which employs 60 persons.

Don's volunteer activities have included Coaching for Bethlehem Pop Warner and the Board of Directors of the Bethlehem Basketball Club (BBC). Currently Don serves on the Boards of: The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, St. Catherine's Center for Children, and Community Caregivers.

Statement on Police Reform and Reinvention Advisory Committee

As a 30-year resident of Bethlehem (Slingerlands), I have seen many changes in the Town impacting demographics, governance, commerce and development. All of these changes result in a Community which looks and feels different now than it did 30-years ago. There are new faces, new opinions, more businesses and more visitors. As an African American male my view of the Town has an added lens. There are more Black, Brown and Asian faces around. There are fewer residents who have spent their lifetimes in the Town and more who have come from other places, near and far. There is an increased diversity of people, experiences and opinions.

One thing that unifies us all however is the desire to feel welcomed, safe and fairly and equitably treated by and in the Town. The Police Reform and Reinvention Advisory Committee will play a critical role in ensuring that the work of the Bethlehem Police Department (BPD) reflects the best practices and highest standards of Community service; that the BPD will treat all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, residents and visitors, with respect, fairness and professionalism. Additionally, the Advisory Committee will help to reimagine the role of the BPD, to again ensure that the service provided reflects best practices, uses resources efficiently and engenders trust within all the Community. I have an extensive background in policy development and implementation. I have drafted and negotiated legislation and budgets and I have also been responsible for the implementation of those policies. I believe I can bring that experience to the work of the Advisory Committee and do the hard work to ensure that the BPD operates in a way that we can all have confidence and pride in.

Monica Scherzer

Monica moved to Bethlehem in 2003, and she resides in the hamlet of Delmar with her husband, Jonathan, and her two sons. An educator since 1998, Monica has worked in various areas that differ in demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds. This experience has allowed her to witness the differences in how police officers interact with a variety of communities. Monica's goal for working on the Police Reform Advisory Committee is to improved trust and to strengthen relationships between the police and people of color as Bethlehem's diversity continues to grow.

Suni Swann



Suni Swann, a town resident (Selkirk) since 1992, grew up in a multi-ethnicity, lower-income family. This background, along with her bi-racial marriage and faith allowed for Suni to experience diversity and inclusion challenges. These challenges taught her perseverance, ingenuity, and self-control. Her post-secondary education centered on education and psychology (with a focus on law enforcement). Her interest in law enforcement reform stems from her studies and life experiences. Her understanding that change is positive when proactive in approach is key to police reform. Suni has spent the majority of her time volunteering within the Capital Region mentoring others. She has served on numerous committees within her school district where she now substitutes as a teacher, when needed.

Caren Tiu



I have lived in the Town of Bethlehem for more than 13 years alongside my husband, Ronan and our 2 children. I am looking forward to being a part of the Police Reform and Reinvention Advisory Committee to help facilitate trust and respect between the police department and all of the members of this community. I am Puerto Rican, Bronx raised, married to a Filipino with two wonderful mixed race children. This diversity in my own family guides me to be a part of this conversation.

Katie Yezi

Katie Yezi grew up in the Capital Region. Having moved away for college and career for 18 years, she returned to the area in 2006, purchasing a home in Delmar, where she currently lives with her spouse and two children who attend the Bethlehem Public Schools.

Professionally, Ms. Yezi has spent the majority of her 27-year career committed to social justice through education by serving predominantly Black and Latinx communities. Most recently, she was a school founder and an Assistant Superintendent in Troy, providing previously underserved students from the Capital Region a high quality, college preparatory education.

She views her role on the committee as an opportunity to give back to our community, to seek fair and equitable policing for all people who live, work, and travel through Bethlehem, and to leverage this moment as a way to bring our community closer together through democratic participation. She is eager to analyze data and solicit the input of a broad range of stakeholders in order to ensure our police meet the needs of Bethlehem.

Faith Based Community Group

Rev. Dr. Roxanne Jones Booth, Riverview Missionary Baptist Church



Rev. Dr. Roxanne Jones Booth is Co-Pastor of the Riverview Missionary Baptist Church in Coeymans Landing. In addition to Co-Pastoring, she is an Adjunct Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences Department of Africana Studies at SUNY Albany. She is also a Recovery Coach at Homer Perkins Center in Albany, NY, which is a re-integration facility for men in recovery from alcohol and substance abuse. Dr. Booth enjoys traveling. She and her husband most recently traveled to Japan to celebrate their 20th Wedding Anniversary. She has served for 10 years as a Christian mission worker living in Eswatini and South Africa. Currently, she coordinates an annual short-term mission trip to Southern Africa sponsored by the Riverview Missionary Baptist Church. She is a life-time member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and serves as the Chair of

the International Awareness and Involvement Committee for the Albany (NY) Alumnae Chapter. She and her husband, the Reverend Antonio Booth have been residents of Selkirk for over 10 years.

Dr. Booth wanted to participate on the Advisory Committee because of her shared experience with men, women, boys and girls of African descent who live each day in a nation that is still trying to be a “a more perfect union.” She brings the perspective of having grown up in this community with family and friends who have experienced micro-aggressions and discrimination all their lives. Dr. Booth will use her academic expertise in African American history as well as her lived experiences in making our community better for everybody.

