

NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

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FOUR TENNESSEANS WIN NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR THEIR WORK ON BEHALF OF YOUTH IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW *Honored as Youth Justice Reform Leaders*

(Washington, DC) Four Tennesseans – including State Representative Raumesh Akbari -- are being recognized as leaders in youth justice reform by the [National Juvenile Justice Network](#) (NJJN), based in Washington, DC. The [leadership awards](#) were created by NJJN to honor advocates working at the state level who have championed the cause of youth justice reform. These individuals have shown themselves to be true friends of and advocates for youth in trouble with the law, and the awards recognize their commitment to creating a smaller, fairer, and more equitable juvenile justice system.

“We wanted to honor these leaders because they understand that Tennessee’s youth justice system is like a maze, with too many entrances and lots of dead ends,” said Sarah Bryer, who directs the National Juvenile Justice Network. “They’ve each done crucial work to redesign the maze with fewer entrances and clearer pathways out, so that our justice system makes sense and kids can be rehabilitated and contribute to their communities.”

Meet the four recipients:

- **State Representative [Raumesh Akbari](#)**, will receive NJJN’s “Reformer Award” for spearheading bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation that will benefit all of Tennessee’s citizens. “We nominated Representative Akbari because of her courageous and compassionate work on both sides of the aisle. She has helped create sensible and sustainable justice policies for all Tennesseans,” said Josh Spickler, Executive Director of Just City, a Memphis criminal justice reform organization which nominated



her for the honor. “During her short time in the General Assembly, Representative Akbari has distinguished herself by working with a variety of community partners, fellow legislators, and the Governor’s office to keep our communities safe and support better outcomes for youth and their families.”

- **Mahal Burr and Evan John Ross Morrison**, co-workers at [BRIDGES](#), have been selected as recipients of NJJN’s “**Advocate Award**”. Through a program at Bridges known as Incarcerated Youth Speaking Out for Change, they have created leadership program for youth in lockup which is aimed at preventing other youth from becoming incarcerated and tackling youth violence in Memphis. “Ms. Burr and Mr. Morrison asked a simple question: ‘Who understands the problems these youth face better than the young people themselves?’” said Spickler. “The result is a powerful program that can transform the lives of children who find themselves in trouble with the law – and our justice system.”



- **Lauren Wilson Young**, of the Kemmons Wilson Family Foundation, will receive NJJN’s “Servant Award” to recognize the multiple ways she has worked to make her community safer by helping youth in trouble with the law. She serves as chair of the board for [Juvenile Intervention and Faith-Based Follow-up \(JIFF\) Program](#), a program focused on helping youth break the cycle of crime and offering them hope for a productive future. She and her husband also created Sweet LaLa’s Bakery to employ graduates of the JIFF program and other at-risk youth. “Lauren has long known that changing outcomes for young people who are in contact with the justice system will depend wholly on the opportunities, support, and truly rehabilitative programming they receive during and immediately after incarceration,” said Spickler. “Her personal leadership in finding these kinds of solutions for Memphis children and their families is an inspiration to our entire community.”



The awards will be given July 26, 2016, at an annual gathering of youth justice advocates from across the country. This year, the conference is hosted in Memphis, TN by NJJN’s [Youth Justice Leadership Institute](#).

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The [National Juvenile Justice Network](#) is composed of coalitions, organizations and alumni of the Youth Justice Leadership Institute across 43 states and the District of Columbia, all of whom advocate for a fairer justice system for children and teens.