

## **Deborah Peterson Small Bio**

Deborah Peterson Small is a lawyer and social justice activist, Her political education and social activism began early. Soon after graduating high school she went to work for a national youth voter registration organisation and organised the first state-wide voter registration campaign on the campuses of the State University of New York. She holds Law and Public Policy degrees from Harvard University.

After several years as a corporate attorney working in the private sector, she found her way back to her true passion – public interest work. She served as Chief of Staff to a member of the New York State Assembly representing one of the poorest neighborhoods in New York City and immersed herself in the issues that had initially propelled her towards a legal career. A few years later she became Legislative Director for the New York Civil Liberties Union, in that capacity she lobbied the state legislature on behalf of the poor, disenfranchised and incarcerated. It was during this period that she became an ardent advocate for drug policy reform as she became increasingly aware of the ways that the “war on drugs” impacted most of the issues she addressed as a lobbyist. Because of her commitment to promoting drug policy reform, she left the NYCLU to become Director of Public Policy & Community Outreach for the Drug Policy Alliance.

Deborah is a recognized leader in the US drug policy reform movement and has been a major catalyst in engaging communities of colour and their leaders to address the negative impacts of the war on drugs in their communities.

Deborah left DPA to found Break the Chains: Communities of Color and the War on Drugs, a public policy research and advocacy organization committed to addressing the disproportionate impact of punitive drug policies on poor communities of colour. The mission of Break the Chains is to build the movement in communities of colour in support of drug policy reform with the goal of replacing our failed drug polices with alternatives based in science, compassion, public health and human rights.