

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid Topic Leads, 1 of 2

Lisa Perrone, Director of Constituent Services for U.S. Representative John Larson, 1st District, CT.

Lisa worked as a Legislative Assistant at the Connecticut State Capitol in the later 1990's. She joined John Larson's 1998 Campaign and has worked for him since. She currently serves as the Director for Constituent Services, specializing in Social Security and Medicare issues. She also serves on the CMA Advisory Board and has been recognized for *Outstanding Congressional Service* by the *Federal Executive Association of CT* (FEACT).



Maureen McIntyre, CEO, North Central Area Agency on Aging (NCAAA)

Ms. McIntyre has been with the North Central Area Agency on Aging in Hartford, CT since the year 2000 when she started as the part-time CHOICES (State Health Insurance Program) Regional Coordinator.

Now CEO of the Agency, Ms. McIntyre directs the allocation and expenditure of Older Americans Act funds by community service agencies, oversees the administration of NCAAA's direct service programs, and cultivates opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. Ms. McIntyre is a frequent guest speaker and panelist and often provides legislative testimony on behalf of the AgingCT, the statewide Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Ms. McIntyre received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with a Certificate in Gerontology from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and has earned her Master of Arts in Non-Profit Management and Philanthropy from BayPath College, Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

A life-long resident of Connecticut and exuberant empty-nester, Ms. McIntyre lives in Durham, CT with her husband Tim and rescue pup Josie.



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Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid Topic Leads, 2 of 2



Melanie Lambert, Senior Medicare Advocate, Center for Medicare Advocacy

Melanie Lambert has a background in public service, advocacy, and program management, and has a passion for promoting health equity. As Senior Medicare Advocate, Ms. Lambert contributes to the Center's education, training, outreach and advocacy work and provides direct support to Medicare beneficiaries who contact the Center for assistance. Prior to joining the Center, Ms. Lambert administered and coordinated a variety of grants and programs serving older adults and individuals with disabilities for the CT Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), including serving as the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) Director from 2019 to 2023. Before that, she administered community health programs and provided Aging and Disability Resource Center counseling to older adults and people with disabilities at the North Central Area Agency on Aging. Ms. Lambert holds a policy-focused Master of Social Work (MSW) degree from the University of Connecticut.

Terri Giardino, Medicare Advocate, Center for Medicare Advocacy

Terri Giardino has focused on elder care and people with disabilities since 1991. Working as a Social Worker in a nursing home early in her career, she saw a great need for people to have the opportunity to age in place, so founded and managed a non-medical home care agency with a partner in Baltimore, MD from 2001-2008 where she managed the Homemaker and Companion Department. She has also worked as a Care Transition Coach, helping older persons navigate the healthcare system upon discharge to home from the hospital and skilled nursing facilities to help reduce re-hospitalizations through education and advocacy. Ms. Giardino has also worked as a Resident Services Coordinator, advocating for, and coordinating care for, older people in their homes. From 2013-2023, Ms. Giardino worked as Care Manager for the CT Home Care Program, coordinating and managing care for persons aged 65 and older in their homes. Ms. Giardino graduated from Franklin Pierce College with a B.A. in Psychology.



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Veterans Benefits and Care Topic Lead



Sherri Vogt, Veterans Affairs Liaison, Hartford Health Care

Every day is veterans' day for Sherri Vogt, who has evolved a family legacy of military service into serving the military. A third-generation U.S. Army veteran who served during Desert Storm, Vogt is continuing her mission as the Hartford HealthCare veterans' liaison, connecting them with benefits, entitlements and services available, often ones they didn't even know existed.

Some of the ways Vogt helps veterans include:

Obtaining rightful medals, including the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal, those earned during service time, France's Knight of the Legion of Honor Medal and Korea's Ambassador of Peace Medal

Registering them at the National Museum of the U.S. Army, National Museum of the U.S. Navy, and/or WWII Registry of Remembrance

Assisting with end-of-life planning by providing information on burial options, free footstone and military honors; and obtaining burial allowances when eligible

Obtaining discharge papers (DD214)

Connecting to financial assistance when eligible

Discussing possible disability and "presumptive diseases" claims

"We know that when veterans are connected to the right resources, they have better overall health outcomes," said Carla Schnitzlein, DO, a veteran and provider with the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network. "The system can be challenging to navigate, especially if a veteran is struggling with depression, PTSD or other behavioral health concerns. It's so important to have a Battle Buddy like Sherri to make the process that much smoother and certainly less stressful."

Thank a veteran "I believe every day is Veterans Day," Vogt said. "We as an organization strive to honor, teach and embrace patients, families and veterans about benefits and connect to them to the appropriate resources."



