



The Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Endowed Professorship

Dear Friends,

Byllye Avery has been a leader and tireless advocate for women's health for over five decades. Recognizing that the reproductive healthcare needs of Black women and women of color have been particularly overlooked and under addressed for far too long, Byllye dedicated herself early in her career to improving the health outcomes of Black women and women of color, over time developing an impressive body of reproductive justice advocacy work that has empowered generations of Black women to take charge of and improve their health outcomes.

Byllye now brings to us her reproductive justice advocacy, in the form of an endowed professorship at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy (CUNY SPH). With a commitment to social justice at the core of our school's mission, the Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Professorship fits neatly into the school's pursuit of not only improving health outcomes, but mindfully advancing health equity.

Byllye and I first met over 20 years ago when I had just joined Columbia University's Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health as an assistant professor, and Byllye was teaching classes on reproductive health and advocacy within the department. Together we developed a class designed to teach and promote advocacy in health care.

It is impossible to overstate the impact that Byllye has had on me and my peers in the reproductive justice movement, and on feminism globally. Byllye understood from day one that reproductive health and rights are dependent upon justice for all and on the dismantlement of structural and environmental racism. She also knew that it was crucial that Black and Brown women who were directly affected lead the fight for change.

With the U.S. Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, a cascade of up to 26 states have begun or are likely to ban or severely restrict abortion. In addition, numerous states are fast at work to criminalize providers and anyone who assists with abortion care. This will have a devastating impact on access to often lifesaving care

for all women, especially Black and Brown women, as well as other historically marginalized populations.



Now, in my new role as Senior Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs at CUNY SPH, an institution founded on the social justice values Byllye embodies, I invite you to honor her undaunted commitment to the reproductive justice movement and join the fight by helping us create a sexual and reproductive justice curriculum centering the very advocacy models she pioneered. Byllye's greatest gift is her vision—to transform the next generation of scholars and advocates in the reproductive justice movement. As you will see in the enclosed, the Byllye Avery Endowed Professorship at CUNY SPH will enable us to advance cutting-edge scholarship and train the next generation of scholar-activists to advance sexual and reproductive justice.

We know the road to women's liberation and bodily autonomy is long and meandering. Women's sexual and reproductive freedom has never been guaranteed. It must be pursued and defended vigorously every day and during every decade. As we build this endowed professorship in her name, let us learn from the lessons of our past as we forge a better future. By following Black and Brown women and centering their dreams and needs, we can build a world where sexual and reproductive health is a human right for all.

We welcome you to join us.

