

NC Junior League, A Statewide Conversation on Inequities Speaker Bios

Dr. Sonny Kelly

Sonny Kelly is a scholar, performer, story teller, motivator, speaker, and comedian. Dr. Kelly earned his PhD in Communication at UNC Chapel Hill. He is also a graduate of St. Mary's University (MA, Communication Studies, '08) and Stanford University (BA, International Relations, '98). Currently, his research is focused on seeking performance centered practices to name and address the issues that divide Americans. Sonny has served as a U.S. Air Force officer, a non-profit organization director, university admissions counselor, award winning pharmaceutical salesman, college communications instructor, and a church youth pastor. He teaches courses in Public Speaking and Intercultural/ Interpersonal Communication at Fayetteville Technical Community College. Sonny has also acted professionally on stage and television for over 20 years. Sonny is currently performing an original one-man show called THE TALK that grapples with the talks that parents of color must have with their children about surviving and thriving in a racialized America. Sonny's dissertation, "Pipelines to Pathways: Reframing and Reclaiming Black Youth Identity through Performance," mobilizes performance-centered pedagogy, ethnography, and participatory action research toward hope, unity, equity, and inclusion. No matter where he is, or what he is doing, Sonny's passion for teaching, engaging and empowering others is unmistakable! Learn more at www.sonnykelly.com



Dr. Monique Perry-Graves



Member, AJLI Governance Committee (& JL Charlotte Sustainer)
Executive Director, Teach for America North Carolina (statewide role)

Dr. Monique Perry-Graves is an award-winning leader, educator, speaker, and author. As of June 2021, she is the first statewide Executive Director for Teach for America (TFA), North Carolina. In her role serves as the first chief executive to lead a multi-region portfolio in North Carolina. in support of TFA's mission to find, develop, and support a diverse network of leaders working together to end educational inequity leading over 50 TFA staff across the state.

Known for her visionary leadership and impact, Dr. Perry-Graves has spent the past 15 years in positions of increasing leadership across the higher education ecosystem. She comes to Teach for America after an 11 ½ year tenure at York Technical College, a community college in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she held positions of increasing responsibilities in the areas of academic affairs, college advancement/marketing, and student affairs. Her most recent role prior to joining TFA was

serving as the College's Campus Operating Officer overseeing campus centers in rural locations and Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management. Her former portfolio included leadership of new student advising, recruitment, and registration; new student orientation; registrar's office and graduation; enrollment operations; one-stop center/call center operations; student retention; student employment and financial aid.

Preceding that role, she served as York Tech's Director of Strategic Communications and Marketing and started at the college as a full-time faculty member and academic advisor. In the classroom she taught high school juniors and seniors who participated in dual enrollment programs alongside adult learners. During her tenure at the College, she was a key leader in many student success efforts including: activating and leading an integrated strategic enrollment model resulting in historic increases in recruitment, retention and completion; designing the first formal adult re-enrollment program (Reconnect); architecting a cohesive student service model across multiple campus locations; and cultivating career paths to support the development of diverse leaders throughout her division. She also oversaw multiple successful A133 audits of state and federal financial aid funding, led the implementation for the College's CRM system, and contributed significantly in deepening the college's access and equity efforts to support economic mobility.

Dr. Perry-Graves has been recognized on a local and state level for her leadership, most recently named by The Mecklenburg Times as one of the 50 Most Influential Women of 2020. She was one of the first leaders in South Carolina selected for the national Aspen Institute Presidential Fellows program. She is also the first woman, and first woman of color from York Tech selected as the recipient of the state of South Carolina's A. Wade Martin Innovator of the Year award.

Community impact is particularly important to Dr. Perry-Graves. She is a member of the national governance committee for the Association of Junior Leagues International (AJLI); and is a sustaining member in the Junior League of Charlotte where she also served as a board member and Nominating Chair. Additionally, Dr. Perry-Graves also contributes her time as a board member for Florence Crittenton Services of North Carolina. In 2020, Dr. Perry-Graves was appointed to North Carolina Central University's College of Arts, Sciences, and Humanities advisory board and the Aspen Institute College Excellence alumni advisory council.