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Education Topic Leads

SCHOOL + STATE FINANCE PROJECT

Erika Haynes, Director of Community Engagement

Erika Haynes brings to the School and State Finance Project decades of community leadership, parent engagement, and experience navigating the state's public school systems.

In her role as Director of Community Engagement, Erika meets with parents, teachers, students, community leaders, and interested residents across Connecticut to help them better understand the state's school finance system and how it impacts their communities. Erika regularly gives school finance presentations to community and school groups, and offers a number of workshops for those interested in learning more about education funding and how they can increase their civic participation. In addition to trekking around the state, Erika is responsible for developing and executing the School and State Finance Project's community engagement plan, and for nurturing and maintaining connections in communities.

Erika is a former member of the Windham Town Council and has served as both a community representative on the Windham School Readiness Council and as a board member for the Windham Parent Network.

As a proud mother of four, Erika has experienced the gamut of Connecticut's public school systems. In addition to homeschooling for a period of time, her children have attended local public schools and magnet schools. The journey of her children through school, and her unique experiences as both a community leader and parent, have fueled her passion for working with communities to support their students and schools.

Erika's commitment to education and community is demonstrated through her past work assisting parents and guardians through special education Planning and Placement Teams (PPTs) and her founding of the Windham chapter of Blessings in a Backpack, a program that sends food home to roughly 500 Windham-area children each weekend.

Erika holds a Master of Education degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Hartford and a Bachelor of General Studies degree from Eastern Connecticut State University. From 2000-2016, she also served as an adjunct professor at The Hartt School at the University of Hartford, where she led the nonprofit component for Performance Arts Management and Music Management majors.

Melanie Strout, Community Engagement Manager

With over a decade of experience in civic engagement, program management, and community development, Melanie Strout uses her knowledge and expertise to empower parents, build community knowledge, and help individuals make their voices heard on issues impacting students and schools.

As Community Engagement Manager, Melanie works in cities and towns across the state helping community members and organizations better understand Connecticut's school finance system, and equipping them with the tools, knowledge, and resources to take action. Along with building and maintaining relationships with parents, community leaders, and other education stakeholders, Melanie helps craft and execute the organization's community engagement strategies and works to develop partnerships across sectors aimed at eliminating education funding inequities.

Prior to joining the School and State Finance Project, Melanie held a number of leadership positions focused on education and engaging communities, including serving as the Director of Civic Engagement for the University of Bridgeport, where she managed the university's community partnerships, oversaw its community work study program, established a campus food pantry, and implemented initiatives to increase student engagement in civic education programs.

Melanie previously served as District Manager for Junior Achievement of Greater Fairfield County where she managed the daily operations of Junior Achievement programs that reached over 7,500 students annually across four school districts within the Greater Bridgeport and Naugatuck Valley areas. Prior to her time at Junior Achievement, Melanie served as Associate Director of Education & Outreach for International Partners in Mission (IPM) and worked as a Service-Learning Coordinator for AmeriCorps VISTA, where she supported 300 teachers and 1,500 students in developing projects, grant-making opportunities, and community partnerships for service-learning initiatives. Melanie's commitment to service and community is also exemplified in her time outside of work. She currently serves on the board of directors for both the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce and Junior Achievement of Greater Fairfield County. Previously, Melanie served on the boards of the Urban League of Southern Connecticut, Connecticut Young Professionals, the Connecticut Boys and Girls State Foundation, and FUEL (Valley Young Professionals). She also was a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Connecticut.

Melanie holds a Master in Public Administration degree from Fairfield University and a dual Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Anthropology from the University of Maine at Farmington.



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Women's Rights Topic Lead



Jillian Gilchrest, CT State Representative, 18th District

Jillian Gilchrest was elected to represent the 18th District of West Hartford in the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) in 2018. She serves as House Chair of the Human Services Committee and member of the Appropriations, Public Health, and Judiciary Committees.

Jillian Chairs MAPOC, the Trafficking in Persons Council, and the Endometriosis Working Group.

Prior to becoming a state representative, Jillian served as the Director of Health Professional Outreach for the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut, and Director of Policy & Communications for the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. She has extensive experience advocating for women's health and safety, in particular influencing public policy at the CGA.

Jillian was elected to the West Hartford Board of Education in 2013. She holds a Masters Degree in Social Work with a focus in Policy Practice from the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, where she has taught Political Advocacy.

Jillian currently teaches for the University of Saint Joseph and University of Hartford. Finally, she is a newly published author of, "Feminist Advocacy: Championing Gender and Social Justice."



