**Down to the Struts**

Season 2, Episode 6: Black Disabled Lives Matter

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Guest: Dara Baldwin

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**Introduction**

[jazzy piano chords, bass strumming with smooth R&B]

Qudsiya Naqui:

Hi, this is Qudsiya Naqui and welcome to the final episode of this season of Down to the Struts. But don't worry, we're far from the end of the road. Stay tuned through the very end of this episode for some special shout outs and a taste of what you can expect in season three.

Today, we'll listen in on my conversation with Dara Baldwin. Dara is the Director of National Policy at the National Center for Disability Rights. We'll talk about Darras activism and advocacy related to the experiences of black disabled people in the criminal legal system. According to a study conducted by the Ruderman Family Foundation, between 2013 and 2015, half of police shootings involved disabled people, Dara will shine a light on the challenges at the intersection of disability and policing, and how we can chart a course forward towards the achievement of transformative justice for black disabled lives. Okay, let's get down to it.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Thank you, Dara, for being with me today on Down to the Struts. I really appreciate your time to talk about this very important topic of disability race and policing that is so often not part of the discussion. So I'd love for you to start us off by telling us a bit about yourself and the journey that led you to work in the Disability Justice space.

Dara Baldwin:

So thank you for having me. Peace and blessings to everyone out there. My name is Dara Baldwin. I'm the Director of National Policy for the Center for Disability Rights. My CIL is—a CIL is a Center for Independent Living—is located in Rochester, New York, but I live and work in washington dc dc statehood, DC statehood DC statehood I have to say that so my journey to Disability Justice is is long and good. I was born in Spain. My parents were serving their country. They brought me home to Newark, New Jersey, their home, I was raised there. And I came to Washington DC in 2007. But had worked on the Hill—Congress--since 2004. I was a child advocate in New Jersey and in New Jersey child advocacy, at least the organization I worked with did disability work. I actually worked on a bill to make sure youth who were in the juvenile justice centers received their IDEA--Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—services. A lot of states were removing that when someone became adjudicated and went into the system. So New Jersey, I worked on that in New Jersey. So I had done some disability policy, came to DC and was a contractor for about two years and then met some people who were doing disability rights work. And at that time in 2007, is when people were starting to talk about race and the intersection of race in disabilities and the lack of black people and people of color and disability. So about 2009 Two years later, have after you know meetings and conversations I got my first job in the disability community which was with ]TASH]--they got a grant to make their board and their membership more diverse. So I worked on that grant as well as some policy I did a little education policy. And then I left TASH after about two years in 2011 and went to work for the National Center for Independent Living, where I expanded my portfolio of policy word to include much more and specifically around criminal justice reform, which is what we called it back then a lot of disability rights groups do not work in criminal justice reform. And they come from come to it at a different angle they come to specifically when I'm policing since we're talking about that with a lens of victimization. And that is not how black and brown people come to this. We come to it with a lens of criminalization. We're criminalized by the system. But anyway, left there went to work for the mayor Mayor Gray at the time of DC and Office of Disability Rights. I am not a government worker, so I got out I'm most definitely an activist. And I was told by people in the government you’re too much of an activist. Okay, all right. This is the wrong place. For me. So I tell people this that because that is the beauty of having an education, right is that you can choose different jobs and you can move yourself and having opportunities, which is what I try to do every day, release those barriers and knock down and dismantle those barriers that don't allow people to have choices. And I'm blessed to use my choices. So I left the office of the mayor's office and went to work for National Disability Rights Network, which is the national office for protection advocacy programs, for those of you out there who know them worked there for about four years, and then now at the Center for Disability Rights. So that's how I came to this work. And I'm sure we'll talk about more of that in the rest of our conversation.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Yes, absolutely. Thank you for sharing that journey. And I think it's important, I think your career trajectory illustrates a lot of different things. One of which is realizing what you don't want to do versus what you do want to do coming into work as an ally, which I think is really wonderful. And I want to unpack more with you as we as we talk, just the idea of you know, when we spoke initially, you mentioned that you don't identify as a disabled person. But, you know, obviously, you've been working in the space for a very long time. And also, I love the shout out to New Jersey, I am also from New Jersey. So it was nice to hear about talking about the place of my roots, I wanted to just kind of dive right in the murders of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor in 2020 really shined a light on the deep, deep problems in this country of the brutalization and violence against black bodies by police and law enforcement. But less discussed is the particular concerns of black disabled people and their interactions with police. Could you tell us a little bit about that? And like what are those specific challenges? And and what have you observed in your work on criminal justice reform? And just share a little bit about what those concerns are? for folks who may not be as familiar?