With gratitude,

Terry McGovern
Senior Associate Dean for
Academic and Student Affairs

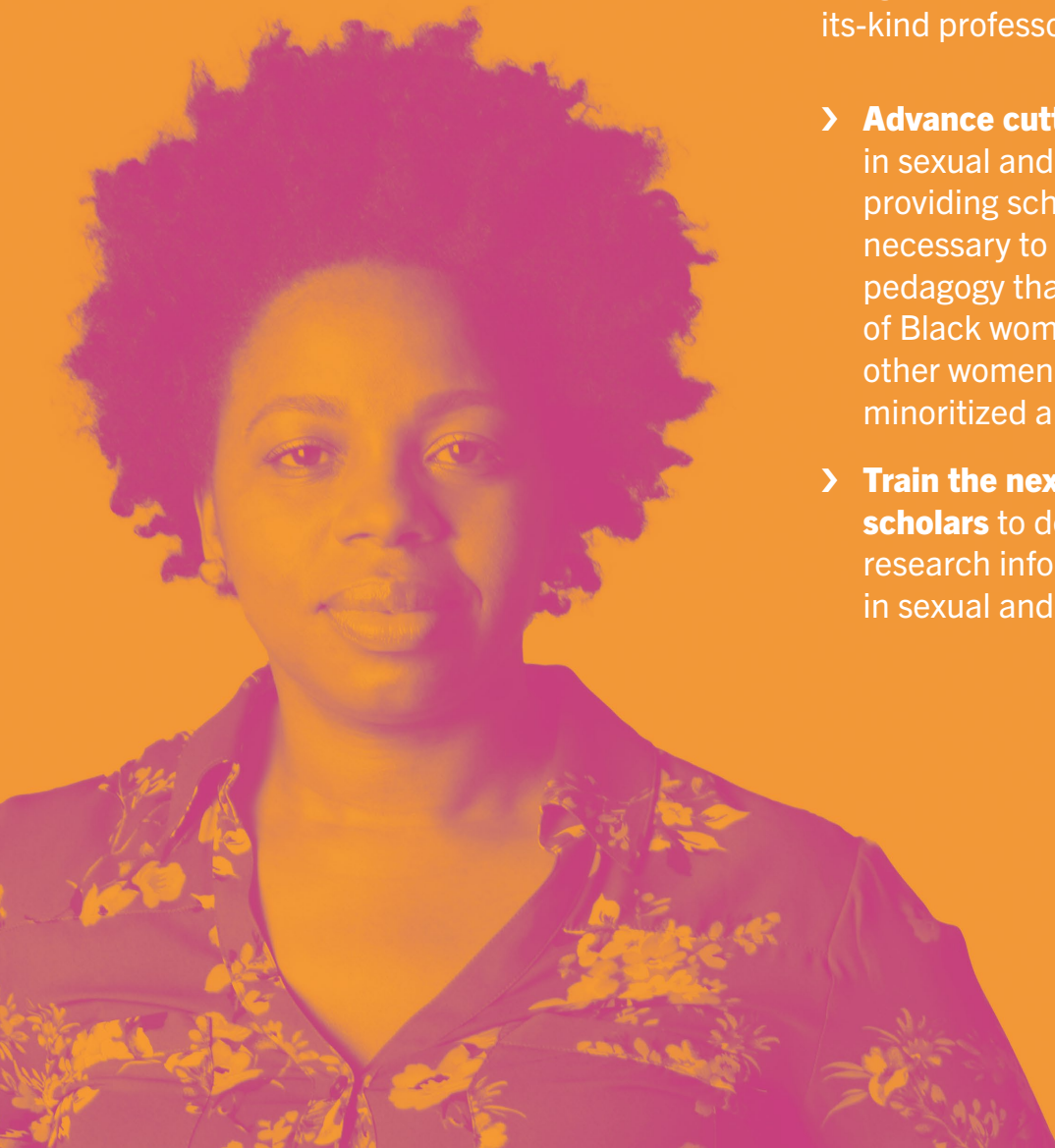
The Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Endowed Professorship

About the Professorship

The Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Professorship, the nation's first endowed professorship in sexual and reproductive justice, will fortify CUNY SPH's leadership in this area of public health. Named for the incomparable Byllye Avery, a trailblazer in women's health, thought leader in reproductive justice, and founder of the Black Women's Health Imperative, this professorship will be crucial in developing a sexual and reproductive justice curriculum at CUNY SPH, centering the very advocacy models Byllye Avery pioneered.

The endowed professorship will be housed within the Department of Community Health and Social Sciences at CUNY SPH. As an integral part of the department, this first-of-its-kind professorship will:

