



## **Human Services Committee Chairs: State Innovations and Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families**

*Renaissance Nashville Hotel*

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### **Speaker Biographies**

**Representative Raumesh Akbari** (D-Tenn.) has represented House District 91 (Memphis) since the fall of 2013. Since that time, she has been an effective and vocal member of the House Criminal Justice Committee and Subcommittee, the House Education Administration and Planning Committee, and the House Ethics Committee and Subcommittee. Since the beginning of the current 110th General Assembly, she has served as the House Democratic Floor Leader. A graduate of Washington University and the Saint Louis University School of Law, Representative Akbari is currently chair of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators, treasurer of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL), a state director within Women in Government; and financial secretary of N.O.B.E.L., the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women and alum of NCSL's Early Learning Fellows Program.

**Dr. Elizabeth Alves** is the assistant commissioner for the office of early learning and literacy at the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) where she leads, manages and coordinates departments responsible for quality improvements in statewide early childhood and literacy programs serving children ages 0-8 and their families. This birth to grade three continuum of work is a key component of the TDOE's strategic plan under the Early Foundations and Literacy strategy and is aimed at ensuring that all children enter kindergarten ready to grow and thrive and read proficiently by the end of third grade. Prior to her role with the TDOE, Elizabeth served as the assistant superintendent/chief academic officer for the Knox County Schools in Knoxville, Tenn. She began her career with the Miami-Dade County Public Schools where she worked as a teacher, principal and district administrator. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English from Florida International University, a master's degree in secondary English education from the University of Miami and a doctorate in educational administration and supervision from Florida International University.

**Monica Barczak** joined CAP Tulsa in 2003. She currently serves as the director of Strategic Partnerships, leading the agency's collective work with other organizations to improve the systems supporting child and family success from birth through third grade. In her previous role as director of Innovation Lab, Barczak helped drive the development of CAP Tulsa's two-generation program called *CareerAdvance®*. In 2015-2016 she had a one-year appointment with the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to promote the use of two-generation approaches at the local, state, and federal levels. Before joining CAP, Barczak worked for the city of Tulsa and taught political science for the University of California and the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. She has a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and a master's and Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Davis.

**Darneshia Bell** began her career as the Arkansas Pilot Court Team community coordinator in 2009. Since then she has worked collaboratively with Judge Joyce Williams Warren and an ever-expanding team of community stakeholders to build a strong Safe Babies Court Team in Little Rock. Among her many accomplishments is the development of an innovative model of supporting family time for children in foster care and their parents called

Guided Interaction for Family Time (GIFT). She majored in early childhood education and special education at the University of Central Arkansas. She's worked in child care settings serving preschoolers and school age children. Her experience working with school age children convinced her that bad attitudes about school were already well developed by second grade. She subsequently got the opportunity to develop a curriculum for a four-year-old classroom that focused on establishing an environment appropriate for the physical, social and emotional development of her students. For eight years, she worked at Arkansas Children's Hospital, helping parents address the financial costs of their child's medical care.

**Clarence H. Carter** is the director of the Office of Family Assistance at HHS' Administration for Children and Families, coming from the Institute for the Improvement of the Human Condition, which he founded. At that organization, he worked with state and local safety net agencies to meet the emergency needs of socially and economically vulnerable citizens. Carter served as the director of the Arizona Department of Economic Security, in addition to other state, federal and local human services management positions. During his service in the Bush Administration, he managed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and served as the director of the Office of Community Services. As Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services, his program was instrumental in growing the capacity of its citizens. In his first five years, more than 25,000 public assistance recipients obtained gainful employment, earning in excess of \$200 million. During his tenure, Virginia's public assistance rolls were reduced by more than half, from an all-time high of 74,000 families to a 30-year low of 31,000.

**Rosa Maria Castañeda** is a senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation with a cross-cutting portfolio to advance opportunity for low income families and children. She leads the foundation's two-generation strategies initiative, with investments in program pilots, evidence-building and policy and system reform. She provides strategic guidance to a four-state, 19-college initiative to deliver integrated services to improve retention and graduation for low-income students in community colleges. And she leads the foundation's portfolio to advance opportunity for immigrants and refugees, and promote economic opportunity in rural America. Before joining Casey, she was a manager at Pew Charitable Trusts in the state fiscal and economic policy division, and led research on child and family policy and immigration policy and immigrant well-being at The Urban Institute.