Police Department

Gina Cocchiara, Chief of Police



Gina F. Cocchiara is the Chief of Police of the Bethlehem Police Department. She is a twenty-six year veteran of law enforcement with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Administration and has held the positions of Patrol Officer, Patrol Sergeant and Detective Sergeant before being appointed to the position of Chief in 2020.

Chief Cocchiara believes in developing strong community relationships and bonds, both professionally and personally. She is a strong proponent of the community policing philosophy, police professionalism and continuing education and training. She is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police, and New York Women in Law Enforcement Organization and sits on the board of directors for the Bethlehem Youth Court.

The Chief resides in Glenmont, New York.

County District Attorney's Office

Mary Tanner-Richter, Asst District Attorney



Mary Tanner-Richter has been an Assistant District Attorney in the Office of the Albany County District Attorney since February 2001, and is currently the Chief of the Vehicular Crimes Unit and a designated Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor for the State of New York. She has specialized in the area of vehicular crimes prosecution since 2004 and was instrumental in creating the Albany County District Attorney's Vehicular Crimes Unit in 2008. Ms. Tanner-Richter has completed training in At Scene Motor Vehicle Collision Investigation, and is responsible for overseeing the prosecution of all felony alcohol/drug-related vehicular crimes, vehicular assaults and vehicular homicides in Albany County. She has participated in numerous trainings of various law enforcement officials and prosecutors across the State and has spoken on numerous occasions to high school parents and students, and college students. Additionally, Ms. Tanner-Richter has been involved in providing training to Bar and Tavern Owners throughout the Capital Region. Ms. Tanner-Richter is a member of the Albany District Attorney's Office DWI Advisory Board, the Albany County STOP-DWI Program, and currently sits on the NYS GTSC Taskforce on Impaired Driving

Enforcement Team. In addition, Mary is a member of the Appellate Division 3rd Department Character and Fitness Committee.

Ms. Tanner-Richter received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science from Nazareth College in Rochester, New York, in 1994, and received her JD from Albany Law School in 1998. Prior to coming to the Albany County District Attorney's Office, Ms. Tanner-Richter was an Associate at the Buffalo Law Firm of Jaeckle, Fleischmann, & Mugel, LLP., assigned to the Litigation Department, from 1998-2000.

Ms. Tanner-Richter is the recipient of the 2011 Recognition of Excellence Award presented by NYS STOP DWI, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, in conjunction with the New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee. Additionally, Albany County STOP DWI presented Mary with the Daniel S. Dwyer Memorial Award in December 2012 to honor her commitment to justice for victims of DWI crimes. In 2015, Mary Tanner-Richter was named the National Traffic Safety Prosecutor of the Year by the National Association of Prosecutor Coordinators (NAPC).

In 2018, Bureau Chief Tanner-Richter was named as one of two Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors (TSRP) for the State of New York through the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee's Highway Safety Program. The program is grant funded by the Federal Highway Safety Program under the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and addresses roadway safety through education and trainings across the State of New York, as well as nationwide. As a TSRP, Ms. Tanner-Richter is working in conjunction with members of the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the National Traffic Law Center of the American Prosecutors Research Institute to keep New York prosecutors and police officers apprised of the latest traffic safety issues affecting the entire country.

County Public Defender's Office

Gabriella Romero, Asst Public Defender



Gabriella Romero is an Assistant Public Defender with the Albany County Public Defender's Office where she serves as a Felony Trial Attorney as well as the Primary Public Defender assigned to Bethlehem Town Court. Prior to her assignment to Bethlehem, Ms. Romero served as the Assistant Public Defender assigned to Colonie Town Court, Guilderland Town Court, and Menands Village Court where she zealously represented hundreds of clients.

Ms. Romero graduated from Albany Law School in 2018, where she was a Pro Bono Scholar, Editor in Chief of the Government Law Review, Executive Vice President of the Student Bar Association, in addition to the President of her 1L Class. In law school she was a Puerto Rican Bar Association Diamond Jubilee Scholar, as well as a recipient of the J.H. Milstein award for Excellence in Clinical Programs for her leadership, professionalism, and advocacy during her internship at the Schenectady County Public Defender's Office.

Prior to law school, Ms. Romero was awarded the Minerva Fellowship for the 2014-2015 session where she focused on social issues and political unrest in Estero de Platano, Ecuador. Gabriella completed her B.S. at Union College in 2014. She is excited to not only listen, but to add her voice to this discussion on issues of race, community, and ethics within Bethlehem.

