

Gene Downing (he/him) is a Washington, D.C. native and a returning citizen who served 21 years in prison after being arrested at the age 19. After his release, due to the Second Look Amendment Act, he was selected as the 2022 Congressman John Lewis Fellow. Gene is currently the Gelana Yorktown Fellow at the Council for Court Excellence, where he leads an initiative called the Second Chance Hiring Alliance. He is also a Community Outreach Specialist for Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop. Gene also serves as a Poet Ambassador and as the Co-Chair of Thrive Under 25, a transformative coalition in the District that uses advocacy, legislation, and public education to end the racist, damaging, and punitive responses of DC's adult criminal legal system toward people who came into contact with the system when they were under age 25. Gene is also a very talented spoken word artist and actor, and he uses his talent to raise awareness to the social injustices that plagues our country and to connect to the youth. Gene is also a public/motivational speaker, and since his release, he has spoken at national conferences, colleges such as Howard, Georgetown, American University and Yale. Gene is passionate about giving back to his community, advocating for criminal justice reform and changing the narrative for what being formerly incarcerated looks like.