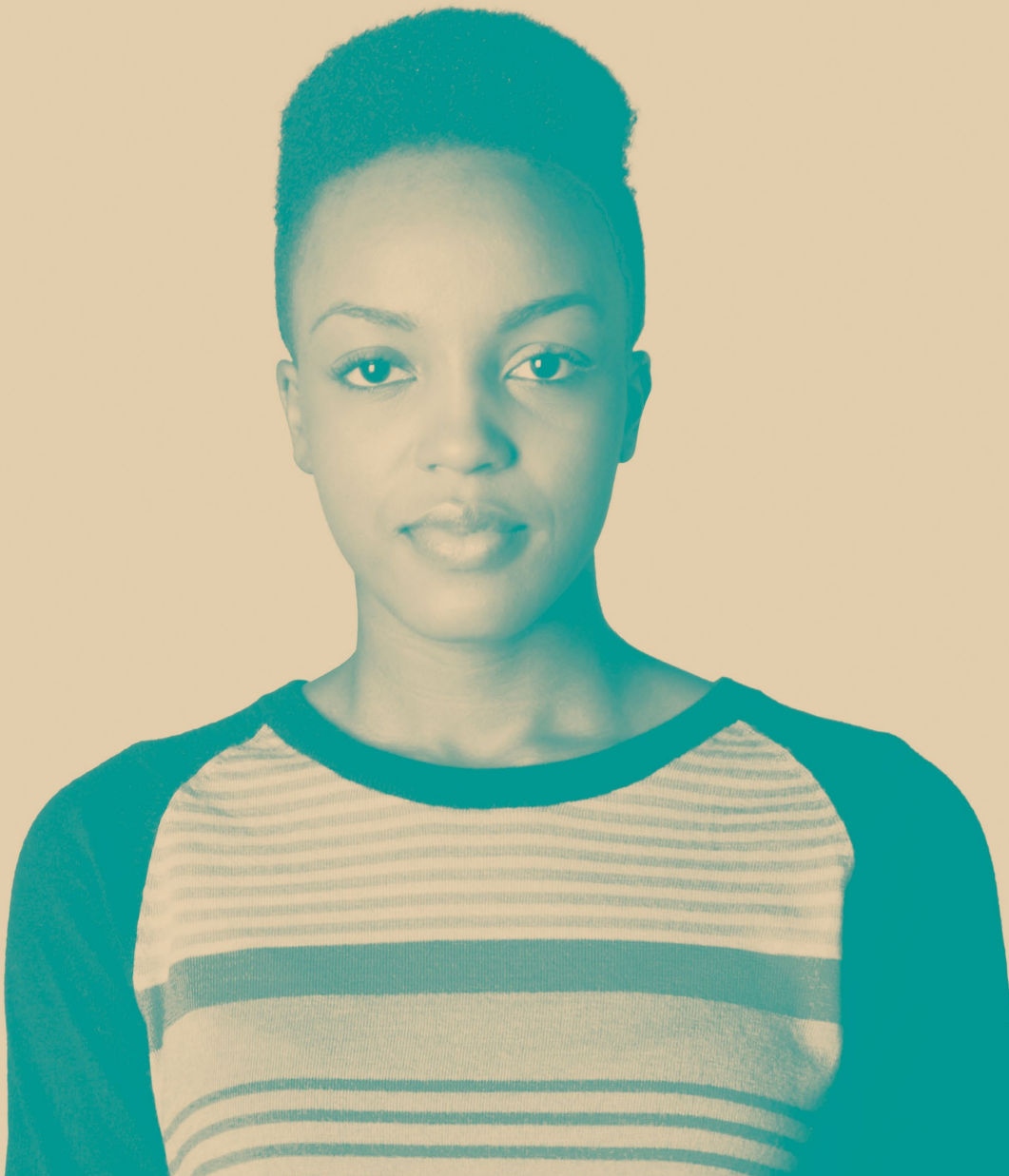
- › **Advance cutting edge scholarship** in sexual and reproductive justice by providing scholars with the resources necessary to conduct research and pedagogy that centers the experiences of Black women, Indigenous women, other women of color, and all minoritized and marginalized people
- › **Train the next generation of activist-scholars** to develop pedagogy and research informed by and grounded in sexual and reproductive justice



Structure of the Professorship

This assistant/associate level Endowed Professorship will be awarded to a scholar-activist who seeks to examine and advance sexual and reproductive justice by:

- › Expanding sexual and reproductive justice research and scholarship
- › Building a solutions based sexual and reproductive justice curriculum
- › Increasing access to culturally responsive sexual and reproductive health services both domestically and abroad
- › Preparing the next generation of public health leaders to advocate for and advance the human right to health



History of the Sexual and Reproductive Justice Movement

In June 1994, in the midst of national debates on health care reform, the term “reproductive justice” was first coined by a caucus of twelve Black women who were looking for a way to articulate the specific unmet needs of Black women facing multiple and intersecting forms of sexual and reproductive oppression that were not being addressed in the proposed health care legislation at the time. Connecting the terms reproductive rights and social justice, they decided to call themselves Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice (WADRJ) and took out a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* and the Congressional newsletter *Roll Call* entitled “Black Women and Health Care Reform” that ultimately garnered signatures from 836 Black women. And with this seminal ad and a press conference on Capitol Hill that followed, the Reproductive Justice (RJ) Movement was born.¹

