ASHLEY NELLIS, Ph.D.

Curriculum Vitae

Assistant Professor, American University

School of Public Affairs

Department of Justice, Law & Criminology

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EDUCATION

2007	Ph.D., Justice, Law & Criminology, School of Public Affairs, American University, Washington, DC Dissertation Title: "How Does the American Public Cope with Terrorism-Related Information?"
2000	M.S., Justice, Law & Criminology, School of Public Affairs, American University, Washington, DC
1997	B.A., Criminal Justice, Saint Edward's University, Austin, TX

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor	American University, Department of Justice, Law & Criminology, School of Public Affairs, Washington, DC (2025-current)
Co-Director of Research	The Sentencing Project, Washington, D.C. (2023-2025)
Senior Research Analyst	The Sentencing Project, Washington, D.C. (2008-2022)
Senior Research Analyst	Justice Research and Statistics Association, Washington, D.C. (2005-2008)

SERVICE POSITIONS

2026	Board Member, *Nation Outside*
2022-2025	Advisory Board Member, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, Arnold Ventures-funded 3-year research grant to study current and former population of juveniles serving life without parole (LWOP) sentences nationwide.
2022-2025	Advisory Board Member, National Institute of Justice 4-year research grant to examine racial and ethnic disparity in the Arizona criminal justice system. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Justice System: A Study of Existing Evidence and Public Policy Implications 15PNIJ-22-GG-01426-NIJB

2025-2026 Editorial Board Member, American Society of Criminology's Division on Sentencing and Corrections (DSC) *Handbook Series* Volume 11.

2025-2026 Editorial Board Member, *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice (2025-2026)*

Ongoing Peer Reviewer, *Journal of Crime and Delinquency, Punishment and Society, The Journal of Criminal Justice, Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*

COURSES TAUGHT

- Introduction to Criminology
- Corrections in America
- Juvenile Justice
- Critical Issues in Justice
- Justice & Public Policy

PUBLICATIONS

Books

2018 Mauer, M. & Nellis, A. *The Meaning of Life: The Case for Abolishing Life Sentences.* The New Press.

2015 Nellis, A. *A Return to Justice: Rethinking Our Approach to Juveniles in the System*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Book Chapters

In press "Transferring Juveniles to Adult Court" In D. Springer & W. Church (Eds.) Juvenile Justice Sourcebook. Oxford University Press. *Peer reviewed.*

In press "The scope and scale of life imprisonment in the United States." In (K. Richman, S. Kokkalera, & R. Bierschbach (Eds.) Parole in Perspective: New Directions in Research and Practice. Routledge. *Peer reviewed.*

2023 Nellis, A. "Life Imprisonment as a Hallmark of Mass Incarceration." In A. Conyers, V. Lynn, & M. Leigey (Eds.) Mass Incarceration in the 21st Century: Realities and Reflections. Routledge.

2023 Nellis, A. "Mass Incarceration's Lifetime Guarantee." In K. Budd, D. Lane, G. Muschert, & J. Smith (Eds.) Beyond Bars: A Path Forward from 50 Years of Mass Incarceration. Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.5590542

2018 Nellis, A. "Punished for Being Punished: Collateral Consequences of a Drug Conviction." In B. Huebner & N. Frost (Eds.) Handbook on the Consequences of Sentencing and Punishment Decisions. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429466380 *Peer reviewed*

2017 Nellis, A. The Worsening Problem of Racial Disparity in Juvenile Justice Systems. In Parsons Pollard, N., Ed. Disproportionate Minority Contact: Current Issues and Policies, 2nd Ed. Carolina Academic Press. https://cap-press.com/pdf/9781531002633.pdf

2016 Mauer, M. & Nellis, A. The Impact of Life Imprisonment on Prospects for Criminal Justice Reform in the U.S. In Dirk Van Zyl Smit and Catherine Appleton (Eds.) Life Imprisonment and Human Rights. Bloomsbury Publishing. https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/life-imprisonment-and-human-rights-9781509928835/

2011 Nellis, A. & King, R. "No Exit: The Expanding Use of Life Sentences in America." In Blind Goddess: A Reader on Race and Justice. In A. Papachristou (Ed.) pp. 159-170. The New Press.