**Shannon Christian** serves as the director of the Office of Child Care at HHS' Administration for Children and Families. She is a former associate commissioner of the former Child Care Bureau at ACF, where she advanced President Bush's Good Start, Grow Smart early childhood initiative, and shaped the office's research agenda to better support state policy and spending decisions. Committed to effective prevention strategies, Christian oversaw the launch of Illinois' home visiting program and was an active board member of Be Strong Families, a Chicago-based national nonprofit. Earlier in her career, Christian was part of former Wisconsin governor (and HHS secretary) Tommy Thompson's welfare reform team, serving as head of the planning section in the state Health & Social Services Department's Office of Policy and Budget, and as senior advisor to the Secretary of Workforce Development. Christian has an MPP from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, a certificate in nonprofit management from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Business, and an undergraduate degree in economics and international relations from California State University, Chico.

**Michael Cull** is deputy commissioner overseeing the Office of Child Health for Tennessee's Department of Children's Services. Prior to this appointment, he was an assistant professor in Health System Management at Vanderbilt University and the director of Education and Dissemination in the Office of Quality and Patient Safety for Vanderbilt University Medical Center. In addition to clinical practice as a faculty member in child psychiatry, he also previously served as executive director of the Community Mental Health Center, Administrative director of the Department of Psychiatry Patient Care Center, and director of the Center of Excellence for Children in State Custody. He has a strong clinical background working with vulnerable populations and extensive experience with organizational evaluation and improvement in healthcare and human services.

**Dr. Linda Davidson Sagor, MD, MPH,** is a professor of clinical pediatrics and the founder and director of the Foster Children Evaluation Services (FACES) Clinic at University of Massachusetts Medical School and American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care Executive Committee Member. In 2015 she was appointed the first full-time medical director for the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF)

where she is charged with facilitating compliance with department policy requiring every child have a medical screening within seven days of foster care placement and a comprehensive exam within 30 days. She is also responsible for maintaining relationships with hospital-based pediatric child abuse specialists; developing and implementing a policy for monitoring psychotropic medications prescribed to foster children and completing the Department's efforts to establish a panel of doctors to advise DCF on medically complex cases. She is a professor of clinical pediatrics at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and was a pediatric consultant with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (prior to becoming medical director). She is also an American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care Executive Committee Member.

**Susan N. Dreyfus** is president and CEO of the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, a strategic action network of social sector organizations that has national reach in thousands of communities across America. Prior to joining the Alliance in 2012, Dreyfus was secretary for the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. She served as a member of the Governor's Executive Cabinet, and had responsibility for Medicaid, aging and long-term care, child welfare, behavioral health care, and other human services. Before her work in Washington state, Dreyfus served as senior vice president and COO for the Alliance. Dreyfus is chair of Leadership 18, a coalition of CEOs from the largest and most respected nonprofit organizations in America, and serves on the governing boards of the American Public Human Services Association, Generations United, the National Human Services Assembly, and the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers. Dreyfus was named to *The NonProfit Times'* Power and Influence Top 50 lists in 2015 and 2017.

**Dale Farran** is a professor in the departments of teaching and learning, and psychology and human development in Peabody College at Vanderbilt University; since 2009, she is also the senior associate director of the Peabody Research Institute. Professor Farran has been involved in research and intervention for high-risk children and youth for all of her professional career. She has conducted research at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center in Chapel Hill, N.C. and the Kamehameha Schools Early Education Project in Hawaii. Professor Farran is the editor of two books both dealing with risk and poverty, the author of more than 80 journal articles and book chapters and a regular presenter at national conferences. Her recent research emphasis is on evaluating the effectiveness of alternative preschool curricula for preparing children from low-income families to transition successfully to school. Currently she is directing an evaluation of the Tools of the Mind curriculum and co-directing an evaluation of the State of Tennessee's Prekindergarten program.

