

## 2015 Champion of State Criminal Justice Award Recipient



Marissa McCall Dodson is the Policy Director and an Attorney for the Georgia Justice Project (GJP). In 2008 she secured a two-year Equal Justice Fellowship allowing her to start the *Coming Home Program* at GJP. The Coming Home Program is a three-tiered approach to addressing the obstacles facing those with a criminal record through direct service, education and legislative advocacy.

Marissa's advocacy began with a successful overhaul of Georgia's expungement law, which at the time was very limited and a burdensome process even for those people who were never convicted of a crime. On the day the law went into effect a third of Georgia's population had a record expunged.

In the subsequent three legislative sessions, Marissa successfully advocated for reentry reforms that: allow people convicted of certain drug crimes to keep their driver's licenses; protect certain employers sued for negligent hiring based on an employee's criminal history; require every person facing criminal charges be informed of first offender eligibility; and create a state remedy when consumer reporting agencies provide incorrect or outdated information to employers. Most recently, Marissa was a lead advocate working with the Georgia Governor's office to get an executive order issued to Ban-the-Box and remove criminal history questions on the state employment application. Governor Nathan Deal signed the order on February 23, 2015 making Georgia the first state in the Deep South to implement this hiring policy.

Marissa is outspoken and fearless and has earned the respect of democrat and republican legislators, the governor's office and community partners. In addition to her policy advocacy and efforts to change widespread and systemic problems that impact people with criminal histories, Marissa continues to represent indigent individuals in the Atlanta area who have been charged with felony and misdemeanor offenses. In a case that stands out Marissa represented a man arrested on eleven charges, including murder. Although GJP was reluctant to take on such a serious case, Marissa was convinced of his innocence and her client was ultimately acquitted of all charges.

Marissa graduated *cum laude* from Spelman College and received her bachelor's degree in Political Science with a minor in United States History in 2005. Marissa graduated *magna cum laude* from Louisiana State University Law Center and received her Juris Doctor and Bachelor of Civil Law in 2008. Originally from Ontario, California Marissa lives in Marietta, Georgia with her husband and their five-year old son.