2009 Nellis, A. (2009). "Fear, Media, and Support for Anti-Terrorism Policies." In Kevin Borgeson and Robin Valeri, (Eds.) Domestic Terrorism in America. Jones and Bartlett Press.

2009 Nellis, A., Greene, J., Allard, P., Krupat, T., & Frazer, A. "Criminal Justice: Race and Criminal Justice." In T. Johnson (Ed.), The Compact for Racial Justice: An Agenda for Fairness and Unity. Applied Research Center.

Under Review

Nellis, A., Grunberg, R., & Garrett, B. — The Path to LWOP: Mandatory and Discretionary Sentencing, Race, and Life without Parole in United States Prisons

Working Papers

Nellis, A. — From Alternative to Fixture: Life without Parole in American Punishment and Scholarship

Nellis, A. & Peck, J. — Demographic and Geographic Drivers of Juvenile Waiver in Iowa 2013-2023

Nellis, A., Grunberg, R., & Garrett, B. — Testing Racial Threat in Texas Counties Over a 20-Year Period: The Role of LWOP

Nellis, A., Grunberg, R., & Garrett, B. — Examining Life and Death Sentences in Texas Counties: Does Poverty Matter?

Datasets

2026 Nellis, A., Grunberg, R., Melton, J., & Garrett, B. (2026). Life Sentences Dashboard. Inter-Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]. Ann Arbor. https://doi.org/10.3886/E247935V1

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

2026 Enduring Time: A First Look at Emerging Adults Serving Life Without Parole *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice.*

2023 Vannier, M. & Nellis, A. (2023). The Severity of Life Imprisonment through the Lens of Old Age. *Punishment and Society 25*(5), 1271-1292.

2023 Nellis, A. [Review of Death by Prison: The Emergence of Life without Parole and Perpetual Confinement. By C. Seeds] *Law and Society Review, 57*(1), 124-125.

2012 Nellis, A. & Savage, J. (2012). Does Watching the News Affect Fear of Terrorism? The Importance of Media Exposure on Terrorism Fear. *Crime and Delinquency 58*(5), 748-768.

2011 May, D., Herbert, J., Cline, K., & Nellis, A. Predictors of Fear and Risk of Terrorism in a Rural State. *International Journal of Rural Criminology 1*(1), 1-22.

2010 Nellis, A. & Richardson, B. Getting Beyond Failure: Promising Strategies to Reduce DMC. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice 8*(3), 266-276.

2009 Nellis, A. Gender Differences in Fear of Terrorism. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice 25*(3), 322-340.

Law Review Articles

2021 Nellis, A. Using Data to Achieve Justice Reform. *Federal Sentencing Reporter*, 33(4), 265-268.

2013 Nellis, A. (2013). Tinkering with Life: A Look at the Inappropriateness of Life without Parole as an Alternative to the Death Penalty. *University of Miami Law Review* 67(2), 439-458.

2010 Nellis, A. Throwing Away the Key: The Expansion of Life without Parole Sentences in the United States. *Federal Sentencing Reporter 23*(1), 27-32.

