



Leon Ford

Co-Founder and Director of External Affairs, The Hear Foundation

A native of Pittsburgh, Leon Ford is a celebrated author, social entrepreneur, impact investor, international speaker, and changemaker dedicated to driving positive change in his community and beyond. As a respected activist and mental health ambassador, Ford passionately addresses disparities by focusing on holistic wellness. His inspiring approach emphasizes the importance of resilience, transforming personal challenges into purpose, and creating a lasting societal impact.

In 2012, Leon was tragically shot five times by a police officer during a traffic stop, leaving him physically paralyzed. Nevertheless, he has continued to positively impact his community, working with police officers on cultural competency and legislators on drafting policies to modify the use of force laws.

In 2022, Leon joined forces with former Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Chief Scott Schubert to co-found The Hear Foundation. This trailblazing nonprofit seeks to bridge the gap between residents, community leaders, and law enforcement in order to cultivate a safe and thriving community for all. In 2024, Leon became the organization's director of external affairs, giving him the opportunity to focus full-time on fostering safety through police and community collaboration in Pittsburgh.

In recognition of its innovative approach, the foundation received the prestigious McNulty Catalyst Prize in 2023. Ford has also joined 150+ other leaders as a Founding Partner of Starts With Us – a movement to end the culture wars by fostering curiosity, compassion, and courage as daily habits.

Leon was recently named to Gov. Josh Shapiro's Pennsylvania Citizen Law Enforcement Advisory and Review (CLEAR) Commission to bring state law enforcement experts and criminal justice reform advocates together to support public safety and ensure accountability for state law enforcement agencies.

In 2023, he completed a year-long national and international book tour to launch “An Unspeakable Hope: Brutality, Forgiveness, and Building a Better Future for My Son,” and in late 2023 was named recipient of the prestigious Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award.

As an influential figure in social justice and mental health, Ford inspires others through speaking engagements, mentorship, and fostering open dialogue. Through his work, he cultivates leaders, organizers, and social entrepreneurs, ensuring his vision for a compassionate and just society endures for future generations.

Ford's accomplishments include executive producing the Cannes Film Festival award-winning documentary Leon (2019) and Breaking Bread: A Conversation on Race in America (2021), which won a Shorty Award; President Obama's Volunteer Service Award (2017); The Root 100 (2018); Pittsburgh's 40 Under 40 (2019); Forbes 30 Under 30 (2023); and National Urban League Community Service Award (2023).

As a member of The Aspen Institute's Inaugural Civil Society Fellowship, Ford is devoted to nurturing the next generation of leaders and activists. He serves as an entrepreneur in residence for Bronze Investments, is co-founder of the Leon Ford Legacy Fund, and holds board positions with multiple organizations.

In addition to his activism, Ford has authored valuable resources for overcoming adversity and promoting well-being, including his memoir, An Unspeakable Hope (May 2023); Untold: Testimony and Guide to Overcoming Adversity (2017); and The Leon Self-Care Handbook: From Surviving to Thriving, offering practical tools for healing and personal growth.