Dara Baldwin:

Yeah, sure. So let me start with how disability work is being done. Because I think that kind of will give people you know, the foundation of this work. So you know, many people know we have disability rights, which centers white people and their work and Disability Justice create about me, I mean, this when the 10 principles starting with intersectionality, right as one and collective liberation is number 10, you will not see the disability rights community do one through number 10. And that caused the problem in Washington, DC, there are about 122 disability rights organizations and I worked with them for many years, I was the only person of color. Let me say that again, of color, not black. There were not many Asians, South Asians, Latino, Latinx, you know, not many other there were not not not many, there were none. And so what that does, and people don't understand is that these are the people here in Washington, DC, who shape the policy work that is done around disabilities. So what does that mean? And I said it earlier, that means that if these groups who are predominantly white, they are led by predominately white out of those organizations, that is all of them are run by white men, except for about seven of them. And those are run by white women. And there's one easterseals is run by a black woman, but she's not here in Washington, DC. So what does that mean? Then people need to understand this. The people who are sitting at the table, those are the conversations you have. And so since these are white people who nobody's killing their people, police are not killing their people at a rate in which they're killing black and brown people BIPOC folks. Yes, they are killing white disabled people. I will say that, right. Like I said, victimization is not a criminalization. That's one thing. And the other thing that I noticed in doing this work and again, as we said, I don't identify as a disabled person, but I am part of the family as people tell me just like I do LGBTQ work. I don't identify as LGBTQ person, but I'm part of the family I've been doing the work so long I've done my trainings and talked to people and interacted and so I'm well respected and I respect and I respect black disabled activists. Well, I also noticed about disability rights organizations is that they make BIPOC people choose between their marginality right which which marginalization is more important, being disabled or being a person of color. And you cannot do that to us, you can't right that can happen. And so, in conversations and I will call it multi marginalization is that, you know, people have many different identities, and for many of us, all of them are marginalized. So I say all of this, so you understand it know how I approached this work, I had to leave that space. Because in the disability rights space, they are not talking about the killing of black disabled people by law enforcement. And so I had to go elsewhere. I went to the Justice Roundtable, which is run by now Nkechi Taifa. The roundtable is where you find many organizations who think like us and who we're approaching now we call it transformative. Justice, because we don't want criminal justice reform. We don't want to reform slavery we didn't want, right. You don't want to reform criminal justice, right? You want to transform right and stop it. Actually, I am by my soul, an abolitionist. So you know that as well. But anyway, I had to go there, I had to go to the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, right? Where there justice reform Task Force, and work on law enforcement, because they worked on it from an angle of what we're talking about the killing of black and brown bodies. But even in those spaces, right, as we all know, intersectionality, they don't want to talk about disabled lives. At those tables. I was, I still am. And we still are probably the only Disability Justice group that's sitting at those tables, which is another issue we need to talk about, right? We need to start funding Disability Justice activists so that they can do this work, they are doing great work in the state levels. And I'm appreciative of that we needed at the federal level, and many of us are discussing that. So that came up right the conversation. And also when you started looking at the numbers, it's unfortunate, the data is not collected in an evidence based manner. You have the Washington Post, who is collecting this and then you have the kind of killing projects, projects of police shootings, people who are sending in data who are telling people, okay, this person had a disability or this person was, you know, black and queer. And so that is something we're trying to change in policy and saying, No, these law enforcement entities need to be collecting this data and telling us who they're killing and who they're harming. Right. They're also harming people, through much of the conversations. And many of the high profile cases that you hear about those are disabled people, specifically disabled black people who have been harmed. Some of them have been blessed to live, some of them not like Mr. Blake, right. In Wisconsin, he lived and some of them not some, many of them killed, right. Even Eric Garner, you heard about his case, he had asthma, he had breathing issues. He had disability for a long time, right? You hear about Sandra Bland and people who have mental health diagnosis. So you hear about that. But the last thing I'll say is this. Also in that black disabled conversation of people being killed by the police who are black and disabled, you only hear and people really push mental health. And I have to push back on those civil rights groups when we're talking about the intersection of law enforcement and black people is mental health, mental health, mental health. That is a very large piece of it. But as that is not the only piece of it and that is not the only disability that is out there. Right. And people need to understand that people with all disabilities come in contact with the police and black disabled folks are killed at a higher rate of death. Right, there are blind people who come in contact people who have physical disabilities. And then finally there are so many ways that people come in contact with law enforcement that people don't address and see most people are talking about local law enforcement, such as the police who Louisville police who killed Briana Taylor, Minneapolis police, who killed George Floyd. Rochester police who killed Daniel prove these are all horrible cases disabled people. But here's the key. Law enforcement is so much a part of our lives that people don't want to they don't recognize that and the policies that are out there are not covering those other law enforcement's TSA is one of them. And that's why I'm bringing up TSA is when you're traveling Well, many of us before the pandemic when we're traveling and airlines and we're hopefully going to go back to traveling. TSA is one of them right and patting down people and touching people and accusing them of carrying weapons in their wheelchairs or carrying weapons in you know, as parts of their bodies or the metal pieces of their bodies for you know, they’re an amputee is a weapon and being disrespectful to them and harming their bodies making them do things I can't do. They did that to disabled people. So I just want people to understand and see the whole concept of this work around ending the killing and harming of black bodies and how that is also, you know, black disabled Lives Matter is what that means.

