

Trans Heartbeat, Episode 9, Inside Lavender Rights Project with Jaelynn Scott

Chapter 1: Introduction with Michelle Matlock

[mellow Americana guitar]



MICHELLE MATLOCK: Hello everyone and welcome back to Trans Heartbeat. I'm your host, Michelle Matlock, and I encourage the use of all pronouns. Today's episode is one I've been looking forward to for a long time, because I'm sitting down with Jaelynn Scott, the Executive Director of Lavender Rights Project. And listen, I've been trying to get in the same room with Jaelynn for a minute. Because the vision, the brilliance and the leadership coming out of Lavender Rights Project is exactly what our community needs right now.

Lavender Rights Project is a Black trans feminist organization based in Seattle with impact across Washington and beyond, grounded in the belief that liberation work isn't one lane. Yes, the law can be a tool, but the mission is bigger: Organizing with the most impacted to move systems. In this conversation, Jaelynn breaks down what that looks like on the ground. From housing justice and community care, to decriminalization and public safety to policy work and defending trans lives in real time. And she also names something I really want you to hear— Trans people are not a debate. We are human beings living full lives, full of love, grief, joy, bills, family, work, all of it.

So settle in. This is Trans Heartbeat.



Chapter 2: Jaelynn Scott joins

MICHELLE: Hi, Jaelynn. Welcome to Trans Heartbeat.

JAELYNN SCOTT: Thank you, Michelle. Good to be with you.

MICHELLE: You too. If we could just start, you can give us your full name, your position, who you are, what you're doing— Who you working for?

JAELYNN: Yeah, I am Jaelynn Scott. I use she/her pronouns. I am the Executive Director of Lavender Rights Project.

MICHELLE: Amazing. So excited to have you on Trans Heartbeat. Like I was saying before, when we were off camera, I feel like I've been chasing to get a meeting with you—

JAELYNN: Hopefully not chasing too hard. Now come on.

MICHELLE: Nah (laughs) I know that you're super busy. So like, I get it. Not chasing too hard, just like desiring to like be in the same room, even if it's just a Zoom room or whatever. As I've been working with TRACTION for the past couple of years and then becoming a part of their board and just... just wanted to connect, connect with your vision, your mission, what's happening. So for folks that may just be discovering Lavender Rights Project for the first time, can you share what the organization's mission is and what the work looks like day to day on the ground in our region?

Chapter 3: Lavender Rights Project

JAELYNN: Yes, so, Lavender Rights Project is a Black trans feminist organization based here in Seattle, statewide, but also, we say impacting the nation, because we do do work outside of the state, but very focused in on Washington. As an organization, we started as a LGBTQ legal services organization with Morgan Mentzer, and she really was seeing that there was a lack of competency in the legal services world for LGBTQ needs. And to her credit and the credit of those who worked here for years, they actually built out, through trainings and know your rights clinics and competency training with attorneys, they built out a good network of people who are doing the work well. And that allowed the organization to pivot.

And right around 2019, really wanting to lean in and focus in, less on, as an emphasis on the law necessarily, but organizing that the law itself is a tool, right, one tool in our tool belt to seek liberation for those who are at the center of the mission and always had been, which is folks of color.

And so over the years we've grown, we've changed, our mission has moved and shifted under this principle of really focusing in on community organizing with the most impacted through a Black transgender feminist, lens. At the moment, we don't see ourselves necessarily just a LGBTQ org or trans org. We have leaned into the fact that trans folk have been at the lead, and LGBTQ people at the lead of civil rights movements across the country and liberation across the country.

And I know a lot of our organizations like TRACTION and Gender Justice League, the Lavender Rights Project, Queer Power Alliance really often fit into that box. But if you look at their work, many of us are doing criminal justice and public safety work. Many of us are doing housing and housing justice work. And the truth of the matter is that that work is good for everyone in Washington.

And so we're leaning into that and saying, 'You know what? We are providing a particular lens, but our focus right now is housing justice.' So we have a housing facility that houses 32, mostly community of color members who are queer and trans, but not exclusive to them. But really serving them in the way that we know best is through the lens that we operate.

We also have a movement lawyering community organizing that we put under the heading of decriminalization, really trying to get ourselves and our people from under the boot of the law. So making sure that we're free from police violence, incarceration, that we have the tools necessary to advocate for ourselves, and that we're actually pushing the government— city, local, state government to change

laws, policies, procedures that are harmfully impacting, even if that means we have to pursue lawsuits.

And then finally, we're doing the larger sort of policy work in those realms often, within looking at public safety, looking at housing justice on the state legislative level. But also I would say this is where our work happens both in the state and out. We're still touching bases on the trans justice work and defending democracy and defending trans rights and LGBTQ rights. And that means pushing back on a number of the attacks that we're facing in our community right now.