Dr. Perry-Graves is a proud graduate of North Carolina Central University where she earned her undergraduate degree in English. While at NCCU she was selected for the INROADS® internship program and credits the experience as a foundational springboard for her leadership success. She continued her educational pursuits by also earning a master's degree in Strategic Communications and Leadership from Seton Hall University, after which she earned a doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Florida.

Dr. Alison Harris Welcher

Senior Vice President, Public Impact (statewide/national role)

Dr. Welcher is the senior vice president for Opportunity Culture design and implementation at Public Impact, and serves on the firmwide strategy team. She helps lead national Opportunity Culture implementation by working intensively with school and system leaders to build both the culture and systems for sustained excellence for all students and educators. Before joining Public Impact, Dr. Harris Welcher served as a teacher, principal, and director of school leadership for the Project L.I.F.T. zone within North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district. Her work as a principal



leading a middle school transformation was highlighted in “Getting Smart: 100 Schools Worth Visiting” in 2014 and in the book *Breakthrough Principals: A Step-by-Step Guide to Building Stronger Schools*. Dr. Harris Welcher has coached and developed school leaders and principal supervisors in states across the U.S. and in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2016, she spoke before the U.S. Senate HELP Committee on ESSA legislation. Dr. Harris Welcher received her doctorate in educational leadership from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, from which she also holds a master’s degree in education focused on risk and prevention in adolescents. She holds a bachelor’s degree in English from Spelman College, and during her time at Spelman was part of Stanford University’s domestic exchange program on urban education and leadership.

Kelly Ann Mudd

Principal, Martin Millennium Academy (Edgecombe County Schools)



"I am so incredibly honored to be at MMA. I love serving along side of phenomenal scholars, teachers, families and an amazing community each and every day. I am committed to ensuring that every Trailblazer, young and old, is capable and confident to master their wildest of dreams. Being a Trailblazer brings me so much pride and joy."

Mudd earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism from the University of Maryland. After graduation, Mudd joined Teach for America and has been working in education in eastern North Carolina since 2006.

Mudd has a variety of experience in education, including being a middle grades Exceptional Children’s educator in Vance and Nash Counties. She earned a Master’s in School Administration from North Carolina State University in 2013 and was a Northeast Leadership Academy Fellow during that time. In addition to her undergraduate and graduate degrees, Mudd participated in the New and Aspiring School Leaders Institute at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education in 2010, and participated in the Rural Schools Leadership Academy with Teach For America in 2011.

Lashea Agnew

Recent English Teacher, Harding University High School (Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools)
Teacher Leader Coach, Teach for America

LeShéa Agnew is a Winston-Salem, North Carolina native with a degree in Mass Communication (% '08) from Salem College. She spent more than a decade in Broadcast Journalism as an award-winning host/reporter/producer for NPR-affiliate stations in North Carolina and New York. Her first beat as a reporter – education. Some of her most memorable interviews include Maya Angelou, bell hooks, Cokie Roberts, Lee Daniels, Trayvon Martin’s father Tracy, Gloria Steinem, Hill Harper, and Common.

The daughter of a poet, playwright, and Sign Language interpreter for WSFCS, LeShéa grew up in the arts and teacher breakrooms alongside her mother. In 2018, LeShéa honored her promise to close mentor Dr. Maya Angelou that she would return



home and do her part to cultivate a love of learning and literacy in underserved communities. She joined the CLT Corps – and fell in love.

For the past four years, she proudly served as an English teacher to an incredible Tribe at Harding University High School. LeShéa met a HUHS Marketing teacher who became her life partner, and together, they grew Tribe to more than 1,200 students. LeShéa also co-advised Gay Straight Alliance which became the largest nonathletic club on campus. During her time, LeShéa was voted Beginner Teacher of the Year and Most Trusted Adult. She also facilitated several professional development workshops for HUHS and CMS.