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Immigrant Rights and Safety Topic Lead

HARRIS BEACH MURTHA
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Dana R. Bucin, Partner, Harris Beach Murtha, Attorneys at Law

Dana represents businesses and individual clients on a wide range of immigration matters, including green card applications, work visas, student visas, foreign investor visas, asylum, naturalization, religious work visas, as well as various other employment and family-based immigration matters.

As an immigration attorney with a business/corporate legal background, Dana's experience includes counseling foreign investors and entrepreneurs on setting up businesses in the United States or investing in existing U.S. ventures and obtaining a visa or green card based on such investment or entrepreneurship pursuant to the E-2, L-1 "new office," H-1B "entrepreneur" and EB-5 visa options.

Dana regularly provides multilingual legal representation in English, Spanish, French and Romanian. She also has a basic knowledge of Italian, German, Hungarian and Latin. She is often quoted by publications such as Bloomberg/BusinessWeek and the Hartford Business Journal on immigration law topics.

Dana is a member of the the firm's Inclusion and Diversity Council and assists with the firm's diversity and inclusion strategy and initiatives, ensuring that the firm's core principles of inclusiveness and diversity are reflected across its internal and external policies, work and practices.

In addition, Dana handles a variety of cases to assist immigrants and refugees with humanitarian legal needs. Examples of humanitarian cases she assisted with include:

- Representing Muslim refugee and her three children at JFK airport during the promulgation of the Muslim Ban in January 2017.
- Representing Cuban nationals with habeas corpus release from ICE custody in 2018 and 2019.
- Representing 70 Afghan nationals in applying for humanitarian parole after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Representing several immigrants from various countries in applying for asylum based on political, religious and ethnic persecution.
- Traveling to the Tijuana – San Diego border checkpoint to assist more than 2,000 Ukrainian refugees entering the United States on humanitarian parole.
- Setting up the "Connecticut for Ukraine" Matching Program which matches Ukrainian refugees to Connecticut sponsors.
- As Honorary Consul of Romania to Connecticut, running diplomatic programs that assisted the reunification of families separated at the border (Roma populations), coordinating assistance for vulnerable Romanian citizens in Connecticut and assisting in the transfer of Ukrainian refugees from Romania to Connecticut.
- Advocating for pro-immigrant bills at the state and federal level and offering testimony in support of state bills protecting the rights of Connecticut immigrants.



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LGBTQIA+ Rights and Safety Topic Leads

MJ Shannon, Connecticut State Representative, 117th District



MJ Shannon proudly serves as the State Representative for Connecticut's 117th Assembly District, which includes parts of Milford, Orange, and West Haven. Born and raised in Milford, MJ is a passionate environmentalist and an advocate for social justice and community development.

MJ graduated from Foran High School in Milford and Plymouth State University, where he earned a BA in Political Science and Government.

Before his election, MJ served as the Clerk of the General Law Committee at the General Assembly, gaining valuable insight into the legislative process. Now, as a state representative, he remains focused on empowering the community, building strong relationships, and addressing key issues such as education, affordability, and environmental protection.

Matthew Blinstrubas (he/him), Executive Director, Equality Connecticut



Matt comes to Equality Connecticut with 15 years of experience in LGBTQIA+ and HIV activism and nonprofit administration. After graduating from the University of Connecticut with a B.A. in English, Matt began his career as a Field Organizer for Love Makes a Family, working in communities around Connecticut to galvanize support for same-sex marriage. Simultaneously, Matt worked on the HIV Prevention team at the Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective. In 2009, Matt joined the Elton John AIDS Foundation where he spent 10 years working on a grant-making program addressing HIV treatment access, prevention, and the systemic causes of the HIV epidemic in the United States. In 2019, Matt set up a small consulting practice that supports social justice organizations in fundraising, strategic planning, and project management. He is really excited to work with fellow advisory board members and the community at large to build a lasting queer-led social justice organization in Connecticut. With deep roots in the Prospect/Greater Waterbury area, Matt is continually drawn to the beauty and vibrancy of Connecticut's cities and people. Matt is driven by a fierce commitment to advocacy, movement building, social development, and cultural production that build solidarity across social justice movements among queer people.

Matt can be reached at matt@eqct.org.

Melissa Combs, Founder, Out Accountability Project, CT



Melissa Combs is the founder of the Out Accountability Project, where we believe that every child has the right to an education in a safe, affirming learning environment, and is the co-chair of the LGBTQ+ Justice and Opportunity Network. For more than two decades, I have worked with nonprofit organizations, primarily in fundraising, communications, and public relations, and have recently reinvented myself as a lobbyist. I work at the state level to advance policies supporting LGBTQ+ youth in schools, ensuring equitable access to an education.



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