



Amara Welcomes New Team Members

Smooth Transitions in Staff and Board Signal Growth and Opportunity



On February 16, Amara's Board of Directors welcomed [Carole Bernard](#) as the organization's new Executive Director. Selected after an intensive search process, Carole brings deep expertise in strategic communications, fundraising, advocacy, and board development, honed over 18 years in non-profit executive leadership roles. At this pivotal time in the organization's growth, Carole offers the skills needed for the continued expansion of Amara's capacity to address the legal needs of sex trafficking survivors and individuals impacted by the commercial sex industry.



Also joining the Amara team as staff attorney is [Caitlyn Burnitis](#). While pursuing her J.D. at the University of Miami School of Law, Caitlyn founded the the Miami Law Alliance Against Human Trafficking, was a member of the Human Rights Clinic, and interned with Amara. Barred in the State of Maryland, she will be an invaluable addition to our team, and the Amara team is excited to welcome her back.



In yet another team development, the Amara Board of Directors welcomed [Brittany Mobley](#) to its ranks. As Deputy Chief of the Juvenile Service Program within the Community Defender Division of the Public Defender Service of the District of Columbia, Brittany has a deep understanding of the legal system, and will provide the Board with needed real world perspective as it works to support and advance Amara's mission.

Amara bid a fond farewell to two staff members whose work had been integral to the organization's development over the past several years:

- **Llamillet Gutierrez** marked her last day as Amara's Executive Director on February 26, but she will continue supporting survivors in her new role as prosecutor for the State's Attorney's Office in Prince George's County, Maryland.
- **Dena Shayne** leaves Amara after three years as a staff attorney serving clients in DC

and Maryland, having accepted a research and policy position with the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

Board President [Sakala Rutherford](#) reflected on these transitions with gratitude and enthusiasm: "Amara has come a long way since its founding in 2013, growing and maturing under Llamilet's leadership, and with the support all of its exceptional staff attorneys." She continued, "I'm tremendously excited by the prospect for Amara's continued growth with Carole's vision and leadership, supported by a stronger and diversified Board of Directors, and continued excellence from a strong and committed staff team."

Amara in the News - *Trafficking Survivors are Not Criminals*

In an OpEd piece appearing in the [Roanoke Times](#), Board President Sakala Rutherford writes in support of two bills passed by the Virginia General Assembly. HB2133 would provide trafficking survivors with access to criminal record relief. HB2234 would offer survivors the ability to raise an affirmative defense during prosecution alleging that they were forced by their trafficker to commit the crimes with which they are charged.

Rutherford writes, "Virginia is behind every state in the country when offering legal support to victims that were charged with crimes they were forced to commit. In the United States, 45 states have already passed criminal record relief laws for trafficking survivors. Moreover, of the five states left to pass these laws, four of them have passed legislation allowing victims to raise an affirmative defense."

Should Governor Northam sign these bills into law, Virginia will reverse this injustice, protect survivors, and help them regain control of their lives.

Help Amara provide
legal assistance to
trafficking
survivors!

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