



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

CUNY School of Law names Vince Warren as the W. Haywood Burns Chair for 2023

MICHAEL GIANARIS December 13, 2022

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NEW YORK, NY The City University of New York School of Law will welcome **Vince Warren**, Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), as the **2023 W. Haywood Burns Chair in Human and Civil Rights**.

The Burns Chair honors W. Haywood Burns, a people's lawyer, professor, and civil rights activist who served as the second dean of CUNY Law, from 1987 to 1994. Burns was the first Black dean of a law school in New York State; in that role, he helped bring to fruition a new model of legal education with the central purpose of training lawyers dedicated to the public good. Vince Warren is a renowned expert on racial injustice and discriminatory policing whose career reflects the life and work of Haywood Burns. As

he considered attending law school, Warren sought guidance from Burns: *“He told me, with that broad smile and those wonderful shining eyes of his, that in this line of work, the only thing that would limit me would be my discomfort with demanding from power what needed to be demanded and saying to power what needed to be said.”* Warren spoke these words upon receiving the 2016 Haywood Burns Memorial Award from the New York State Bar Association Committee on Civil Rights.

Under Warren’s leadership, CCR has successfully challenged the constitutionality of the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk practices, ended the policy of holding people in long-term solitary confinement at California’s Pelican Bay Prison, and established as a crime against humanity the persecution of people who identify as LGBTQ2IA+.

Jennifer Dohrn, Burns’s widow and a longtime ally of CUNY Law, applauded the appointment.

“Haywood’s family and I are honored and excited to welcome Vince Warren as the W. Haywood Burns Chair for Human and Civil Rights. We are confident that his knowledge, experience, passion, and commitment will transform Haywood’s legacy into new meaning for the urgent struggles we face today.”

CUNY Law Dean Sudha Setty is looking forward to welcoming Warren as the Burns Chair in 2023.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for our students, faculty, and alumni to learn from and collaborate with Vince, a visionary leader in his field. The Burns Chair is one important way the Law School brings leaders, activists, and experts in human and civil rights into the classroom, community, and conversation with CUNY.”

Warren will join CUNY Law in 2023 as a thought leader, teacher, and mentor. As Burns Chair, he will facilitate discussion and debate in student sessions and public forums; teach a seminar; and direct research undertaken by Law School students serving as W. Haywood Burns Fellows. In his teaching and public presentations, Warren will explore social movement lawyering, addressing the role that lawyers, activists, journalists, and artists play in mobilizing movements that advance racial, economic, and social justice.

“The collaborative effort of many CUNY Law stakeholders and allies has allowed us to re-establish the W. Haywood Burns Chair with Vince Warren, a leader and lawyer who remarkably exemplifies Haywood’s trailblazing spirit. Like Haywood, Vince’s graciousness and influential work on behalf of marginalized groups have earned him the profound respect of so many and we are fortunate that he will be a part of our CUNY Law community,” shares **Professor Nicole Smith Futrell**, Faculty Director of the W. Haywood Burns Chair of Human and Civil Rights Program as well as the Center for Diversity in the Legal Profession.

In 1996, after Burns lost his life in a car accident while participating in a conference on South Africa’s transition to multiracial democracy, the W. Haywood Burns Chair was first funded with donations from

Burns' family and friends and an allocation from the New York State Legislature. The state renewed financial support for the Burns Chair annually until 2011; that year, state funding was cut due to extraordinary fiscal constraints and was not restored in the following years.

In 2022, the New York State Legislature and **Governor Kathy Hochul** allocated funding for the re-establishment of the Burns Chair. With this renewed support from the state, the Burns Chair and CUNY Law faculty and staff will take up the mission Burns championed throughout his life: to teach, train, mentor and inspire rising generations of people's lawyers.

Assembly Member Jeffrion Aubry introduced a state budget measure in 1996 establishing the Burns Chair at CUNY Law. In 2022, as Assembly Speaker Pro Tem, he sponsored funding to reinstate the Burns Chair. "W. Haywood Burns left a lasting legacy as he worked tirelessly to bring social justice for many who were often marginalized in society," said Assembly Member Aubry. "Although his time with us was tragically cut short, Haywood's work on racial justice remains alive through the W. Haywood Burns Chair in Human and Civil Rights; its reinstatement will help CUNY Law attract, teach and mentor future legal professionals from under-represented racial and ethnic communities."

Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris, in whose district CUNY Law is located, had a key role in securing funding in the 2022 budget for the Burns Chair. "CUNY Law School is a leader in public interest law and the reinstatement of the W. Haywood Burns Chair is an incredible opportunity to further that tradition. I congratulate Vince Warren and the entire team at CUNY Law on this occasion," said Senator Gianaris.

The City University of New York School of Law is the nation's leading public interest law school; its dual mission is to train lawyers dedicated to the practice of law in service of human needs and to make the learning, teaching, and practice of law accessible to those historically excluded from the legal profession.