

# Elder Kristen John Foy

President and Founder of The Arc of Justice, Inc.



## BIOGRAPHY

Kirsten John Foy was born to John Davis and Louise Kirsten Foy in the former Unity Hospital, in Crown Heights and was raised in Central Brooklyn. Kirsten is a product of the New York City public school system, having graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School and attended CUNY's Brooklyn College, where he studied Political Science and History. Kirsten's personal and professional commitment to social change and progress is rooted in his personal narrative of racial and class diversity.

Until October of 2018, Kirsten served as the Northeast Regional Director for the National Action Network, a national civil rights organization, headquartered in New York City and founded by Rev Al Sharpton. There are 12 States and the District of Columbia in NAN's Northeast Region and he was responsible for developing new chapters, supporting and guiding existing chapters, within his region, and coordinating their activities and action agendas. Issues ranging from organizing against gun violence, subpar education, and police misconduct to advocating for greater health care enrollment under the affordable care act, expanded use of the earned income tax credit, to greater civic participation and advancement of an economic justice campaign all fell within Kirsten's purview.

In addition to Civil Rights, Kirsten has worked in the labor movement, as a senior advisor to the President of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), the late Larry Hanley. Kirsten has worked with community organizations and New Yorkers throughout the city in ATU's efforts to ensure the City Administration provided a fair contract for school bus drivers that would ensure the safe transportation of New York's school children. When negotiations failed to codify established and critical worker protections ATU's Local 1181 was forced to strike. Kirsten was the principle spokesperson and organizer of the strike, as the International President's special advisor and point person to the striking local.

Kirsten has also worked in New York's city and state governments. Kirsten worked in New York City government as Director of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs for then Public Advocate Bill de Blasio. He worked in State government as a special assistant to a State Senator and a special projects manager for the Democratic State Senate Conference. Kirsten helped build support for measures to safeguard the civil liberties of New Yorkers during stop-and-frisk police encounters and to protect New Yorkers living in buildings with serious housing violations, such as a lack of heat and other dangerous conditions. He also led organizing efforts to provide students, parents and communities with

a platform to voice their opposition to teacher layoffs, helping defeat those City administration proposals for two consecutive years. Throughout his tenure in the office of the Public Advocate, Kirsten worked closely with numerous civic groups and organizations across the city to address the most pressing issues in their communities. Gun violence was a major component to Kirsten's portfolio while at the Public Advocate's Office. Working tirelessly to redirect intellectual, human and financial resources to a public health approach to combating gun violence. Prior to his New York City government service, Kirsten served as the National Director for the National Action Network's Criminal Justice Initiative. During his tenure as Director of Criminal Justice Initiative Kirsten advocated for criminal justice and police reforms across the nation. He organized communities to fight for justice in the wake of the senseless shootings and assaults of New Yorkers by NYPD officers, such as the deaths of Sean Bell, Amadou Diallo and Shem Walker and countless others across the country, like 12 year old Deaunte Farrow of West Memphis, Arkansas, as well as the 1997 brutal assault and sodomy of Abner Louima. Kirsten's continual efforts following the deaths of Sean Bell and Eric Garner helped lead to significant reforms of NYPD practices.

In 2011, Kirsten became the subject of the discriminatory policing practices he so stridently opposes when he was assaulted and unjustly arrested and detained – with now Public Advocate Jumaane Williams – by NYPD officers at New York City's famed Labor Day Parade on Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn. The incident only strengthened Kirsten's determination to advocate for further reforms to help end discriminatory policing and improve police accountability. Kirsten's advocacy and organizing leadership was critical in moving New York City government to adopting historic and trailblazing police accountability legislation, including the creation on an Independent Inspector General for the NYPD. In September of 2011 The New York Times published a half page profile on Kirsten chronicling his Civil and Human Rights work and personal history.

Kirsten has also been an outspoken advocate against the culture of gun violence plaguing communities throughout New York City and the country, working closely with the families of gun violence victims such as Lloyd Morgan Jr., Trayvon Martin and countless others. Kirsten initiated the "Occupy the Corners" program, under the National Action Network, in the aftermath of the murder of 4 year old Lloyd Morgan Jr. on a Bronx, New York playground on July 22, 2012. The summer of 2019 Kirsten lead a renewed occupy movement with the Overnight Occupy, under the banner of a newly formed national civil rights organization, The Arc of Justice, Inc., in which dozens of activists and advocates stayed at scenes of violence crimes.

Kirsten has received three city citations for his advocacy work: one from the NYPD for his anti-violence work, one from the Brooklyn Borough President for his leadership representing Brooklyn, and another from the Public Advocate for his work fighting against the predatory financial

practices of rent to own rent to own companies, like Rent-A-Center, located low-income communities.

In 2013 Kirsten ran a vigorous yet unsuccessful campaign for New York City council. Kirsten's candidacy was a critical vehicle advancing a progressive police accountability and living wage agenda that was eventually adopted by major candidates for citywide elective office. In August of 2013 Kirsten penned an opinion piece on the need for economic justice in the fast food industry that was published by the New York Daily News. In the op-ed Kirsten argued for the establishment of a \$15 per hour fast food starting wage and the recompense of workers' stolen wages. In October of 2013, in response to various media reports of retail racial profiling or "shop and Frisk", Kirsten led the successful fight to reform the retail industry's loss prevention and customer engagement policies. His efforts resulted in the historic establishment of "The Customers' Bill of Rights" which has been adopted by most major retailers in the nation. Much of this past year Kirsten has been leading and organizing around the cases of Eric Garner, working to ensure that there is a vibrant, rigorous and peaceful protest movement to respond to the national crisis of police killings and continuing the fight for economic justice and Educational Equity. Most recently Kirsten along with Michael Mulgrew, President of The United Federation of Teachers on the issue of expanded gifted and talented programs to all school districts city-wide.

In October of 2018 after a quarter century of activism Kirsten founded The Arc of Justice, Inc., a civil and human rights organization inspired by the philosophies of non-violent direct action of Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. The Arc of Justice had, by its first anniversary grown to a national organization with chapters and affiliates in 21 cities. Kirsten along with Gwen Carr mother of Eric Garner led the "Fire Panteleo Movement" which resulted into the dismissal of the officer responsible for the killing of Eric from the N YPD. Kirsten also launched the Education Equity Campaign which is focused on top to bottom systemic reforms to public education.

Kirsten is a licensed Pentecostal Minister, the President and Founder of The Arc of Justice, Inc. and currently resides in Bedford-Stuyvesant with his wife and their three children.