



“Love and Disability: Exploring Person-Centered Supports and the Marriage Penalty”

Summary of a webinar from December 15, 2022

Introduction

This webinar is about the “marriage penalty.” Marriage penalties are federal policies that impact people with disabilities. If people with disabilities get married, their supplementary security income (SSI) and disabled adult child (DAC) benefits can be reduced.

Here are two examples of marriage penalties:

1. Two people with disabilities who receive SSI benefits get married. Before they got married, they could each have \$2,000 saved. After they get married, they can each only have \$1,500 saved.
2. A person with disabilities who receives DAC benefits wants to marry a person who receives SSI. If they get married, they could lose their DAC benefits and their Medicare.

Personal Stories

Lydia and Shain met at an Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) meeting. They got married in 2019. Lydia says “Our lives have had many parallels, but that’s not how we met. We met because we’re geeks, that’s how we met. And I love that about our relationship.”

Al and Renita are elementary school sweethearts. Before Al and Renita were in a relationship, Al didn’t know about the marriage penalty. Al and Renita are passionate about spreading awareness and ending the marriage penalty. Al says, “Some people will say ‘well you’re living together, you’re having that life’ but it’s not enough to just have that. In my opinion, I think that I should be able to legally marry her.”

After Stephanie and Kile got married, Stephanie’s SSI went from \$700 to \$6.75. She felt lower than low, she didn’t feel like she was independent anymore. Kile says, “People with disabilities should be able to have equal rights to get married, be happy, start a family, and actually have both incomes and make sure that you’re above poverty so you can have a half-decent life.”

Ayesha shared resources for people to advocate for ending marriage penalties.



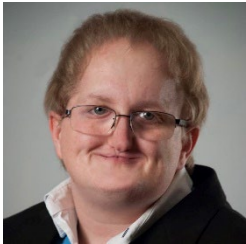
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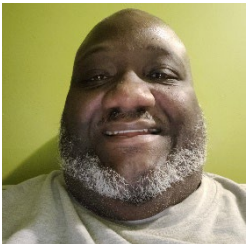
The speakers on this webinar were:



Lydia X.Z. Brown is an activist-scholar, attorney, and organizer. They are Director of Policy, Advocacy, & External Affairs at the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network and founding Executive Director of the Autistic People of Color Fund. Lydia teaches courses in Disability Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and American Studies at Georgetown University and American University. They are co-president of the Disability Rights Bar Association and Disability Justice Committee representative on the National Lawyers Guild board.



Shain Neumeier is a lawyer, activist, and community organizer, as well as an out and proud member of the disabled, trans, queer, and asexual communities. They are a Trial Attorney in the Commitment Defense Unit of the Committee for Public Counsel Services' Mental Health Litigation Division. Previously, Shain worked with the Intersex & Genderqueer Recognition Project, Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network, Community Alliance for the Ethical Treatment of Youth, Connecticut Legal Rights Project, and Disability Rights New York, as well as in solo practice.



Al Lewis and Renita Bundrage are elementary school sweethearts who have not been able to marry due to the marriage penalty for people with disabilities. Together, Al and Renita share their love story in support of marriage equality, and with the hope of ending the marriage penalty so that others do not have to experience the pain they have felt as two people who love each other and should be able to marry. Al has been a board member of People First of Georgia since 2016.



Renita was one of several founders of Long Road Home. She was president of People First of Atlanta for eight years. Renita was also a former President of People First of Georgia for a year after being Vice President for four years.

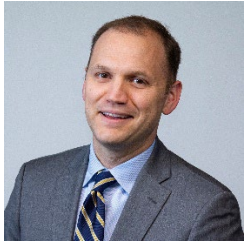


Kile and Stephanie Pelletier are a married, disabled couple. Once they were married, Stephanie's benefits went down to eight dollars and some cents. Getting rid of the marriage penalty has become a priority in their lives as they know that other people with disabilities would love to get married and keep all their benefits. However, they often must settle for a relationship ceremony instead of being able to get married and maintain their quality of life. Kile currently works for Speaking Up for Us (SUFU) in Maine where he teaches and supports other self-advocates to create change in their community.

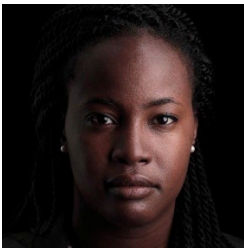


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David Goldfarb is the Director of Financial Security Policy at the Arc of the United States. Previously, he spent nearly 8 years at the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA), where he oversaw NAELA's advocacy initiatives. He currently co-chairs the Disability and Aging Collaborative and the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD) Social Security and Financial Security Task Forces. He was inducted into the National Academy of Social Insurance in 2017.



Ayesha Elaine Lewis is a Staff Attorney and member of the Leadership Team at Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF). She is a graduate of New York University School of Law, where she earned her J.D. in 2013 and LLM in Taxation in 2015. Ayesha uses her experience from various aspects of civil rights advocacy to inform her work to advance the civil and human rights of people with disabilities at DREDF. Her work spans a variety of areas, including marriage equality.