



PARTICIPANT DIRECTED ADVOCATES OF GEORGIA

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**TUESDAY
AUGUST
25**

LEADING CHANGE: The Participant Directed Advocacy Forum

SPEAKER & PANELISTS BIOS



DBHDD Commissioner Kevin Tanner

Kevin Tanner is the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, which has an operating budget of \$1.6 billion and 4,500 employees statewide. Commissioner Tanner has more than 35 years in public service, including serving as county manager of Forsyth County and four terms as a State Representative for District 9.

Commissioner Tanner spent his undergrad at North Georgia College and State University and holds a Master of Public Administration from Columbus State University. Commissioner Tanner's wife Stacie is a public school kindergarten teacher, and they are the proud parents of three daughters: Kaitlyn, Abbie, and Chloe. He serves as a Deacon at Bethel Baptist Church where his family has attended for seven generations.



DBHDD Director Ron Wakefield

Ronald Wakefield began working with the intellectual and developmental disability community in 1982 for a program administered by Temple University in Pennsylvania.

He began as a direct care worker and was quickly promoted to supervisor of direct care services. Ron advanced in his career over the next two decades serving individuals diagnosed with developmental disabilities before moving to Georgia in 2005. He worked as a case expeditor in DBHDD's Region 3, then as a regional service administrator in Region 1 before being promoted to director of field operations. In February 2017, Ron was asked to serve as director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities.

Ron holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Temple University and many certifications for developmental disability services.



Marian Frattarola-Saulino

Working in the Home and Community Based Services system for over 30 years, Marian's priority has always been to build coalitions where people with lived experiences choose and control the support they need, to live the lives they want.

Her background is in community organizing, social administration and planning. Her career includes experiences as a Housekeeper, Direct Support Professional, Residential Service Director, Supports Broker, and Executive Director. She currently serves as the CEO of Values Into Action, organizations she co-founded in 2005 with her Paul, her husband and the organizations' CFO. She helped to start and currently supports the Collaborative for Citizen Directed Supports-New Jersey, and the Alliance for Citizen Directed Supports, disability led organizations focused on enhancing sustainable self-directed systems.

She has been invited to participate in numerous initiatives that seek to change services through innovation guided and led by people with disabilities in pursuit of better lives. These include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Self Determination Project, Developmental Disabilities Councils' grants that have focused on conflict free housing resources as well as advancing self-direction, and collaborations with UCEDDs, national and international organizations.



Caitlin Kendrick

Caitlin Kendrick is a resident of her hometown in Monroe City, Missouri, and a graduate of Northwest Missouri State University, where she earned a degree in Agricultural Business. She has been employed with Learning Opportunities Quality Works (LOQW) for the past four years and serves in several roles, including Support Broker, Benefits Specialist, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program Manager, Summer VR Work Program Lead, and member of the LOQW Technology Team.

Through her work, Caitlin is passionate about helping individuals achieve their goals, increasing access to opportunities, and supporting innovative programs that promote independence and community inclusion. She enjoys building meaningful connections with others and is committed to lifelong learning through both professional and personal experiences.

Outside of work, Caitlin recently became a homeowner and shares her home with her three cats, Joey, Chandler, and Janice. She enjoys spending time with family and especially loves being "Aunt KK" to her niece, Thea, and nephew, Madden. During the summer, she can often be found coaching Thea's softball team and supporting youth in her community.



Jonathan Smith, MD

Jonathan Smith, MD, MBA, FACP, FAAP is an Associate Professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at Mercer University School of Medicine. Dr. Smith is an accomplished physician leader dedicated to advancing academic medicine, graduate medical education, and healthcare innovation. He serves as Director of the Mercer Center for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Care and is the Designated Institutional Official at Piedmont Macon Medical Center, where he also directs the Internal Medicine Residency Clinic.

Dr. Smith earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from Mercer University School of Medicine and completed his residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, where he served as Chief Resident in Pediatrics. He further expanded his expertise in organizational leadership and healthcare management by earning a Master of Business Administration from Auburn University. His interests include graduate medical education, quality improvement, care delivery for individuals with developmental disabilities, and the intersection of medicine and systems leadership, and organizational transformation.



