

# The 2022 Albany 40 Under 40

Rising stars shining bright in the state Capitol.



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It's been said that youth is wasted on the young, but anyone paying attention to the inner workings of Albany knows that's not the case. While the state Capitol has historically been the kind of the place that puts a premium on seniority and experience, it has in recent years seen the rise of a new generation of elected officials in their 20s and 30s who aren't waiting decades before getting a seat at the table. And while big-name politicians headline press conferences and get their names in the news, they wouldn't get anything done without their teams of smart, ambitious young staffers. Youthful experts, advocates and activists are a driving force in an array of important policy areas and professions in the state capital as well, from cannabis, casinos to construction and commerce to combating COVID-19 and implementing value-based care. City & State's Albany 40 Under 40 recognizes the best and brightest of the bunch – all of them younger than 40 years old.

*Profiles by Kay Dervishi, Natasha Ishak & Jasmine Sheena*

## **Na'ilah Amaru**

*Director of Policy and Campaigns, Human Services Council*



*Na'ilah Amaru / Marcus Gilmore*

**Na'ilah Amaru's passion for policy was shaped soon after graduating high school, when she joined the army.**

**"I do not ever regret joining the military. But quite frankly, it's also a very racist and sexist institution," she says, adding that "the experiences that I went through in the military completely changed my career trajectory because I understood, in a very painful way, what it meant to not have any power."**

**Since then, Amaru has sought to "create and expand spaces to build power" through public policy. That has taken her to many different roles throughout her career. A Georgia native, she worked as a community organizer. On Capitol Hill, she was a legislative aide to the late Rep. John Lewis. Amaru has also been active in numerous electoral campaigns and served as executive director of the New York City Council's Black, Latino and Asian Caucus.**

**She started her latest venture at the Human Services Council just last year, spearheading the organization’s advocacy on behalf of human services nonprofits and their workers. In 2022, Amaru helped secure cost-of-living increases on the state level for human services employees for the first time in 12 years.**

**Having that diverse range of experience has helped Amaru understand the importance of making sure policy discussions include the voices of the people who would be most impacted by those decisions. As she puts it, “I’m constantly asking the question: Who is missing? How do we get them to be part of this conversation?”**

**– Kay Dervishi**