Elected Officials

David VanLuven, Town Supervisor



David VanLuven joined the Town Board in January 2016 and was elected as Town Supervisor in November of 2017. He previously served on the Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan Assessment Committee and the Citizens Advisory Committee on Conservation. Professionally, David led a variety of programs with nonprofits and state agencies for 20 years, including directing the NY Natural Heritage Program in the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and launching The Nature Conservancy's Hudson River Estuary Program. In these roles, he built strong teams, navigated shifting politics, managed complex budgets, and raised millions through grants and appropriations. More recently, David worked as a strategic planning consultant for nonprofit organizations and government agencies throughout the Northeast. David and his wife Isabelle Bleecker moved to Delmar in 2001, and have three daughters Catie, Juliette, and Emma. David has a B.A. from Middlebury College with a double major in Religion and Arctic/Alpine Ecology (for which he did his thesis research 130 miles north of the Arctic Circle), and a joint M.S. from Tufts University in Urban/Environmental Policy and Biology.

Joyce Becker, Town Councilmember



As an experienced Town Department head, Joyce dedicated her working life to improve the lives of families and older adults. Retired from municipal service, Joyce is a recognized leader who wants to represent the community with integrity and compassion on the Town Board.

Dan Coffey, Town Councilmember



Dan Coffey joined the Town Board in January 2019 and began a full four-year term in January 2020. He previously served on the Town's Planning Board (2009) and as Chair of the Town's Zoning Board of Appeals (2010-2017). He also served on the Town's Comprehensive Plan Assessment Committee (2013). Dan is an attorney and partner of the Albany law firm Bowitch & Coffey, LLC, practicing in the areas of environmental/land use and insurance-related litigation. He volunteers as an attorney mentor in Bethlehem Youth Court, serves as an assistant-volunteer at the Albany County Family Court, and is a member of the Third Judicial District's Committee on Character and Fitness. In 2016, Dan was President of the Albany County Bar Association. Dan is a graduate of Union College of Schenectady (BA, political science), Columbia University (Master of Public Administration) and Georgetown University Law Center (juris doctor). He previously worked for the U.S. Congressional Budget Office and General Accounting Office in Washington before relocating to the Capital Region. Dan, his wife Eileen, and their two daughters live in central Delmar. In his spare time, Dan can be seen running or biking on the streets of Bethlehem.

Maureen Cunningham, Town Councilmember



Maureen Cunningham joined the Bethlehem Town Board in 2018. She recently served two years as a Board Member on the Bethlehem Youth Court, as well as formerly serving on the town's Conservation Easement Review Board, Local Waterfront Revitalization Advisory Group, Open Space Working Group, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee. Maureen also served on the Friends of Five Rivers Board of Directors for several years and led several PTA initiatives at Hamagrael Elementary School while her sons were students there, including launching their popular Walk to School and Bike to School events. A fifth generation Upstate New Yorker and a town resident since 2008, Maureen lives with her husband, Paul, and two teenage sons in Delmar. She currently serves as the Deputy Director of Water and Senior Strategic Advisor for the Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to building policies that improve the speed and scale of conservation, where she works on ensuring clean water for all by prioritizing equity, public health and innovative financing. Prior to this, she served as Senior Director for Clean Water at Environmental Advocates NY, where she championed statewide clean water legislation and policies, including pushing the state to set nation-leading drinking standards for emerging contaminants. Maureen also served as Executive Director of the Hudson River Watershed Alliance for several years, strengthening the capacity of dozens of grassroots groups and municipalities to protect their streams and water resources. Before moving back to New York, she worked for Rare in Washington, DC, where she led international initiatives in several countries linking community-based ecotourism projects and social marketing strategies to biodiversity conservation. Maureen holds a Master of Environmental Management from the Yale School of the Environment and a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from The American University School of International Service, and she speaks Spanish and French. Maureen's priorities on the Town Board include open space protection, expansion of parklands, bike and pedestrian safety, community policing, a just transition from fossil fuels, social and environmental justice, and a safe and healthy community for all.

Jim Foster, Town Councilmember



Jim Foster was elected and took office on the Town Board in January 2018. A third generation resident of Bethlehem, Jim has volunteered hundreds of hours serving the community in various capacities, including as a long-time member of the Elsmere Fire Company. After graduating from Bethlehem Central High School, Jim attended Georgetown University from which he graduated with honors with a dual major in Government and Psychology. While in college Jim earned his EMT certification and received hands-on medical training working in the Georgetown University Hospital Emergency Room. He continued on to employment as a Senior Auditor at UHY Advisors, where he was granted Top Secret security clearance and provided consulting services to various federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, at multiple civilian and military installations, including the US Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2007, Jim left UHY Advisors to attend Albany Law School, where he served on the Executive Board of the Albany Law Review and graduated with honors. He then accepted a position as a litigator in the Manhattan office of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, LLP, a top international law firm. As a litigator, Jim worked on highly-complex commercial cases and managed a team of over 60 attorneys. While in Manhattan, Jim also worked pro bono on environmental policy at the Environmental Defense Fund. Jim received further

executive legal and business training at Harvard University and was recognized by Legal Services NYC for his dedication to providing legal representation to the poor and underserved. In 2016, Jim joined a local law firm as an attorney in that firm's Corporate and Transactional group. He sits on the Advisory Council of the Bethlehem YMCA and on the Board of Directors of the Elsmere Fire Company, where he also continues to serve as an active firefighter and "big brother" to several junior firefighters. Jim currently resides at his home in Delmar in the neighborhood immediately behind Elsmere School.