**Rob Geen** is the director of policy reform and advocacy at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In this capacity, he is responsible for designing and implementing the Foundation's advocacy strategy related to child welfare, juvenile justice and evidence-based practice. Prior to joining Casey, Geen was the vice president for public policy and director of the child welfare program at Child Trends, a non-partisan policy research organization in Washington D.C. For two years, he also was a visiting fellow with the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means. Earlier in his career, Geen was director of the Child Welfare Research Program at the Urban Institute and an evaluator for the U.S. Government Accountability Office. During his career, he has analyzed policies and evaluated programs in various areas of social services for children, youth and families, but has focused primarily on child welfare issues, including child abuse and neglect investigation, family preservation and family support services, foster care, independent-living programs for foster youth, adoption and the impact of welfare reform on child welfare systems.

**Senator A.J. Griffin** (D-Okla.) is a life-long Oklahoman who grew up on a family farm in Adair where three generations made their homes. Griffin gained business management experience working in the restaurant industry. She eventually entered education, sharing her professional knowledge by becoming a teacher and hospitality careers instructor, helping others acquire the skills and education needed to launch new careers. Those experiences merged when she began a new career managing non-profit organizations dedicated to improving the lives of Oklahoma children and families. Senator Griffin and her husband are former foster parents and have been intimately involved in the child welfare system. Griffin has served as chair for the First Christian Church Board, the Guthrie Chamber of Commerce and the Oklahoma Child Abuse Training and Coordination Council. She's been a member of the Oklahoma Substance Service Alliance, the Oklahoma Association of Youth Services, Oklahoma Sports Museum Board of Directors, Mercy Health Systems Advisory Board for Logan County, and Logan County United Way Board of Directors. She is an appointee to the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women. Griffin

is an Elder at the First Christian Church in Guthrie. First elected to the State Senate District 20 seat in 2012, Griffin previously served as vice chair of the Senate Republican Caucus and now serves as chair of the Rural Caucus. She also serves as chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. She has been appointed to Co-Chair the OK Conference for the National Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL). She has worked to write and pass legislation to address Oklahoma's fastest growing substance abuse issue—prescription drug addiction. She also authored as legislation to better protect victims of child abuse.

**Elizabeth “Liz” Huntley** is an accomplished litigation attorney, and dedicated child advocate, author and lecturer. She practices law at Lightfoot, Franklin & White, LLC in Birmingham, Alabama. In addition to handling large complex corporate litigation matters, Huntley is regularly appointed by judges to represent the legal interests of children in civil cases. She is also frequently asked by governmental agencies to consult on issues that impact children including the development of legislation that protects children. Huntley is a leader in the movement to expand access to high quality prekindergarten to all four-year-olds in Alabama and has received several state and national awards for her work for children. She was recently named to the “This is Alabama” 2017 class of “Women Who Shape the State.” Huntley regularly speaks to groups throughout the country, often referencing her own journey as described in her published memoir titled *More Than a Bird*. She earned her law degree from the University of Alabama School of Law where she now serves on the Law School Foundation Board of Directors and received her undergraduate degree from Auburn University, where she is now a member of the Auburn University Board of Trustees.

**Matt Leslie** is the director of Housing Development for Veterans and provides statewide coordination of homeless and housing services for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and the Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) program. Leslie helps communities collaboratively develop and enhance services for veterans through partnership and support from Federal and State entities. Leslie is also co-chairmen of the Governor's Homeless Coordinating Council Veterans Subcommittee and serves on the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Center Advisory Group. Before joining DVS, Leslie worked at the Virginia Department of Housing and Development (DHCD) as both a homeless and special needs program administrator and a housing policy analyst. Leslie brings extensive policy, program design, and data knowledge of behavioral health, homeless, and housing services, as well as an affinity for data visualization and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Prior to his work in housing and homelessness, Leslie worked in direct service for over five years at an outdoor therapeutic school for at-risk youth. Originally from Virginia Beach, Leslie is a graduate of James Madison University where he earned a bachelor's degree in geography in 1998. Leslie earned his masters in social work degree, with a concentration in policy and planning, in 2006 from Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Sara Marques** is the director of Strategic Initiatives at the Center for Youth Wellness. She is responsible for overseeing CYW's policy and advocacy efforts as well as new initiatives that support CYW's strategic priorities, including the National Pediatric Practice Community on ACEs. She brings over 15 years of public health programmatic and research experience in child and adolescent health and development. She holds a master in public health (MPH) from George Washington University and doctor of public health (DrPH) from the University of California, Berkeley. Prior to CYW, Sara was a research scientist at the Public Health Institute's Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development where her work focused on adolescent development, sexual health and the use of research to inform policy and program development. She has experience working in direct service, program management, policy, and research in various settings and with diverse populations, both in the U.S. and abroad. Sara is a native of the Washington, D.C. area and lives in Portland, Ore.