LeShéa is the co-founder and Creative Director of TRIBEverse, a creative arts youth org with a panoptic approach to education, social awareness, and integrative holistic practices to cultivate community and growth. As a certified beginner Tai Chi and Qigong instructor, LeShéa works primarily with communities of color to build family and community wellness via mind-body aligned exercises. She is a Mother Nature enthusiast, sports fan, knowledge-seeker, and admirer of dope humans. LeShéa is deeply honored to join in heartfelt unison with TFA NC as a newly hired teacher leader coach.

Jacob Hicks

Recent Coordinator of Service-Learning and Character Education (Guilford County Schools)
Teacher Leader Coach, Teach for America

Jacob Hicks most recently served as the Coordinator of Service-Learning and Character Education with Guilford County Schools. During his tenure at GCS, he was a critical leader in the implementation of Social, Emotional Learning as a practice to support learning and success for all GCS students.

Prior to his work in the district, Jacob taught middle school level. Outside of work, he enjoys spending his time with his fiancé, Samuel. Jacob most recently joined Teach for America NC as a teacher leader coach serving the GCS district.



Dayson Pasion

Teacher Advisor: Office of the NC Governor and Equity Advocate



Pasión graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2010 with a degree in biology. During his undergraduate tenure, Pasion enrolled in the UNC Baccalaureate Education In Science and Teaching (BEST) program, completing all requirements to teach secondary science in North Carolina. During his time with ABSS, Pasion served the community as a science teacher, STEM educator and coordinator, instructional technology facilitator, and academic coach. Pasion currently serves as an equity specialist in the Office of Equity and Inclusion for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS).

He also serves on the board of Immersion for Spanish Acquisition (ISLA), is a member of Elon University's School of

Education Advisory Board for Middle Grades, is a co-founder of Alamance4Ed, and is a graduate of the inaugural class of the Alamance Teacher Leadership Academy. Dayson also remains an active alumnus of the Kenan Fellows Program for Educational Leadership, and is a current member of educational organizations including the North Carolina First in Teaching (FIT) Leaders, North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), Teaching in Color, EduColor, and several additional professional organizations. He currently serves as a Teacher Advisor in the Office of Governor Roy Cooper and is the head of the Governor’s Teacher Advisory Committee.

Representative Ashton Wheeler Clemmons



Dr. Ashton Clemmons has always had a passion for serving the people of the state she proudly calls home. After graduating from UNC-Chapel Hill as a NC Teaching Fellow, she taught school in Durham and Guilford counties, and went on to earn her Master’s in School Leadership from Harvard University. Most recently, Ashton Clemmons received her Doctorate of Education from University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Her commitment to education led her to serve as principal of schools in Rockingham and Guilford counties, where she led the turn-around of one of the state’s lowest performing schools. While serving as assistant superintendent of the Thomasville City Schools, Ashton was selected one of the Triad Business Journal’s “40 Leaders under 40” and has

also been honored by the United Way with its Human Rights Advocate award.

Ashton Clemmons was re-elected to serve in North Carolina’s 57th House District on November 3, 2020 and sworn into office on January 13, 2021. During her time in Raleigh, Representative Clemmons has been appointed to the Commerce, Education K-12, Education-Community Colleges, Finance, and Marine Resources and Aqua Culture Committees. She also serves as Early Childhood Caucus Co-Chair. The mother of three young children, Ashton is an energetic and passionate advocate for better schools and job training programs, as well as policies that protect our health care, environment and voting rights. She lives in Greensboro with her husband Bryan Clemmons.

Representative Brandon Lofton

Brandon Lofton is a dedicated and thoughtful leader. He is serving in his second term in the North Carolina General Assembly, representing House District 104 (South Charlotte). He is a public finance lawyer who began his career as a civil rights attorney. He cares deeply about fairness and opportunity and is mindful of how our public investments impact these values. Brandon serves as Deputy Floor Leader and Finance co-Chair within his caucus and has advocated for greater investment in our public schools and reforms to strengthen our democratic institutions.



