

ACLU Of Wisconsin: Appoints Dr. Melinda Brennan as executive director after national search

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MILWAUKEE —The ACLU of Wisconsin today announced that Dr. Melinda Brennan has been chosen to lead the organization as its executive director after an extensive, nationwide search.

Dr. Brennan, born and raised in Wisconsin, called the opportunity “a dream come true.”

Dr. Brennan earned her bachelor’s degree in women’s studies and her master’s degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She went on to earn her doctorate in gender studies at Indiana University, where she wrote a dissertation on the nexus between hate acts, nationalism, white supremacy, and American Islamophobia.

Before joining the ACLU, Dr. Brennan served as a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Board Consultant for the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition Project, training and educating board members about disability, race, and class issues related to mobility justice. She also has expertise in the DEI space, with years of experience as a consultant and community advocate.

“Many of the issues I am devoted to reveal the way difference is weaponized and cast as problematic, rather than honoring difference, being accountable to justice, and supporting communities held at the margins,” Dr. Brennan said. “My commitment to this work is informed by scholarship and action, much of which was done by women of color, queer people of color, and other multiply marginalized leaders who speak truth to power.”

Dr. Brennan was previously a trusted leader in the UW System, operating as Co-chair of the Women's and Gender Studies Consortium, served as a member of the Rapid Response Team for Hate and Bias Incidents, and worked at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as the assistant chair of Women's and Gender Studies.

"In my career and community service, I prioritize working collaboratively, foregrounding how our different backgrounds and needs bring strength and clarity to our work, with a deep fire for the pursuit of justice. I am delighted to bring this focus to serve the ACLU, Wisconsin communities, and the battles ahead — justice, activation, care, and quality of life," Dr. Brennan said.

Shaadie Ali, who served as interim director, will stay with the organization until March as the ACLU of Wisconsin's interim deputy executive director.

"We are so excited to welcome Melinda to lead our organizations," said William Sulton, board president of the ACLU of Wisconsin. "Her extensive leadership experience, passion for the equity of all people, and commitment to the protection of civil rights and civil liberties will serve her well in this role. I do not doubt the affiliate will reach even greater heights under her leadership."