For nearly three decades, RJ has been recognized globally as a critical framework grounded in Black feminist thought and human rights. While the theory, strategy, and practice of RJ have evolved over time, from the outset, the framework has been built in recognition of the need for an **intersectional analysis** defined by the **human rights** framework—based on the **practice of self-help/community care**—that would be inclusive and applicable to *everyone*. Most simply and elegantly stated, RJ has been defined as the human right “*not to have children* using safe birth control, abortion, or abstinence; the right to *have children* under the conditions we choose; and the right to *parent the children we have* in safe and healthy environments.”² Since its earliest inception, the RJ framework was expanded to include the right to *bodily autonomy* free from any form of sexual or reproductive oppression.³ In a quest to avoid limiting its scope to issues of reproduction, the framework has evolved and is now more inclusively called Sexual and Reproductive Justice (SRJ).⁴

1 Bond Leonard, TM. Laying the foundations for a reproductive justice movement. *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*. New York: Feminist Press; 2017: 39-49.

2 Ross L., Roberts L, Derkas E, Peoples W, Bridgewater Touré P. (Eds) Introduction. *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*. New York: Feminist Press; 2017: 14.

3 Ross L. Conceptualizing reproductive justice theory: A manifesto for activism. *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*. New York: Feminist Press; 2017: 170-232.

4 Diallo DD. HIV prevention and reproductive justice: A framework for saving women’s lives. *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundation, Theory, Practice, Critique*. 2017:340-6.

Breaking the Cycle of Health Inequities and Outcomes for Black Women

Women of color and marginalized and minoritized women face extensive health disparities in the United States. These disparities are starkest for Black women who suffer higher rates of many preventable diseases and chronic health conditions—including diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular disease—that harm maternal and infant health outcomes.

Black women face significant barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health care and continue to be affected by ongoing legacies of structural racism.

IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY, BLACK WOMEN ...

Die from pregnancy related complications at

2.9
times

the rate of white women

Experience rates of preterm birth that are about

50%
higher

than those for births to white women

Are more likely to be uninsured than their white counterparts; of those with insurance,

1 in 4

depend on federal and state programs that often limit coverage for sexual and reproductive health

The pandemic, restrictive state abortion policies, and a post-*Roe v. Wade* landscape have compelled **an urgency to advance reproductive justice education**. CUNY SPH—New York City’s only public school for public health—is rising up to meet this challenge.



A new professorship which honors the spirit, legacy, and trailblazing practices of Byllye Avery, will **empower innovative scholarship and advocacy** in the sexual and reproductive justice movement.



Expanding Our Impact at a Pivotal Moment

In 2023, lifelong sexual and reproductive justice advocate Terry McGovern joined CUNY SPH as the Senior Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs. Terry joins CUNY SPH at a pivotal moment in the school's history.

Standing at number 15 out of 202 ranked schools and programs of public health nationwide in the latest U.S. News and World Report rankings, CUNY SPH has soared in its short history to establish and maintain its position not only as a top school of public health, but as the leading *public* school of public health in the tri-state (NY, NJ, CT) area. The school has developed a reputation for being fully integrated into the local community and distinctly aware of community needs.

Now, we are seeking to expand our impact by establishing the Byllye Avery Endowed Professorship. Under Terry's guidance, this new professorship will develop leaders who will strategize and innovate to eliminate disparities in health outcomes for Black and Brown women both in our local community, and more broadly across the nation and beyond.

We will build upon Byllye Avery's model of scholar activism and empower a new generation of public health leaders to protect the sexual and reproductive rights of all people, particularly women of color and historically marginalized people, and all while dismantling the structural and environmental systems that stand as barriers.

CUNY SPH BODY OF WORK

- › Audit of existing federal funding (NIH, EPA) available to study the role of environmental exposures in Black maternal and infant mortality to establish the need for additional targeted funding
- › Analysis of maternal meconium samples to establish the role of metal mixtures associated with adverse child outcomes to inform prevention strategies
- › Advocacy in city land use processes to require more accurate environmental impact statements and a showing of no harm prior to approving industrial sites in overburdened neighborhoods
- › Investigation of the impact of the Dobbs decision on medical integrity
- › Comprehensive review exposing migrants' lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services
- › Study to understand the integration of reproductive health services in primary care, including the role of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC)
- › Assessment of safety-net health care utilization among uninsured immigrants in New York City
- › Exploration of the establishment of a Wellness and Prevention Trust in Brooklyn, New York
- › Qualitative study of East Harlem adolescents and their life goals in the context of personal relationships, risk of pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- › State analyses of welfare family cap policies
- › Large-scale mixed-methods evaluation of a physician training program for advocacy around abortion and other reproductive health issues
- › Study of the intersectionality of racial and gender discrimination among teens exposed to dating violence