In the legislature, Brandon successfully worked across the aisle to get his first bill, a bill to help nonprofits, passed unanimously by the House. He also sponsored or cosponsored legislation to end gerrymandering, increase funding for public schools and expand Medicaid. Brandon serves on the Finance, Judiciary, State and Local Government, Commerce and Agriculture committees.

Prior to serving in the General Assembly, Brandon chaired the board for the Council for Children's Rights, served on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Advisory Board, served on the Levine Museum of the New South's board, chaired the city of Charlotte's Disparity Study Advisory Committee and helped revise the city's small business program. He also coached the chess team at his kids' elementary school.

Brandon's leadership and service has been recognized with the North Carolina Bar Association Citizen Lawyer Award, the Charlotte Business Journal 40 Under 40 Award, the Charlotte Chamber's Young Professionals Business Leader for small to midsized companies and Uptown Charlotte Magazine Community Catalyst Award.

Brandon is a partner with the law firm, Robinson Bradshaw & Hinson, P.A., where he practices public finance law. He began his career with the civil rights law firm then known as Ferguson, Stein Chambers.

Brandon attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he graduated with highest honors and met his wife, Kellie. He earned his law degree from New York University School of Law, where he was a Root-Tilden-Kern Scholar and a Dean's Scholar. Brandon and Kellie are the proud parents of Caleb (13) and Brandon II (15).

Representative Donna White



Donna McDowell White was elected to her first term in the NC House of Representatives in November 2016 and is currently serving her third term representing the citizens of NC House District 26. She is the first woman from Johnston County to be elected to this role. In her service to the House Rep. White has been very active on the Health front where she currently serves as Chairman of the Health Committee and Chairman of the Appropriations for Health and Human Services Committee. Additionally, Rep. White is a Vice-Chair of the Appropriations Committee and a member of Education K-12, Environment, and Families, Children and Aging Policy Committees. Bi-cameral appointments include serving on the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the 2022 newly created Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Access to Healthcare and Medicaid Expansion.

There are many other task forces and councils that Rep. White sits on including the Child Fatality Task Force, Olmstead Plan Stakeholder Advisory Committee (OPSA), NC Serious Illness Coalition, NC Falls Prevention Coalition, and the recently convened NC Council on Health Care Coverage. She was appointed by the Speaker as the Representative to the NC Cancer Coordination and Control Committee and the Minority Health Advisory Committee. Her strong commitment to public health, mental health and the overall well-being of NC citizens is demonstrated through her

committee work. Rep. White is chair of the NCBIO Life Sciences Caucus, and a member of the Early Childhood Caucus, and the Joint legislative Women's Caucus.

Rep. White had many years of local public service prior to being a representative. She served 12 years on the Johnston County Board of Education, 15 years on the Clayton Planning Board, 13 years on the Clayton Board of Adjustment, and since 2004, is a member of the Johnston County Transit Advisory Board. Rep. White continues to be very active in civic associations and is a member of the Clayton Chamber of Commerce Education Committee, past board member of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce as well as a member of the Smithfield Chamber. She was named the 2013 Woman of the Year for the Cleveland School Road Rotary Club. Rep. White was a local radio personality on a talk show for the prevention of fraud and scams' targeting seniors for 5 years prior to becoming a legislator.

Her professional career includes being a registered nurse and she has worked as a public health nurse in communicable disease, school health, pediatrics, and home health. She was the statewide Nurse Consultant for HIV/AIDS, Migrant Health and served as the Nurse Consultant for a national Case Management Demonstration Project for seven years that became the model of modern case management. Her most recent position, until her retirement Feb. 1, 2017, was the Home Care Consultant and Elder Rights Nurse for the Division of Aging and Adult Services at the NC Department of Health and Human Services. Ms. White is a member of the North Carolina Nurses Association, the American Nurses Association and Past President of the Johnston County Nurses Association. She was named one of the Great 100 Nurses in North Carolina. In 2018 Rep. White was named Legislator of the Year by the North Carolina Nurses Association.