Julie Eshleman, PhD

Julie Eshleman, PhD, MEd, BCBA, is a sociologist who studies disability, artificial intelligence, and assistive technology. She is a researcher at Georgia State University's Center for Leadership in Disability and a GaLEND fellow, where her current work involves building an AI tool to help families navigate Georgia's Medicaid waiver system. She recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Georgia Tech's Center for Advanced Communications Policy examining how AI policy decisions shape who can actually access AI-powered assistive technology.

Julie spent nearly two decades as a special education teacher and Board Certified Behavior Analyst before earning her PhD in Sociology and Social Policy from the University of Stirling. She also serves as an assistive technology researcher for Leonard Cheshire in the UK and as a trustee of the Lightyear Foundation, a charity making STEM accessible to disabled young people.



Janelle Adams

Janelle Adams is the Director of Government Relations at the Georgia Dental Association. She manages advocacy for the 3,500 member-dentists involved in organized dentistry. Janelle has been in legislative advocacy for 10 years and has been mostly focused on the healthcare space. Janelle has a Master's in State and Local Government Administration and a Bachelor's in Political Science with a focus in State and Local Government.



GA State Senator Sally Harrell

Senator Sally Harrell represents Georgia's 40th Senate District and has served in the Georgia Senate since 2019. She previously served in the Georgia House of Representatives from 1999 to 2005. A social worker by profession, Senator Harrell earned her Master of Social Work from the University of Georgia and her bachelor's degree from Georgia State University. Throughout her legislative career, she has been an advocate for children and families, health and human services, mental health, and disability services. She currently serves on several Senate committees, including Children and Families, Health and Human Services, Higher Education, and State Institutions and Property.



GA State Representative Katie Dempsey

Representative Katie Dempsey has represented Georgia House District 13, which includes Rome and portions of Floyd County, since 2007. She serves as Chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Resources, where she plays an important role in developing state budgets for health and human services. She also serves on the Georgia Behavioral Health Coordinating Council and several House committees, including Appropriations, Public and Community Health, Higher Education, Rules, Transportation, and the Special Committee on Healthcare. Throughout her legislative career, Representative Dempsey has been a strong advocate for children and families, behavioral health, healthcare, and services for Georgians with disabilities.



GA State Representative Mary Margaret Olive

Representative Mary Margaret Oliver represents Georgia House District 84 in DeKalb County and has served for more than 25 years in the Georgia General Assembly, including service in both the House and Senate. An attorney and graduate of Vanderbilt University and Emory University School of Law, she has been a longtime advocate for children and families, behavioral health, healthcare, and Georgia's most vulnerable citizens. She currently serves on several House committees, including Appropriations–Human Resources, Public & Community Health, Judiciary, Judiciary Juvenile, and Governmental Affairs. She also served on the Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission and played a key role in the passage of Georgia's landmark Mental Health Parity Act.



GA State Representative Scott Hilton

Representative Scott Hilton represents Georgia House District 48, which includes portions of Fulton and Gwinnett counties. A financial consultant and longtime community leader, he currently serves as Chairman of the House Information & Audits Committee and also serves on the Education, Public & Community Health, Ways & Means, Creative Arts & Entertainment, Special Rules, and State Properties committees. Representative Hilton has been particularly active on issues involving education, children and families, and opportunities for Georgians with disabilities.



Rita Young

Executive Director Participant Directed Advocates of Georgia

For 20 years, Rita has held various roles, including corporate trainer, public policy director, and coalition builder within nonprofit organizations dedicated to helping individuals with developmental disabilities. She managed the Partners in Policymaking program in Georgia, worked as a grassroots organizer for the Unlock the Waiting List Campaign, and led training and awareness programs for law enforcement, judges, and attorneys on the specific needs of people with developmental disabilities. Rita, a parent of two autistic adult sons, has also worked as a freelance project consultant for the past decade, collaborating with a diverse range of clients, such as state agencies, nonprofits, and individuals. She is based in North Fulton. Her sons have profoundly shaped who she is both personally and professionally.