Joining Forces with the Maternal, Child, Reproductive, and Sexual Health (MCRSH) Specialization at CUNY SPH

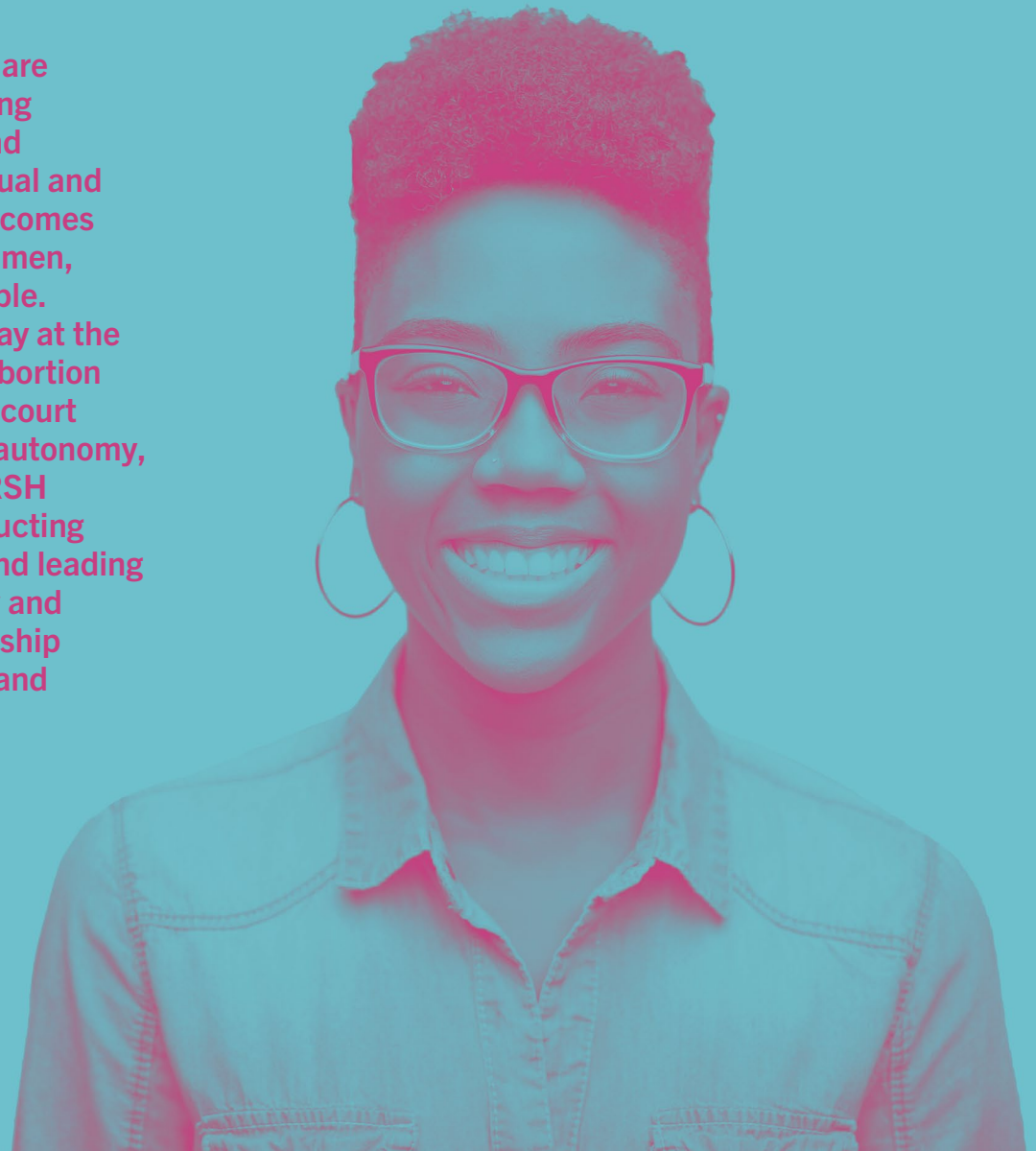
This Endowed Professorship will centralize sexual and reproductive justice programming, research, and scholarship at the school to usher in a new master's degree in Maternal, Child, Reproductive, and Sexual Health (MCRSH), as well as expand experiential learning opportunities

for students. The MCRSH master's program will focus on leadership development with an emphasis on challenging political environments and anti-evidence trends. The program will empower the next generation of public health leaders to dismantle barriers and proliferate justice.