**Dr. Dawn Matera Bassett**, MSW, LCSW, PhD, is currently an associate professor at the Metropolitan State University of Denver. Matera Bassett obtained her MSW and PhD in Social Work from the University of Denver. During the past 30 years Matera Bassett has worked with adults, children, adolescents, transition-aged youth and their families who have complex behavioral health issues, in residential, day treatment, community-based, and sub-acute mental health settings. She has been a member of several federal, state, and private grant projects focusing on workforce development, vicarious trauma, children of incarcerated parents, and recruitment of foster parents with diverse identities. Matera Bassett has been involved in grant projects from the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Daniels Fund where she has developed curricula and trained therapists, case workers, teachers, foster parents, and paraprofessionals on how to effectively work with children and adolescents and

their families. She has drafted policy white papers and legislation that have been adopted by the state of Colorado. The foci of her interest are on projects which support clinical staff development; address the impact of vicarious trauma on the workforce; build personal, familial and community assets; and explore the efficacy of interventions. Matera Bassett is currently chairperson of the Colorado State Child Welfare Worker Resiliency Taskforce; principal investigator, HSRA Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) for Professionals Project; principal investigator, HSRA BHWET for Paraprofessionals Project; co-principal investigator, THRIVE vicarious trauma training and consultation initiative with Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS); and, Leadership Council, Kempe Center, Child Welfare Training System, Subaward.

**Meg Nipson** is a research manager at Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University. Prior to joining CEPR, she worked at Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, where she focused on low-income housing policy and rental affordability. She also carried out spatial analyses of foreclosures and participated in research on consumer bankruptcy. As a research associate at Harvard's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, she worked on a large telemarketing study and managed data acquisition for several projects on state and city fiscal accountability. Her prior experience was as a group manager and project administrator for the Harvard Institute for International Development, where she oversaw collaborative research and development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. She has an M.S. in finance from Brandeis University and a B.A. in mathematics from Harvard University.

**Mary Sprague** joined the Office of Child Care in 2012 as a program specialist in the policy division and has been involved in the development of the new Child Care and Development Fund regulations. She previously worked at an after-school child care program and on a number of public health issues in St. Louis County, Mo. She received her Masters of Social Work in 2011 from Washington University in St. Louis and an undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology from the University of Virginia.

**Jennifer Thornton** manages the Pew Charitable Trusts' efforts examining the ways in which states use data to inform decision-making. Before joining Pew in 2014, Thornton was the chief administrative officer of WorkForce Central in Tacoma, Washington, where she oversaw regional workforce planning, program implementation, policy, and performance. Thornton previously served as the senior research analyst for the Washington State House of Representatives, where her portfolio included technology, economic development, housing, higher education, and workforce issues. She was also a deputy assistant commissioner of the Washington State Employment Security Department and program administrator for the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. She holds a bachelor's degree in public policy analysis from Cornell University and a master's in urban planning and policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Jabeen Yusuf** is the director of marketing and communications at Center for Youth Wellness (CYW). With over 15 years of experience in leading brand strategy, consumer insights and research, brand campaigns and communications planning, Yusuf has helped organizations build powerful narratives that touch their customers' hearts and minds. The strategies she has developed have resulted in building awareness, shifting perceptions, impacting behaviors and creating new market opportunities. Her experience spans product categories including consumer packaged goods, technology, entertainment, finance, healthcare and retail industry. Her strategic insights have shaped campaigns for Procter & Gamble, Intel, Intuit, Google, The Walt Disney Company, General Mills, The History Channel and Partnership for a Drug Free America among others. Yusuf received her undergraduate degree in Marketing Communications at FIT State University of New York. In 2012, She completed a fellowship at the California College of Arts Leading by Design program which focuses on catalyzing business innovation and social transformation through design-thinking infused collaborative action, disruptive technology, creative leadership and business strategy.