Qudsiya Naqui:

That's a really helpful picture and I appreciate that you shared the definition of law enforcement is broader than we think there's many entry points for the government to police our bodies. I think TSA is a great example. We had an episode a couple of weeks ago about the immigration system and Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the treatment of disabled bodies in that context. So I think thinking about the concept of law enforcement really broadly is really key. And I really appreciate also the point of lack of data. I think I saw a report from the Ruderman Family Foundation from a few years ago that said that uh, About half of police killings involve disabled people. But that's not even. I don't even know that that's a complete number because of under reporting. So there's just so much we don't know, taking what you've just described. So helpfully, the Rehabilitation Act, and the ADA provided essential protections against discrimination and unequal treatment for people with disabilities in the context of employment, and housing. And I wondered if you could say a little bit about whether those laws that were designed to advance the rights of disabled people do anything in terms of protections when it comes to law enforcement and whether those protections have been effective or ineffective?

Dara Baldwin:

So yes, , these are great questions. And I will say this, you know, in doing this work, I come from a social equity background. I have a master's in public administration from Rutgers University, and concentrated in social equity. And I say that so people want to do social equity is a public administration theory, just so you know, created by Philip Rutledge, who was my mentor, and who was the person who got me to come to DC. So I say that so you understand it. Now. I study a lot of civil rights laws. I am not a lawyer, although many people think I am. But you don’t need to be a lawyer to read laws, I tell people I can read, okay, in reading many of the civil rights laws and regulations and things that are out there, 504 and the ADA are pretty ironclad and pretty damn good written laws. I just say that the public accommodation law and ADA is so well written that for the Equality Act, right, which is not the last but one of the last groups in this country to be to have a civil right, right, LGBTQ and Equality Act, they use the public accommodation language from the ADA, just so you know that. So I say that to say to people, yes, the ADA is a great law. And it is out there. And of course, there are some things that are missing from the ADA that we want to close up those gaps. And those holes, many people don't is tied to the ADA, which covers public entities, which will cover law enforcement and all agencies that really protect people's rights. And yes, they are really good laws, but the thing about laws is enforcing them. So I say that in this country, we have a really horrible track record of enforcing them, no matter how much activism we have out there. Again, in doing this work, even the protection advocacy programs have been doing really good work in trying to train right, the whole criminal justice system meaning right from the law enforcement officers, to the court systems to the jails and prisons. It's just starting this, I would say that we were on our good 10 years of there's been some really good cases, litigations were right, law enforcement entities, police department, sheriff's departments, right, they will arrest someone, so in Title II, communications, in it, you have to communicate to the person in the format that is best for them, not for your agency. So when someone is arrested or even questioned about something, they don't have ASL interpreters, or right they don't have interpreters who can interpret in different languages, right being in a city like New York, right? Or here in Washington, DC, where we have over 30 languages spoken. They don't have a sign language interpreter who can sign in Spanish or in Japanese or something like that. And many people are left going through the system never properly being adjudicated. We have public defenders who don't know anything about the ADA, I have been told. And because I talk to lawyers, you know, who do this work public defenders, even prosecutors who tell me they may have three chapters on the ADA, when they were in law school. And I looked at them say excuse me or three paragraphs, I'm like, I don't what are you talking about? They don't know the ADA. And I have had to say to them be the friends of mine who do this work or people I come in contact and say you need to read the ADA. It is not a long bill. It is not a long law, you need to know this. And so you have a bunch of people who are doing this work, who have no concept of the ADA law or section 504 law.