“

Here at CUNY SPH, we are committed to dismantling the structural racism and sexism driving poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes for Black and Brown women, girls, and pregnant people. As many states chip away at the constitutional right to abortion and as our highest U.S. court guts the right to bodily autonomy, the school and its MCRSH specialization are conducting groundbreaking work and leading advocacy to shift policy and practice. This professorship is critical to expanding and deepening that work.

— TERRY McGOVERN



Honoring Byllye Avery's Legacy

Byllye Yvone Avery, a trailblazer in advancing global sexual and reproductive justice, has empowered Black women and girls across the world through her work to advocate for themselves by taking control of their health.

Born on October 20, 1937 in Waynesville, Georgia, Byllye Avery spent her formative years in DeLand, Florida. After studying psychology and completing her Bachelor of Arts at Talladega College in Alabama, she went on to earn a Master of Arts in special education from the University of Florida in 1969. In 1970, her husband suffered a massive heart attack at the young age of 33. His tragic death propelled her lifelong passion for improving health in the Black community.

Over the years, Byllye Avery became a fierce advocate for the sexual and reproductive health of Black women, co-founding the Gainesville Women's Health Center, an abortion clinic, in 1974 and Birthplace, an alternative birth center also in Gainesville, Florida, in 1978. In 1983, she convened the first national conference on Black women's health at Spelman College, a historically Black college for women, which over 2,000 women attended. Following the conference, Byllye Avery founded the National Black Women's Health Project, now known as the Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI), the only national organization exclusively dedicated to improving health and wellness among Black women. The BWHI is still serving Black women and will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2023.

In addition to her activism, Byllye Avery is a teacher and mentor.

From 1991 to 1993, she was a visiting fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health. From 2003 to 2010, Byllye Avery co-led classes on reproductive health and advocacy in the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health at Columbia University. Her work and mentorship continue to inspire and support the department's commitment to affirm access to sexual and reproductive health as a human right.

Byllye Avery has served on the Charter Advisory Committee for the Office of Research on Women's Health of the National Institutes of Health and has received numerous awards for her work, including the prestigious MacArthur Genius Award for Social Contribution, the Essence Award for Community Service, and the Audre Lorde Spirit of Fire Award from Fenway Health. She holds honorary degrees from Thomas Jefferson University, the State University of New York at Binghamton, Gettysburg College, Bowdoin College, Bates College, Russell Sage College, and Simmons University. In 2018, she received the University of California at San Francisco Medal, the institution's most prestigious campus award.

Byllye Avery is currently retired and working on her memoir. She lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts, with her wife of 35 years, Ngina Lythcott. They have three children and one grandchild.



“By Black women coming up with the concept of reproductive justice, we broadened the whole definition of reproductive health to include justice issues, not just physical health issues.

— BYLLYE AVERY

Campaign Leadership

The Byllye Avery Endowment Campaign is led by Terry McGovern, Senior Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs at CUNY SPH, and an esteemed group of activist-scholars.

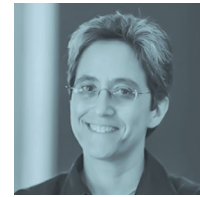


Prior to joining CUNY SPH, **Terry McGovern** was the Harriet and Robert H. Heilbrunn Professor and chair of the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. At Columbia, Terry led domestic and global research related to sexual and reproductive justice and human rights. Prior to joining Columbia in 2002, McGovern served as senior program officer in the Gender, Rights, and Equality Unit of the Ford Foundation, where she oversaw global and domestic programming relating to HIV, gender, LGBT, and human rights. In 1989, McGovern founded the HIV Law Project, where she served as executive director until 1999. While there, she successfully litigated numerous cases against federal, state, and local governments including *S.P. v. Sullivan*, which forced the Social Security Administration to expand HIV-related disability criteria so that women and low-income individuals can qualify for Medicaid and Social Security benefits; and *T.N. v. FDA*, which eliminated a 1977 FDA guideline banning women of childbearing potential from early phases of clinical trials.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS



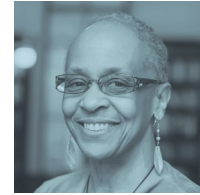
Susan Bernstein
Accomplished
Ceramicist
and Teacher



Nancy Krieger
Professor of Social Epidemiology,
Department of Social and
Behavioral Sciences, and
American Cancer Society Clinical
Research Professor, Harvard T.H.
Chan School of Public Health



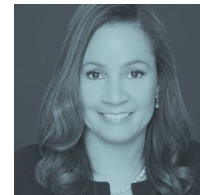
Leslie Davidson
Professor of Epidemiology
and Pediatrics,
Columbia University
Medical Center



Shiriki Kumanyika
Research Professor, Community
Health and Prevention, Drexel
University Dornsife School of
Public Health; Emeritus Professor,
University of Pennsylvania



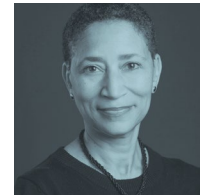
Linda Goler Blount
President & CEO,
Black Women's Health
Imperative



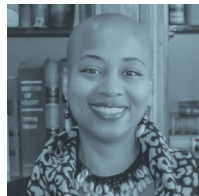
Regina Davis Moss
President and CEO,
In Our Own Voice:
National Black Women's
Reproductive Justice Agenda



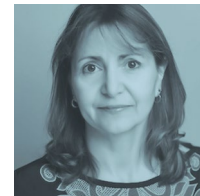
Sally Deane
Adjunct Assistant Clinical
Professor in Health Law,
Policy, and Management,
Boston University School
of Public Health



Lynn Roberts
Dean of Students and Assistant
Professor, Community Health and
Social Sciences, CUNY Graduate
School of Public Health and
Health Policy; Emeritus Founding
Board Member of SisterSong



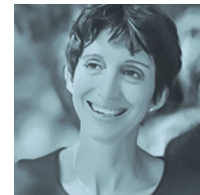
Stephanie Y. Evans
Professor, Institute for
Women's Gender & Sexuality
Studies, Georgia State University



Diana Romero
Professor, Department of
Community Health and Social
Sciences and Director of the
Maternal, Child, Reproductive
and Sexual Health specialization,
CUNY Graduate School of Public
Health and Health Policy



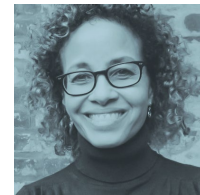
Latanya Mapp Frett
President & CEO, Rockefeller
Philanthropy Advisors; Adjunct
Assistant Professor, Heilbrunn
Department of Population and
Family Health, Columbia University
Mailman School of Public Health



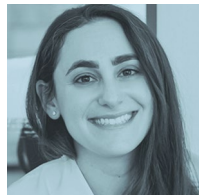
Adrienne Torf
Composer, pianist,
and retired nonprofit
finance consultant



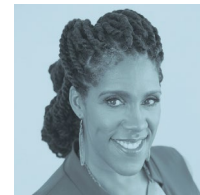
Lyndon Haviland
President, Lyndon Haviland &
Co.; Chairman, CUNY Graduate
School of Public Health and
Health Policy Foundation



Linda Villarosa
Journalist, author, and
contributing writer to the
New York Times Magazine



Jordana Kier
Co-Founder, Lola; Chief
Advancement Officer, Brooklyn
Academy of Music; Board
Director, CUNY Graduate
School of Public Health and
Health Policy Foundation



Teresa C. Younger
President and CEO,
Ms. Foundation

Join Us

We are raising a minimum of **\$4 million** by May 2025 to endow the Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Professorship and invite visionary partners to join us. With your support, we can honor Byllye Avery through a new generation of sexual and reproductive justice scholar-activists advancing human rights for historically marginalized women, families, and communities.

- › Please contact Adam M. Doyno, Executive Director of the CUNY SPH Foundation to discuss giving options. adam.doyno@sph.cuny.edu.

Thank you for considering a gift to the Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Endowed Professorship.



“ When Black women win victories, it is a boost for virtually every segment of society.

— ANGELA DAVIS

CUNY SPH Foundation
55 West 125th Street
New York, NY 10027

CUNYSPH FOUNDATION

foundation.sph.cuny.edu