Past NC House committee appointments include the House Standing Committees for Aging, Health, Appropriations, Appropriations for Health and Human Services, Education K-12, Ethics and Judiciary III. She was also appointed to serve on the House Select Committees for Disaster Relief and Access to Rural Health Advisory Committee, NC Internship Council, and has a gubernatorial appointment to the Safer Schools Task Force in 2013 and was reappointed in 2016, 2018 and in 2020-2021. For the 2019-2020 biennium she was appointed by the Speaker to the Bi-partisan House Select Committee for Safer Schools and the NC Well Child Being Transformation Council.

Rep. White has been recognized by multiple advocacy associations for her commitment to many causes. She was named Legislator of the Year by Friends of Residents in Long Term Care during 2017 and 2019, and she received the Legislator of Excellence Award from the N.C. Police Benevolent Association for 2017-2018 being the first freshman legislator to receive this recognition. In 2017 she was given the Optometric Visionary Award and was also recognized that year for her years of service and leadership to victims by the Victim Services interagency Council of North Carolina. Additionally, she received the Capitol Care Givers Award in 2018 and was named as a fellow to the Legislative Health Policy by the NC Institute of Medicine. In 2019 Representative White was named the Legislator of the Year by the NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities. In December of 2019 Rep White was named Legislator of the Year for the Children's Advocacy Center of North Carolina and the Partnership for Children of Johnston County named her the 2019 Champion for Children. Rep. White was the Clayton Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year in 2019. Rep. White was named a 2020 Hunger Champion by Reinvestment Partners for her work connecting people in need with healthy food during the Covid 19 crisis. In 2021 Rep. White was named the first recipient of the Champion of Aging Award by the NC Coalition of Aging. She also received the Legislator Excellence Award from the Police Benevolent Society in 2021.

Judge Carrie Vickery

Carrie Vickery was elected to the District Court bench in Forsyth County, North Carolina in 2016 and re-elected in 2020. Prior to becoming a judge, Carrie practiced at the Holton Law Firm. She received her law degree from Elon University in 2009, and her B.A. in Political-Science from Western Carolina University. In 2015, Carrie was certified by the North Carolina State Bar as a specialist in the field of family law. Carrie is admitted to practice in all federal district courts in North Carolina, the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court. Carrie is the immediate Past President for the 21st Judicial District Bar and Forsyth County Bar. Carrie taught as an adjunct professor at Forsyth Technical Community College from 2011 - 2019, and was on the Paralegal Certification Committee of the NC State Bar. She has also spoken on topics within the field of family law at continuing legal education and continuing judicial education. Carrie is the Bench-Bar Liaison for the Family Law Section of the NC Bar Association.



Carrie has received several awards and recognitions including a 2019 “Rising Star” by Lawyer’s Weekly, a 2018 “40 Under Forty Leader” by the Triad Business Journal, a “Rising Star” in the field of Family Law by Super Lawyers in 2016 and 2017, a 2017 Outstanding Alumni by Elon Law School, an “Outstanding Women Leader’s Award” from the City of Winston-Salem in 2015, a 2014 “Winston <40 Leadership Award”, and a “Special Recognition Award” from the Winston-Salem Chronicle in 2013.

Carrie is also active within her community and currently serves as the President-Elect for the Junior League of Winston-Salem, serves as a Past President of the Board of Directors for the Forsyth Humane Society, and volunteers with the Triad Golden Retriever Rescue. She is a past Board Member of the Children’s Museum of Winston-Salem, Twin City Charter High School, and the Liberty Street Community Development Corporation. She also served as a member of the Board of Trustees for her high school alma mater, the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

Judge Rickye McKoy-Mitchell



Judge Rickye McKoy-Mitchell is a double Tarheel having received both her Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degree and Juris Doctorate (JD) from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law and was a James M. Johnston Scholar and a member of the Order of the Valkyries (only campus honorary society that recognizes extraordinary contributions of university women.) She is a recipient of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, among the most prestigious awards presented by the Governor of North Carolina to individuals who have a proven record of extraordinary service to the state. At the time that Judge McKoy-Mitchell was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine in 1980 as an undergraduate, she was and still is one of the youngest persons ever to have received the award.