MICHELLE: My goodness, that is just amazing really. And I love just the idea that the work, no matter the lens, extends and helps everyone, the whole society.

JAELYNN: Of course it does, right?

MICHELLE: Yeah.

JAELYNN: Yeah.

MICHELLE: I was at the Creating Change conference last month and that just was so clear with all of the different advocates and activists that were there. And so, thank you. Thank you for the work that you are doing. It's amazing. So your role— First of all, how long have you been in this role?

JAELYNN: I always get the number wrong. I think it's going on seven years. I believe...

MICHELLE: Okay. Good.

JAELYNN: Don't write that down, but I always forget what the number is, but it's going on seven years—

[crosstalk]

here at the organization and before then, I was doing human resources and operations, and my main training has been in ministry. And in fact, it's why I moved to Washington is family ministry. The way I interpreted that was really, a sort of faith development, a development of families and children into the work of social justice within the church. And that's the lens, that's how I wrote curriculum, that's how I taught, that's how I led people.

Chapter 4: Jaelynn's Career Journey

MICHELLE: That is absolutely amazing. What a journey. So just a little bit about that journey. With that lens, is that sort of what drew you to this position or were you pulled into this position? Tell me a little bit about your journey of getting to where you are now.

JAELYNN: Yeah, I enjoyed family ministry and, I enjoyed the pulpit, I enjoyed working with families, but really seeing how they struggled, right? How they struggled

to both take care of their diverse families. Oftentimes the families I worked with had LGBTQ, sometimes trans youth and kids. They also had some serious economic issues that they were often facing, how to pay for childcare, how to actually care for their family in our economy. And it was, for a long time, providing— you know, working for people in their faith and how to advocate for themselves is one thing, but I wanted to do something a little more direct to figure out how I could directly try to move systems or try to organize community to move systems in a more direct way. I do think— oftentimes I reflect on, have I left the ministry? And to some extent, my identities have changed, things have changed. I don't practice in the same... I'm a Buddhist minister, I'm not practicing in the same traditions I used to. But this work feels like ministry in many ways, right? You know, I think—

MICHELLE: Oh yeah.

JAELYNN: I think I care for employees and those who organize with us in the same way. I think I lead with trying to bring hope and faith in people and our ability to move through this. It does, in many ways still feel like the same type of work, though the people and the context is slightly different.

MICHELLE: Yeah, I could totally see that for sure. So right now trans and gender expansive communities are facing so many layered challenges. From your perspective, what feels like the most urgent or pressing issue impacting our community today?

Chapter 5: Being attacked on all sides

JAELYNN: Yeah, this is a very, very interesting, conversation. I think it really depends on which of trans communities in particular we're thinking about. When we sit with our Southern, Black LGBTQ and Black trans colleagues and community, as we did in Atlanta this past year, we often hold a Black Trans Policy Convening, it helps gives us perspective. But their concerns are, of course the attacks that we're all facing.

But what they often remind us is that in Texas, in Houston, in Mississippi, where I'm from, in Tennessee and etcetera, that they never had the full access that has been offered to other trans people across the country in different states. And they remind us that the pressing issue for them at the time, depending on their context, has been public safety and our folks facing incarceration and being housed in these facilities and identities that don't match them that often result in sexual violence and sometimes even death, that they are concerned about police interactions, they are concerned about community violence, they are concerned about access to healthcare, they are concerned about access to food and employment and jobs. And it makes it really challenging because that fight has been ongoing for our communities, I would say, in the South and also here in queer and trans communities of color.

And there's so much work to do, but then all of a sudden we get these federal attacks and these culture wars that are coming at us. So it feels to many of us we're being attacked on all sides, the attacks that have always been there for us as communities of color. And now we're facing this threat from the government. It is

hard to make a decision on which one is the most urgent and what to fight those conditions. It is very challenging. Do you fight to make sure that folks can get a job and something to eat, or do you fight to make sure that we're not in prison because of our identity and using the bathroom? It's a terrible choice.

MICHELLE: Right. Right.

[contemplative lo-fi music]



Chapter 6: How can we be in service to Lavender Rights Project?

MICHELLE: How can we be in service to Lavender Rights Project? What can we literally do? Like, how can we support you? How can we stand next to you, behind you, in front of you? How can we show up for the mission and the missions that you all have?

JAELYNN: Yeah, I mean, there's some practical things and I'll list those first. That is, give money, right? Follow social media and particularly pay attention, right? And in social media, we often will have a— calls to action. There is— right now we're in legislative session that ends very soon. It's a short session. but we have a legislative tracker online. What that means is we're following bills. So take the time, you know 15, 20 minutes out of your day, even once a week, to look at the legislative tracker and then make a decision on which one you want to take action on and call your legislator and say, 'Hey, I read this on Lavender Rights Project's tracker. I agree with them.' 'Vote no on this.' 'Vote yes on this.' 'I have a problem with this.' It's a very easy thing to do, or write an email.