But the laws that are in there, I think would be very helpful in stopping and mitigating some of the things that happen to disabled people on the streets. But it is only a piece of that right? Just like police officers are trained in different areas. But what they don't understand is racism. You can right you can you can talk to them about all of these different things. And as we saw on January 6, during the insurrection on the Capitol, propagated by the White House, former police officers, former law former soldiers who are racist, and so yes, you can train some of this but it doesn't always seep in it always doesn't help. Take hold, and it doesn't always work. But I will say the laws that are there on the books are good part of this work is making sure that people who come in contact with disabled folks know these laws, you need to know that if you arrest someone who has a developmental disability, and you can tell by talking to them, many of us can, that they may be on a fourth grade level of conversation with you, then that means you need to get a social worker in the room and help this person to navigate through whatever adjudication you are doing to them at that time, they should not be going through it alone. And that is in the ADA that is Title II it is telling them that is section 504 right, you need to provide this person with the help they need to get through this situation. And many jurisdictions just don't use it or do it. And I'm thankful to the many lawyers out there who are taking this up and who are having these conversations, our legal aid systems and the protection advocacy programs who have decided to start training people who are working on disability rights, Washington is doing great work, Disability Rights Pennsylvania, Disability Rights Tennessee, I know a lot of groups disability rights in Massachusetts, who have taken this on, there's about 18, or 19 PNAs who have really pushed us to the forefront of saying we are going to address criminal justice as one of our top priorities for disabled people and coming in contact with the law.

Qudsiya Naqui:

That's right. And I think it's a great point, the fact that advocates themselves, , defense attorneys, other types of advocates, they know the criminal law, they don't know the ADA and that education is so critical if you're doing this work. And it goes even further back than that, that I would say, you know, we have an episode with someone who talks about the lack of disability education and disability positive messaging at the elementary school level. So we have a long way to go in terms of educating people. So when they come into these professions, whether it's criminal defense or being a law enforcement officer, having that background in history and knowledge and understanding the laws and how they're supposed to protect people is really key. And I think your discussion about training and reform brings me to my next question, which is, you know, activists, like yourself have posed a lot of different options and policy solutions, whether that is reforming the existing system, or as you described earlier, abolition and I think you sort of answered this a little bit. But you know, from your perspective, working in the disability, Justice space, and as an activist, what path do you think is going to be sort of the most effective in terms of better protection, and just eliminating the violence against disabled black bodies?

Dara Baldwin:

Yeah, sure. So as I said, I am an abolitionist, and I believe that we need to remove any punitive systems in this country. So again, let's go to the foundations people talk about structural racism, they use the words they don't really know what that is. So in this country, talk about what happens and whenever people come up with solutions, usually, this is usually white folks, I just had to say that because you're the ones who've been coming up with solutions to quote unquote, problems in this country, it's always to be punitive. If you create something that causes harm to someone, then they will act right. And that is structural racism that comes from slavery that comes from the slave master. Telling, right, that is how we control the slaves is that we beat them, if you run away, we'll beat you make that slave an example to other slaves, if they keep running away, cut their foot off, it's punitive. And that system has trickled down through the centuries into the mind and the customs. And the way in which white folks, many white people figure out these issues to be resolved, instead of coming at them from a place of love, and compassion. Because there's a reason why people are starving. There's a reason why people can't keep a roof over their head. There's a reason why people are not able to get the jobs they want or keep the jobs they want or be paid the money they want in order to live a living wage. And these all is connected people say oh, what does this have to do with law enforcement? And what does this have to do abolitionism this is what we're talking about. abolitionism is taking away the punitive side of how you all are resolving problems and infusing love and saying that we need to make sure there are systems that are fully funded to give people the education, the housing, the employment, the transportation, the clean water, the environment, the things that they need to live productive, and thriving lives. And since the systems are not created by us to help fix these problems, that were not created by us, black people, black and brown folks and create the system, we find out and see that when we talk to people about reform, we're talking to people who only know one way of fixing problems and instead of having the possibilities right I want you to have the imagine A nation of all possibilities, then you need to move out the way if you don't think there's anything more possible that you can fix the problem, then you need to move out the way. And so let me give some examples, when we so called had this problem of drugs in this country, which again, we didn't cause the answer was war on drugs. When we so called had a problem with war on crime. When we had an issue and problem of poverty, we should do war on poverty. It's always about war and killing and right it just putting that concept to resolving a problem yet, does not help us who who we are the ones who are living the situation, the New Deal, FDR was a racist, the New Deal is racist. And as well as people don't want to admit that he created redlining, right, they made sure that he created segregated housing in the New Deal, the New Deal only helped those American citizens in the 1930s black and brown people were not considered American citizens, neither war disabled people and and have a civil right, we didn't have a civil right black folks didn't have a civil right in the ‘30s. And so therefore, we did not participate nor benefit from those social services that were created. So I say all that to say that when we think of reform, of course, it's out of the quote unquote, norm is out of the white person's norm of what reform is. And for us reform is the endless possibilities of what we can do. And finally, I'll give an example concrete example where the police have been removed. So one, we need to define what safety is in this country and in safety in this country for black and brown people is not the law enforcement is to never come in contact with law enforcement. So public safety is again another concept. People don't understand the public creating its own safety, it can and is being done around this world. One great example is the Newark community street teams, I’m from Newark this concept came up Daamin x is the leader of these group of community street teams are made up of people from the community. So some of those people have people who have been justice impacted and people who have loved the community for years. And what they did is they set up a program where they walk the streets and talk to the community know the community, they walk children back and forth to schools, when before this pandemic, they make sure the neighborhood restaurants and businesses are safe. And it's funded through the Public Safety Department of Newark. Not the police, there are no more police cars sitting on those corners, right when kids are going to school and those kinds of things. And the last thing I'll say about it is in Newark New Jersey, around this country, in the fall of 2020, you had multiple Black Lives Matter protests, Newark, New Jersey is the only city where there were no riots, not one building was destroyed or harmed, not one business shut down and closed down. And there was not one arrest for those protests. Because of the Newark community street team. These things can happen. We just need to stop thinking with minds of only harm and punitive. And start opening our minds to love and care. And also knowing that you may not have the answers to these problems, that there are multiple people who are brilliant in their work, who need to be in leadership, who you need to listen, some people need to get out of the way. You've been doing this for 30 years, you've been trying to fix homelessness for 30 years, it hasn't worked, it's time for you to move out the way and let other people lead. That is the problem we have here. And that is the way forward that many of us who do this work, see, knocking down the first barrier is knocking down a barrier of specifically white folk who think they know better for everyone else. And they don't.

Qudsiya Naqui:

I think it's so so incredibly powerful, what you're saying. And I like this distinction between sort of reform and transformation and just completely removing the concept of punishment as the solution to problems. I think that's that's so incredibly powerful. So that brings me to a specific piece of legislation or an approach or chance to make reform or make transformation, which is, was passed by the House of Representatives recently, which is the George Floyd justice and policing act. And I know in your role at ncdr, you penned a letter in opposition to this bill and I really would love to dig a little bit into what specifically about the bill, did you find most problematic for black disabled folks in particular,

Dara Baldwin:

Sure, thank you. And the letter was was penned by myself and Breon Wells, who is the president and CEO of the Daniel initiative, and you can find the letter on Center for Disability Rights website under blogs. Of course, I come from an angle when I do this work about saving black and brown disabled bodies. So we oppose the bill because it was not good enough, we also oppose the process. So those are two different things. So let me start first about the process. People like to answer one question, let me go back a little bit. The other thing that happened and in the summer and fall of 2020, is that we mobilize many activists, Black Lives Matter Black Disabled Lives Matter, mobilize people to come out and vote during a pandemic, which was very scary, very harmful, very threatening for many disabled folks. But they did it and they came out and they voted and 93% of black people voted for Joe Biden, Kamala Harris to be president and vice president and a congress that we have they’re in the lead at the end of day, the House is a D and the Senate is now a D. Although, that senate is questionable. But anyway, we came out in the 90%. Number, the numbers for white people 47%. So you still had a majority of white people who voted for Trump to be president. Let's be very clear here. And the reason I bring these numbers up is that now, here we are, again, black folks are asking, no more. We're telling you. We voted you in office, and you need to give us a 90% justice and policing bill. This was a 40% justice and policing bill. And the reasons number one is they did not give a process they had an old bill from 216, which they wanted to quickly pass in 117, which you can do and Congress without having a hearing and conversation or a markup or any changes to a bill. You can pass it in the next Congress before April 1. That was the waiver that the speaker gave, she said any bills that pass in the 116. Let's get them you know, you want to get a pass, you can do that. And so Congress chose to do that. And Mr. Nadler, chair of the Judiciary Committee, and Miss bass, who's the author of this bill chose to do that. What did that do? Well, we had about six or seven new Congress members like Mondare Jones from New York Bowman from New York, and actually Cory Bush, from Missouri, all Democrats, all who ran on defunding the police and all who ran on telling their people they want to do something around policing, who now have no chance to talk about this, though. We sent three letters to the 116. Congress saying you need to update this bill, you need to edit this bill. And they chose not to. So that was the process, right? It was like we're just gonna get this passes through what was missing from this bill, the things that were missing specifically for many of us in this work, I'll give you three. Now you can read our letter, there's 10 of them, but I'm gonna talk about three one is qualified immunity and ending qualified immunity, which is a protection for law enforcement. And when they kill people, you can't sue them. You can't go after them. I will tell you, I worked in the medical field and I worked in the medical field. I'm much older than many people think. But I worked in the medical field when there wasn't qualified immunity for doctors and doctors just leave instruments and people's bodies and do things to people and people were like, We can't sue doctors. And we finally got that right now you can sue malpractice. So this has to happen, right? qualified immunity is not eliminated in this bill, because of the Bivens case. They did not provide a statute for Bivens, and this is back to what I was talking about before about the different law enforcement. The Bivens case is the Supreme Court case and it says that you cannot go after law enforcement who are federally funded. So what does that mean? That means this law, JPA, the Justice and Policing Act only covers local law enforcement, like I just said to you, it does not cover here's a list, sheriff's county, state police office parks police officers, any police officers who are in your state who are federal people, such as FBI, CIA, DEA, AFC and then also SRO, school resource officers are paid through federal funding. And people act like black disabled people don't come in contact with these people. What I just told you TSA, they do, right? They are federally funded. So that means this bill only covers local law enforcement. What about all the other incidences, especially those of you who live in rural areas, you got sheriffs running around your you got County, and you got state police, they are paid through federal funding, once one federal funding, that's there, that means you're not covering all law enforcement in this bill. Again, 40% we want 90% of that. We want you to cover every law enforcement person that we come in contact with. And you chose not to do that. The third thing was the Miss conduct database. I did this because I know working with a lot of people in the community. No one's going to read that whole bill. That's my job as a policy person. I read the whole bill, I just put the sections and because I work with people who do that, so I'll go read this section. So if you read the section on misconduct database, that means police officers who's who create misconduct will go into this database. That is not true. In the database, they're only collecting use of force and racial profiling which are such a high bar To prove, as I just told you, we don't have data. We don't have information, these police officers self report, what police officer, you know, is gonna come and say, Oh, I was racial profiling. So put me in the database.