Prior to becoming a Judge, Judge McKoy-Mitchell practiced in both the criminal and civil areas of law at both the state and federal court levels and has been a District Court Judge in the 26th Judicial District (Mecklenburg County) for almost 24 years since 1998. Prior to becoming a Judge, she was a Reginald Heber Smith Fellow/attorney with Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont, Attorney Advisor with the Office of Hearings and Appeals of the Social Security Administration, Senior Trial Attorney with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Assistant District Attorney with the 26th Prosecutorial District (Mecklenburg County). She has presided in all the district courts, serves as the Child Support Court Lead Judge, and has served as the Lead Judge in most of those courts and serves as faculty for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges providing training to judges across the country and internationally through the Institutes of Domestic Violence, Elder Abuse, and Human Trafficking.

Judge McKoy-Mitchell is an active member of the Mecklenburg County Bar (MCB) and was Co-Chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Co-Chair of the Pipeline Committee; served on MCB's Board of Directors; Alumni Association Board of Directors for the UNC-CH School of Law and its Alumni Outreach Committee; and Board of Visitors for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the Judicial Liaison for the Leary Bar Association; member of the Charlotte Women's Bar of the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys (NCAWA) and former member of the Board of Governors of NCAWA; member of the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers; and National Association of Women Judges.

Additionally, Judge McKoy-Mitchell is a member of the Women Executives; Golden Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated (Charlotte Alumnae Chapter) and recognized as Delta of the Year and her establishment of the Excellence in Youth program which was renamed in her honor; The Links, Incorporated (Alumna Links Committee Chair); Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated Associate member; Junior League of Charlotte Sustainer member; and Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County; and former Deacon and Youth Member and current Board of Directors Member for her Church, Mount Carmel Baptist Church.

Judge McKoy-Mitchell has long been involved in and has been recognized for not only her outstanding Judicial Leadership but also her exceptional community service. She was honored with the Mecklenburg Times' 50 Most Influential Women; Lawyers Weekly Leaders in the Law and Women of Justice Recipient for her outstanding leadership and professionalism (only recipient of all three awards consecutively); the Julius L. Chambers Diversity Champion Award from the Mecklenburg County Bar which recognizes an individual who embodies high ethical standards, unquestioned integrity, consistent competence and who champions diversity in the legal profession; Delta of the Year with May Week Excellence in Youth being named in her honor; Citizen Lawyer of the Year by the North Carolina Bar Association; Outstanding Jurist award by the North Carolina Advocates of Justice; Pinnacle Award of the BPC; Outstanding Alumni of the Year by the Alumni Association of UNC-Chapel School of Law Alumni Board; UNC-CH Harvey E. Beech Outstanding Black Alumnus; and the Martin Luther King Grassroots Change Agent award, among many others.

Although being the recipient of several awards, Judge McKoy-Mitchell believes that being a judge is much more than addressing each individual case as a public servant. As such, she has pursued many avenues for developing mentoring opportunities for adjudicated youth and youth in foster care to see beyond their current circumstances to "walk" in their visions, as well as pursuing other ways to ensure the judicial system is a community partner.

Jessica Zufolo

Founder and CEO, HarvestBeam Inc.



Jessica is the founder and CEO of HarvestBeam Inc, a rural broadband provider that is preparing to deploy 5G wireless broadband internet services to residents, businesses and anchor institutions throughout Eastern North Carolina. Jessica decided to launch HarvestBeam broadband network in Eastern North Carolina to help close the digital divide in parts of the most rural, low income areas in the state.

Throughout her career, Jessica has been at the forefront of broadband investment, network expansion and adoption in rural and tribal communities. Over the past 30 years, Jessica has served numerous senior leadership roles throughout federal government and non-profit sectors in Washington, D.C.

Jessica currently serves as Vice President of Rural Broadband Strategy for Magellan Advisors, a broadband engineering and financial modeling company that designs, builds and deploys broadband networks for municipal governments, Cooperatives, Utilities, Tribal Nations and rural broadband companies. Jessica also serves as a founding member of the FCC's Precision Agriculture Task force.