Policy Reports

2025 Nellis, A. & Barry, C.*A Matter of Life: The Scope and Impact of Life and Long-Term Imprisonment in the United States.* The Sentencing Project. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.7083198

2024 Nellis, A. *Still Cruel and Unusual: Extreme Sentences for Youth and Emerging Adults.* The Sentencing Project.

2023 Komar, L. & Nellis, A. *The First Step Act: Ending Mass Incarceration in Federal Prisons*. The Sentencing Project.

2023 Nellis, A. Left to Die: Young Adults Sentenced to Life without Parole. The Sentencing Project.

2022 Nellis, A. Nothing but Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life without Parole. The Sentencing Project. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.7105618

2021 Nellis, A. *In the Extreme: Women Serving Life without Parole and Death Sentences in the United States.* The Sentencing Project. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.7129698

2021 Nellis, A. A New Lease on Life. The Sentencing Project.

2021 Nellis, A. No End in Sight: America's Enduring Reliance on Life Imprisonment. The Sentencing Project.

2017 Nellis, A. Still Life: America's Increasing Use of Life and Long-Term Sentences. The Sentencing Project.

2016 Nellis, A. *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons.* The Sentencing Project. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.7466300

2014 Schab, E. Annino, P. & Nellis, A.M., Miller Resentencing Project Report: Florida Juveniles Sentenced to Mandatory Life without Parole (Florida State University College of Law, Public Law Research Paper No. 662. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2374429

2013 Nellis, A. Life Goes On: The Historic Rise in Life Sentences in America. The Sentencing Project.

2012 Nellis, A. The Lives of Juvenile Lifers: Findings from a National Survey. The Sentencing Project.

2011 Nellis, A. Collateral Consequences of a Juvenile Conviction. The Champion. National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

2009 Nellis, A. & King, R. S. (2009). No Exit: The Expanding Use of Life Sentences in America. The Sentencing Project.

2009 Cohen, M., Feyerherm, W., Leiber, M., Nellis, A. M., Snyder, H., & Soler, M. Disproportionate Minority Contact Technical Assistance Manual. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Expert Testimony and Expert Reports

2025 Expert report provided in support of commutation of Nicholas DeMatteo, provided to Innocence Project of Pennsylvania on July 2, 2025.

2025 Expert report and in-person testimony provided at resentencing hearing in the matter of resentencing Daniel Randall following the *Mattis* ruling (2024) from LWOP to 30 years. *Commonwealth v. Daniel Randall*, Bristol Superior Court [2025].

2024 Expert report and in-person testimony provided in *United States of America v. Calvin Smith*, U.S. Court of Appeals, Case Number 24-3098. [2024].

2024 Expert report and in-person testimony provided in *State of Maryland v. Deon Campbell*, No. C-03-CR-22-001477 (Circuit Court for Baltimore County, Maryland). [2024].

2024 Expert report and in-person testimony provided in *State of Alabama v. Gregory Wynn*, No. CC-98-934 (Circuit Court of Calhoun County, Alabama). [2024].

2022 Expert report and in-person testimony provided in *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Robert Pacheco*, Nos. 7673CR54352, 7673CR54353, 7673CR54354 (Bristol Superior Court). [2022].

2021 Expert report provided in *State of Wisconsin v. Jason Randhawa*, Appellate Case No. 2021AP1818-CR (Wisconsin Court of Appeals). [2021].

2018 Expert report provided in *State v. Purcell*, No. 1 CA-CR-13-0614 PRPC, at 1 [Ariz. App. Feb. 16, 2018].

2018 Expert report provided in *Jacob Davis v. Tennessee Department of Correction et al*. M2017-02301-COA-R3-CV [2018].

2017 Expert report provided in *State of Arizona v. Felipe Petrone Cabanas* No. 1 CA-CR 15-06600 PRPC [2017].

Amicus Support

2026 *Dwayne Edward Thomas v. Kevin Stitt et al.* On Appeal from the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma Case No. 5:20-cv-00944-D. [Brief of Forty Developmental Science Scholars and Nonprofits]

2024 *State of New Jersey v. Sean Jones* Docket No. A-3911-21T5, July 11, 2024. [Scholars Brief].

2024 *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Derek Lee*, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, 180 WAL 2023 (Pa Feb. 16, 2024). [Brief of Criminologists and Law Professors].

2023 *People v. Tony Hardin*, Supreme Court of the State of California, Case No. S277487, December 2023). [Brief of Criminologists].