No one! Like, what is this? Right? Oh, I was using use of force. So put me in a database or even a sergeant or Lieutenant, someone who's in trouble. Don't look at that person because they got the blue wall. And they might say, oh, Officer Jones, you were using force. I'm putting you in that database. never going to happen. That is right. So it is language around this misconduct database is 40% language, we want 90% language. So there are times when law enforcement people or law enforcement are caught in committing crimes, they are convicted of committing those crimes, and yet they still get to work, such as bribery, harassment, assault, sexual assault, perjury, how many cases we got out there where law enforcement police officers have lied about someone committing a crime, and now those people are in prison. That's why we have what's called the Innocence Project, who's getting people out of prison, and most of their cases are law enforcement people who have lied, right? That's perjury, you were on the stand and you lie. So those people who commit those crimes are not going into database. Why is that important? Because they move from city to city, they leave one city in trouble for bribery or harassment. Okay, I'll just go over here to the next city, which is what the police officer did in George Floyd's case, he worked in three different cities, before coming to Minneapolis, Minnesota, because he wasn't in the database, they could look and say, Oh, hold on, you got a problem here. It’s not in there. Just like and the last thing I’ll say, right. If you're a lawyer, and you commit some crime, you will lose your license to practice law throughout the United States. You're not leaving California and going over to Michigan talking about Oh, yeah, I got in trouble with the California bar. Oh, you know, they just disbarred me now I’m going to come over to Michigan. And that's not happening. Teachers, right, clinicians and doctors, if you even hemoglobin person, people who collect blood in the in the hospital, if they do something wrong, they go into database, nurses, they know and so you can't move from city to city and try to kill people or try to harm people. They say, hold on here. You were in Connecticut, you had some problems, you come here to Florida. So this right is not happening for law enforcement, who we know, have a track record. Again, I will say the people who are up there on Capitol on January 6 for the insurgents, right. There are many of them. And they are in the police department now, as live active law enforcement people who commit crimes, yet they will not go into misconduct database, not this one. Because all that collected in is use of force, and racial profiling. So I say all of this to say to people, we oppose this week, Bill. And we wanted a stronger bill. And we felt that this House of Representatives should have done this. And many people who don't know how policy goes, it's the house. And if they don't do it in the house, it gets watered down in the Senate, specifically in this Senate, we have two black men, Democrats who would support this, we don't have a lot of people on the Senate side, who are gonna sit here and say make this better. And so it's going to get watered down. And we didn't want that. And I also don't see this passing in the Senate. And so we are going to have to keep fighting and continue to fight to get the 90% bill that the 90% of black folks went out and voted for Joe Biden, and Kamala Harris and this Congress to do.

Qudsiya Naqui:

That makes a lot of sense. And it's helpful to kind of tease apart the bill a little bit. So I'm glad that you put on your policy hat and did that for us. And the other thing I observed in the database, they have requirements for being in the database that does not mention any kind of violence against disabled people as a qualifying event that would land you in the database. So that's another sort of problem.

Dara Baldwin:

There's no language in the bill around disabilities we try. I tried to get certain things in there. And you're right. Even assault, right is not collected for the database.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Yeah, exactly. So that leaves me to ask, Where do we go from here? You know, what are your next steps?

Dara Baldwin:

