

## Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Announces Appointments to Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women Board of Trustees

02/16/2022

**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today announced the groundbreaking appointments of Dr. Amesika Nyaku, Tia Ryans, Dr. Johanna Foster, Bonnie Kerness, La’Nae Grant, and Kathleen Witcher to the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women Board of Trustees. The Governor also reappointed Dr. Karma Brown Warren. The appointments will act to create a diverse, highly-engaged, and forward-thinking Board of Trustees that is well-equipped to supervise the operations of the state’s only women’s correctional facility.

“These appointments, combined with the many other reforms and efforts made under our Administration, will effectuate improvement in oversight of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility,” **said Governor Murphy**. “These women are all extraordinary individuals in their own fields, and combined, their expertise will benefit women under the care of the State. I look forward to working with Amesika, Tia, Johanna, Bonnie, La’Nae, Kathleen, and Karma on important prison reform efforts as we move to responsibly close this facility.”

“We are thrilled to welcome this powerhouse group of dynamic, influential, and inspirational leaders to the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women Board of Trustees,” **said Acting Department of Corrections Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq.** “It’s an honor that they have chosen to share their talents to help guide positive changes for the justice-involved women of Edna. In partnership with the committed public service leaders of the NJDOC, the Board is poised to effectuate positive and meaningful change focused on safety and reintegration.”

### Biographies:

#### Amesika Nyaku, M.D.

Dr. Amesika Nyaku is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and a physician-scientist. She is a graduate of Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine where she completed medical school, Internal Medicine residency, and an Infectious Diseases fellowship. She is also co-director of the Northern New Jersey Medication-Assisted Treatment Center of Excellence that is tasked with assisting the State in expanding access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder through education, novel service delivery, and community collaboration. She received her BA, MS, and M.D. from Northwestern University.

For a photo of Dr. Nyaku, please click here

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#### Tia Ryans

Tia Ryans is the founder and Executive Director of FORTE House, a referral-based support program for people who have been incarcerated. As someone formerly under the care of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, Tia will be the first formerly incarcerated person to serve on a DOC advisory board. She also currently serves on the advisory boards of NJ-STEP and the Princeton Prison Teaching Initiative. Tia received her bachelor’s degree from Rutgers University-Newark.

For a photo of Ms. Ryans, please click here

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#### Johanna Foster, Ph.D.

Dr. Johanna Foster is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Monmouth University, where her research interests include intersectional feminism and the incarceration of women. Dr. Foster currently co-coordinates the Monmouth University Academic Exchange Program where Monmouth University students and students living in New Jersey state prisons study together in combined classes. She formerly served as the director of the Gender Studies Program at Monmouth University. She holds a Ph.D. from Rutgers University, and earned her master’s and bachelor’s degrees from American University.

For a photo of Dr. Foster, please click here

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#### Bonnie Kerness

Bonnie Kerness currently serves as Director of the American Friends Service Committee’s Prison Watch Program. She is an advisor to California Prison Focus; Critical Resistance; and SolitaryWatch, a website monitoring solitary confinement in US prisons. She, her students and those with lived experience contributed to the publications of “Our Children’s House” – testimonies on juvenile imprisonment; “Torture in US Prisons – Evidence of US Human Rights Violations; “The Prison Inside the Prison: Control Units, Supermax Prisons and Devices of Torture”, the Survivor’s Manual written by for those living in solitary confinement; and “Inalienable Rights”. Her articles have appeared in numerous publications including Peace Review-a Journal of Social Justice, the Atlantic Journal of Communications, War Resisters League Magazine and others. Bonnie speaks widely on mass imprisonment on behalf of men, women and children in US prisons using the framework of the United Nations Covenants and Treaties. Bonnie has had a special interest in working with imprisoned women and many years ago served on the Board of Directors of the Women’s Lifers. Throughout the decades of her involvement with imprisonment issues, she has met and worked with each New Jersey Commissioner of Corrections; often testifying at Parole Board Annual Meetings and the NJ State legislature. She holds a Master of Social Work.

For a photo of Ms. Kerness, please click here

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#### La’Nae Grant

La’Nae Grant is the Director of the Child and Adult Care Food Program for the City of East Orange. Grant will be the first transgender woman to serve on the Edna Mahan Board of Trustees. Grant is also a longtime activist for the rights of the transgender community, including transgender persons that are currently incarcerated. Grant **received**



her bachelor's degree from Kean University. She holds a masters' degree from the Rutgers Graduate School of Social Work.

For a photo of Ms. Grant, please click here

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### **Kathleen Witcher**

Kathleen Witcher is the President of the Irvington NAACP and a long-time active member of the NAACP's Prison Project Committee. Witcher is also a retired public school teacher.

For a photo of Ms. Witcher, please click here

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### **Karma Brown Warren, M.D.**

Dr. Karma Brown Warren is an Associate Professor of Medicine at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. She is a former staff physician, having served at East Orange Veterans Hospital, Rutgers University-Newark, Irvington General Hospital, and Newark Beth Israel Medical Center. Prior to her career in medicine, she worked as an electrical engineer for several Fortune 500 companies. Dr. Warren holds a bachelor's degree from Tuskegee University. She received her M.D. from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

For a photo of Dr. Warren, please click here

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I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to improving the health and wellness of everyone at Edna Mahan," **said Dr. Amesika Nyauku**. "I look forward to being a part of a transformative process."

"I am honored to join my prestigious peers on the Board of Trustees for Edna Mahan, and I look forward to having a role in genuine reform at this facility," **said Tia Ryans**. "I commend Governor Murphy and Commissioner Kuhn for their vision in ensuring the voice of those directly impacted by New Jersey's criminal legal system. It is a historic step as we work to restore dignity and opportunity to the women currently housed at EMCF."

"My thanks to Governor Murphy and Commissioner Kuhn for this terrific opportunity to work toward our shared vision of positive change for justice-involved women and their families in New Jersey," **said Dr. Johanna Foster**. "I am excited to join the great group of Trustees, and look forward to the promising collaborations ahead with NJDOC, the Edna Mahan leadership team, as well as EMCF residents and staff, in this important new chapter of the work."

"It's an honor to be serving on the Board with such extraordinary partners, including the new Department of Corrections team," **said Bonnie Kerness**.

"It's the extended hands that strengthens the bridge that uplifts hearts, embrace communities, and rightfully soar in liberation of endless equality," **said La'Nae Grant**.

"I am concerned about bringing a better climate to Edna Mahan Correctional Facilities that promotes conditions, training, and supports to the incarcerated women that aide them in preparing for productive lives when they are released from prison," **said Kathleen Witcher**.

"EMCFBOT has great potential to positively affect the lives of women who are facing some of life's greatest challenges. Our Board's role is vital to the rehabilitative and restorative element of this institution," **said Dr. Karma Brown Warren**. "The effectiveness of our work can be a game changer to the families whose mothers, daughters, sisters and partners reside in this facility. I am thankful to Governor Murphy for appointing me to serve another term on the Edna Mahon Correctional Facility Board of Directors and consider it an honor."

## **Governor Phil Murphy**

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