



Strengthening Public Defenders.
Transforming Public Defense.

Ilham Askia

Ilham Askia is executive director of Gideon's Promise, a non-profit 501(c)(3) public defender advocacy organization that provides training, leadership development and mentorship to improve the quality of legal representation for the clients and communities they serve.

In this capacity, Askia has oversight of the organization's daily operations, annual budget, strategic plan, personnel, fundraising, board development, and regulatory compliance. She is also responsible for maintaining the infrastructure that supports the programs and services that distinguish the organization as the only public defender advocacy organization that supports public defenders at every career stage. The organization's five major programs are executed in partnership and for the benefit of 40 public defender offices and 25 law schools across 27 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In five years, Askia moved the organization from an annual revenue of \$800,000 to \$2 million. She has also raised \$3.8 million in government and foundation grants and \$789,000 in corporate and philanthropic sponsorship to date.

Askia has been featured by media outlets that include *Essence*, *Black Enterprise*, *Atlanta Magazine*, *Share International Magazine*, Atlanta's NPR, and the legal podcast *Service Roads: Conversations on the Law and Social Justice*. She regularly speaks at law schools, community organizations and national criminal justice conferences to discuss the critical role of public defenders. Notably, Askia has been a speaker at Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, SMART on Crime Innovations Conference, National Association of Public Defense Conference, Florida A&M Law School, Social Justice Community Foundations, Federal Defenders Conference, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund Capital Training Conference, Public Defender Service for District of Columbia, Mercer Law Review Conference, and Southern Christian Leadership Conference Summit, to name a few.

She also speaks on the impact the criminal justice system has on families. Prior to her leadership of Gideon's Promise, Askia was an educator in Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, GA. During her tenure, her students were routine examples of over-policing in marginalized communities, the school-to-prison pipeline as well as the negative outcomes derived from legal representation provided by poorly trained public defenders with overwhelming caseloads. The latter being a lesson she learned earlier in life when both her father and brother were sentenced to prison.

Askia and Gideon's Promise has won numerous awards including, but not limited to, Stephen B. Bright Public Defender Award, Emory University's Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award, Southern Center for Human Rights' Gideon's Promise Award, The National Association of Sentencing Advocates and Mitigation Specialists Sentencing Project Award and the American College of Trial Lawyers Emil Gumpert Award. The organization also served as the inspiration for the award-winning HBO documentary *Gideon's Army*. She is also a member of Leadership Atlanta and the Society of International Business Fellows.

Askia earned a Master's of Early Childhood and Elementary Education from Trinity University in Washington D.C. and a Bachelor of Science degree in City & Regional Planning from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

She resides in Atlanta, Georgia with husband Jonathan and children Aaliyah and Lucas.