2019 *In Re William M. Palmer*, Amicus Brief of The Sentencing Project in Support of Petitioner. [2019].

2018 *Ahmad Bright v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, Brief of The Sentencing Project as Amicus Curiae in Support of Petitioner. [2018].

2018 Expert report provided in *State v. Purcell,* No. 1 CA-CR-13-0614 PRPC, at 1 [Ariz. App. Feb. 16, 2018].

2018 Expert report provided in *Jacob Davis v. Tennessee Department of Correction et al.* M2017-02301-COA-R3-CV [2018].

2017 Expert report provided in *State of Arizona v. Felipe Petrone Cabanas* No. 1 CA-CR 15-06600 PRPC [2017].

Editorials

2023 Nellis, A. It's Time to End Perpetual Punishment for Young Adults. CommonWealth.

2021 Nellis, A. Virginia's Move to End Capital Punishment Has a Major Flaw. Washington Post.

2019 Nellis, A. Pennsylvania is Poised for Much-Needed Criminal Justice Reform, But Can We Abolish Life without Parole? Philadelphia Inquirer.

2017 Nellis, A. South Carolina Legislature Must Reform Life-Without-Parole Sentences. Charleston Post Courier.

2017 Nellis, A. Life Sentences, Long Sentences Imposed on Youth Need 2nd Look. Juvenile Justice Information Exchange.

2017 Nellis, A. & Henneke, K. Texas Should Stop Spending Billions to Incarcerate So Many People for Life. The Texas Tribune.

2017 Nellis, A. Next Step for Louisiana Prison Reform is to Review Life Sentences: Opinion. The Times Picayune.

2017 Nellis, A. & Mauer, M. (May 9, 2017). Life without Redemption. U.S. News and World Report.

2017 Nellis, A. & Mauer, M. (January 24, 2017). What Can We Learn from the Amazing Drop in Juvenile Incarceration? The Marshall Project.

Presentations

2026 Fetsco, D., Nellis, A., & Rivera, T. Redemption as Public Safety: Reforming Sentencing Through Evidence and Restorative Justice. Academy of Criminal Justice Science Keynote Speakers. Philadelphia.

2025 Nellis, A. & Kleinstuber, R. County-Level Drivers of Life Sentences. American Society of Criminology. Philadelphia.

2024 Nellis, A. "Lifer Census, 2024: Preliminary Figures of People Serving Life with Parole, Life without Parole, and Virtual Life Sentences in America." American Society of Criminology. San Francisco.

2023 Nellis, A. “Emerging Adults Sent to Die in Prison.” American Society of Criminology. Atlanta.

2023 Nellis, A. “Counting Down: Paths to a 20-Year Sentence.” National Association of Sentencing Commissions, Reno, Nevada.

2023 Nellis, A. “Sentencing Young Adults to Die in Prison.” Law and Society Annual Conference. Puerto Rico, June 3, 2023.

2019 Nellis, A. “Presidential Thematic Session: Life Imprisonment as a Driver of Mass Incarceration.” American Society of Criminology, San Francisco, November 15, 2019.

2018 Nellis, A. “Life at the Local Level: A First Look at County-Level LWOP Sentences.” American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA, November 20, 2018.

2017 Nellis, A. “Lesser-Known Lifers: Juveniles Serving Life with the Possibility of Parole.” American Society of Criminology, Philadelphia, PA, November 21, 2017.

2016 Nellis, A. “Still Life: The Continued Expansion of Life Sentences in the U.S.” American Society of Criminology, New Orleans, LA, November 19, 2016.

2015 Nellis, A. “Life without Parole: U.S. and the World,” American Society of Criminology, Washington, DC, November 18, 2015.

2015 Mauer, M. and Nellis, A. “The Impact of Life Imprisonment on Prospects for Criminal Justice Reform,” Life Sentences Worldwide International Conference, Onati, Spain, April 2015.