Prior to joining Magellan, Jessica served for over 5 years as the Senior Advisor for Strategic Partnerships for the federal Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) for the Lifeline Division where she established data sharing agreements with all 50 state Medicaid and SNAP directors to implement the Lifeline national eligibility verifier for the federal Lifeline subsidy program. Jessica also established partnerships between local rural and tribal officials and administrators of the federal Schools and Libraries Program (E-Rate).

Prior to her tenure at USAC, Jessica was appointed by former President Barack Obama to serve as the Deputy Administrator for the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) where she helped oversee a \$65 billion federal loan and grant portfolio that finances water systems telecommunications and broadband networks, precision agriculture, electric utility, smart grid and renewable energy projects in rural and tribal communities.

Jessica also served as the Legislative Director for the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) where she was responsible for developing legislative strategy for all 50 state public service commissions involving telecommunications, technology, consumer protection and water.

Early in her distinguished career, Jessica worked on Capitol Hill for eight years overseeing telecommunications and energy policy for the late New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Senator Charles E. Schumer of New York and Representative Peter A. Defazio of Oregon.

Jessica earned her MBA with Honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a BA in military history and political science from the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Leslie S. Mullinix

Leslie Mullinix, Pre-K Priority Project Coordinator

As the Project Manager of Forsyth County's Pre-K Priority initiative (convened by Family Services), Leslie currently supports the systems-change work to increase opportunities for all the county's children to have accessible and affordable high-quality Pre-K opportunities. She has participated in community-based work the past 10 years spanning the local faith and nonprofit sectors including employment with The Children's Home (now Crossnore Communities for Children) and the Ronald McDonald House.

Prior to nonprofit and social work, Leslie enjoyed a corporate career in apparel at Nike, Inc. in Portland, Oregon, and more locally at HanesBrands and Renfro. The international experience she gained during that time strengthened her focus on multicultural appreciation and collaboration.

After journeying the road of international adoption with her children from Russia, Leslie's experience with early childhood trauma led her to pursue social work. Her internships with Crisis Control Ministries and Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center's Psychiatric and Behavioral Medicine spurred her interest in policy work to support broad, systematic change.

Leslie holds a BS in Textile Apparel Management from N.C. State University and Master of Social Work from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill.

Her passion to support systems-change work that impacts marginalized populations and empowers girls and women, extends to her volunteer work that includes serving as a Board Member for Crisis Control Ministries, Girl Scout Leader of Troop 2323, and recent participation in Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools' Task Force to help revise the Code of Conduct to implement an equitable approach to districtwide discipline protocols.



Amy Barry

Executive Director, Buncombe Partnership for Children

Amy Barry is the Executive Director of Buncombe Partnership for Children. She holds a BA from Hamilton College and an MSW from Boston College Graduate School of Social Work. She has over 30 years of experience providing leadership in nonprofits in a range of communities from rural to urban including Boston MA, Helena MT and for the past sixteen years, Asheville, NC. She brings a deep understanding of organizational operations and strategic planning to her work along with a commitment to supporting children's healthy development, resilient families and strong communities. Amy is actively engaged in advocacy for equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care at the local and state level.

Jenna Barry

Executive Director, NC Early Education Coalition

Jenna joined the NC Early Education Coalition in 2021 as the organization's first Executive Director. She has worked in the early education field for more than 20 years and is dedicated to expanding access to programs and services that support young children in having the best opportunity to succeed. Jenna moved to North Carolina from Michigan where she received her Bachelor's Degree from Michigan State University in Child Development. Prior to completing her Master's Degree at UNC-Chapel Hill in Education: Early Childhood, Families & Literacy, Jenna worked directly with young children as a classroom teacher in the Wake County Public School System. Jenna is inspired by a strong desire to expand the quality of care and education provided to all young children in North Carolina. Her experiences include serving as a Rated License Assessor; working as a Technical Assistant/Adult Educator; managing non-profit programs and staff; coordinating statewide projects; and most recently, serving as a Program Officer working with Smart Start local partnerships.