Secondarily, we'll often highlight issues and there might be community activations, depending on what the ask is from us, like, 'please show up to this.' Show up! And oftentimes that'll take— if you can show up for 30 minutes, just keep track of it and then be there and be present because the numbers do matter.

I think right now, back to the previous question about which one is most important, I'm thinking about the initiatives that we're facing from the multi-millionaire and the people from outside of Washington State who are trying to legislate in Washington through ballot initiatives and tell Washingtonians what they should believe and do. And we're facing these initiatives that are direct attacks on our community and contrary to the values that Washington, as a whole, maybe not everyone individually, and maybe not every city and region, but as a whole, that we have named over and over again that we value, which is the inclusivity and diversity of our state and the inclusion of trans people in our society.

One is quite complicated, but essentially it makes it really difficult for youth to have some privacy in school, to disclose many things about abuse, identity, a number of things without the fear of parents receiving access to that. We have pretty generous access to parents, to students' records as is, but this is really eliminating any trusted adult where they can go and say something in private, too, without it being disclosed. It also has a provision that provides an opt-out curriculum, which could harm Black

histories, community of color histories, LGBTQ histories, in our curriculum in the state.

The second one is the most challenging one, which is the sports ban. And this one is a difficult one because it comes before our ability to sit down with Washingtonians and say, 'Hey... here's what the facts are about performance.' 'Here are the facts about our hormones— what it means to lose muscle mass and endurance and etcetera.' 'Here are the facts of how many people are actually playing sports.' And here's this bill that is really bullying less than 10 trans youth in the state.

MICHELLE: Right.

JAELYNN: It's bullying from the State House and from the government. It's inexcusable. And we haven't had time to sit down with our folks and say, 'Okay, this is who we are as human beings.'

The conversations I have with other trans people on a day-to-day have nothing to do with identity. They have to do with us suddenly being able to age because we're aging longer now, that violence is slowly reducing, right? And our health outcomes are better. Now it means, what does it mean to be in retirement? What does it mean that I have to take care of my parent who's ailing? What does it mean to mourn after the death of a friend and loved one and family? How do I actually pay for my healthcare bills? How do I actually buy food when the cost of groceries are so high right now? How do I afford to stay in Seattle when I can't afford my rent? These are the conversations that we're having.

We're just human beings having normal lives that are full of grief, mourning, love, and celebration. And it takes time for people to understand that, right? This is what we need. This was the ask. Because Lavender Rights Project is focused on this other work, we need people to have this conversation with their neighbors, to go to the No Hate in Washington State campaign, look at it, see how they can help. We need them to be the frontline of this fight so that we can do our real work. At the moment, that's our greatest need, at the moment.

MICHELLE: So powerful, so poignant, so important, just you talking about like the conversations that you're having with other trans folks now and what that's becoming. It gave me a little lift, you know, just to hear you say that, because that's real, even amongst all the challenges, you know, that the conversation is evolving. We want to just continue to be in line and take heed to what you just shared with us for sure. That's part of our goal going into 2026 is... How can we be in line with the BIPOC led organizations and be in step and support? Fully support, because, you know, I believe it's the same thing— if we're in support of what you all are doing, we're in support of the whole thing.

JAELYNN: That's right.

MICHELLE: And we have to get behind, under, in front and lift the most marginalized folks. That's what I believe. That's where we have to be. So anyway, I appreciate you laying that all out for us. You're beautiful, you're brilliant.

JAELYNN: Thank you.

MICHELLE: The work that you're doing is so important.

JAELYNN: As are you. Thank you, thank you.

[Michelle chuckles]

MICHELLE: And I just— I appreciate you taking the time to be on our program. And, I look forward to just, being in support, watching how you grow, watching what you do and supporting that in any way that I can, so... With that, I think that takes us to the end of our program for today.

JAELYNN: I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you, and any time— and this is how we show up for each other, is we stay in conversation. That's it. MICHELLE: That's right. Thank you.

Chapter 7: Michelle's Outro

MICHELLE: Thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Trans Heartbeat. I'm deeply grateful to Jaelynn Scott and the Lavender Rights Project for the work they do every single day, building safety, dignity, and liberation through housing justice, decriminalization, and community-led organizing rooted in Black trans feminism. If you want to support this work, follow Lavender Rights Project, share their calls to action, and show up however you can with your voice, your presence, and yes, your resources. Thank you for listening, thank you for caring, and thank you for being a part of this growing circle of connection. Until next time, let's keep showing up for each other.

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