Sure. So I'm always hopeful, there's always hope. And I'm always hopeful, and I want you all to be hopeful. So what I will say is, this is a holistic way of doing this work. So several things that can happen. We need to continue the marches and the protests, they need to continue to move forward. They've kind of died down and slowed down and I know I'm talking from a place of privilege. So forgive me, and I did my marching many years ago, but I feel that the protest needs to continue and specifically To save lives we need to promote, I have my Black Disabled Lives t shirt on remote that by the T shirt promote to hashtag get it out there. So there are many ways to do this work, right, the marches and the protests, then if you don't feel comfortable doing that, social media, I am a social media person. I'm only on Twitter and Instagram. I'm not on everything. But if you are on those things, use the black disabled Lives Matter hashtag every day, tweet about something every single day center, Instagram every single day, same black disabled Lives Matter. Start reading and learning about the black disabled people who have been killed by the police like Elijah McLean, right, like Daniel Prude, and start telling their stories. Because you know, not everyone knows all of those stories, and getting them out there every day and tagging President Biden in your tweet and tagging vice president Kamala Harris in your tweet and saying we want better for our people. Also tag your house and Senate members, your house of representatives and your Senate members. And you can find those by going to US Senate and House of Representatives website and find your member they go either by alphabet of their last name, or you could put your state in and they will tell you who your members are, you should know your members. And we have to keep doing and tell them. Yes, you pass the JPA for House members, but you need to make it better tell the senate this bill needs to be stronger. And it needs to include disabled folks. And these include black disable people centering in this bill. And then you know, have conversations that you have every day with people when you're talking to people people like to talk about things that are safe. These are issues and concerns that are not safe. And we are in times that are not safe. We're in a pandemic, we're still in a pandemic, still wear your masks, double up on your mask. Don't listen to these people, and start talking about things that make people uncomfortable. I'm so used to it, it doesn't even faze me anymore. But start talking about the importance of black indigenous people of color who are disabled, and how important their lives are, and that you are killing them. And everything we do in this country through public health, the public health model is racist and ablest which is why we're having the problems with COVID that we're having and even getting a vaccine out there and connect that to law enforcement killing these people killing our people killing black people, you're talking if you're white, you're saying these people right but letting people know that safety for you is not the same thing for black, indigenous people of color who are also disabled, letting people know you need to start listening to activists like Keri gray, like Justice Shorter, like TL Lewis, like Vilissa Thompson, like Keith Jones, like Leroy Moore, you need to start listening to people like Allison Donald's, and Anita Cameron and Ashley White. These are people who are out here pushing in many different ways to change black disabled lives, and we need to support them. And we need to let people know that we are going to knock down these barriers, and that we are going to have hope. And then there's also people of color like Lydia Brown, right, andMia Mingus. And Alice long. Dustin from Pittsburgh, who's now in Connecticut, we need to push forward, these wonderful activists who are doing this work, and letting people know that we are not going to go anywhere. By the grace of God, this pandemic will be over. But this fight for black disabled lives will not. And that's unfortunate. We're gonna have to keep fighting.

Qudsiya Naqui

Thank you, Dara. Those are really inspiring words. And I'm grateful that you shared some really concrete things that people can do. And also shout out to Justice Shorter former friend of the pod, former guest on the show.

Dara Baldwin:

My sorority sister, yes yes.

Qudsiya Naqui:

A beautiful human being. So yeah. So thank you so much, Dara. This has been such a beautiful conversation. And I am so grateful for both you describe the challenges and also the hope and I think that both exist, and we need to keep moving towards that North Star. So thank you so much.

Dara Baldwin:

Thank you for having me. And thank you for your work, peace and blessings, everyone.

[jazzy piano chords, bass strumming with smooth R&B]

Qudsiya Naqui:

Thank you for listening to this season of Down to the Struts. I wanted to take a moment to give special thanks to a number of people who have made this podcast possible. First, I wanted to express my incredible gratitude for the amazing team that brings the podcast to life. Ilana Nevins for her excellent audio production, Avery Anapol for her skillful management of our social media platforms, Adriane Kong for her meticulous transcripts. And Anna Wu, who was with us from the beginning launched the website and started the audio production. I am so fortunate to work with a group of such incredibly talented, amazing women. Thank you so much. I wanted to also thank Eiffel Gangsta Beats, for the amazing music that you hear at the beginning and end of every episode, you can find them at @EiffelGangstaBeats on Instagram, check them out, they're fantastic. I'd also like to thank each and every guest that has joined me on the podcast, you have given of your time, your intellect, your creativity, and your wisdom, I cannot thank you enough. I have walked away from every conversation feeling more informed. And having learned so much thank you to each and every one of my guests. And thanks to each and every one of you, who has taken the time to listen to this podcast. We would love to hear from you. If you have thoughts, feedback, questions or ideas, please email us at Downtothestruts@gmail.com. And finally, I wanted to thank my friends and family for all of your support on this incredible journey. I could not have done this without you and I would not be here without you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And while you're all waiting with bated breath for Season 3, you should make sure to subscribe rate and review the podcast on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you love to listen, you can find us on our website at www dot Down to the struts.com. If you want to catch up on past episodes between seasons, you can also give us a follow on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Looking forward to season three so we can get back down to it. Until then be well be safe. And hopefully I'll be seeing you closer to the other side of this pandemic.