

30<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
**ROSALYNN CARTER**  
Georgia Mental Health Forum 

**Tuesday, May 19, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.**

- 8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.**                      **Registration and Breakfast**
- 9 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.**                      **Welcome and Opening Reflections: Thirty Years of the Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum**
- Paige Alexander, CEO, The Carter Center*
- Josh Carter, Grandson of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, Co-Founder and CEO, The VEO-IBD Foundation*
- Neetu Abad, PhD, Director, The Carter Center Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program (RCMHCP)*
- Sarah Phillips, Associate Director, The Carter Center RCMHCP*
- 9:15 a.m. – 10 a.m.**                      **Storytelling and Narrative Change to Advance Mental Health**
- Gita Pullapilly, Award-Winning Filmmaker and Author*
- 10 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.**                      **Georgia DBHDD Update: Priorities and the Road Ahead**
- Commissioner Kevin Tanner, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities*
- 10:20 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.**                      **Morning Break**
- 10:30 a.m. – 10:35 a.m.**                      **Prevention in Georgia: Immigrant Mental Health**
- Irene Barton, Executive Director, Cobb Collaborative*
- 10:35 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**                      **Community Trauma and Resilience in Immigrant and Refugee Populations**
- Aashna Panjwani, Senior Program Associate, The Carter Center RCMHCP*
- Amin Gilani, Medical Director, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Alabama Psychiatry*

*Aparna Bhattacharyya, Executive Director, Raksha*

*Belisa Urbina, CEO, Ser Familia*

*Temple Moore, Director, Community Wellness and Outdoor Leadership, Refugee Women's Network*

**11:30 a.m. – 11:35 a.m.    Prevention in Georgia: Caregiving**

*Anna Bourque, CEO, Georgia Parent Support Network*

**11:35 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.    Mental Health and Caregiving: Supporting Caregivers, Supporting Communities**

*Neetu Abad, PhD, Director, The Carter Center RCMHCP*

*Jason Resendez, President and CEO, National Alliance for Caregiving*

*Mitul Desai, CEO and Co-Founder, The Care Hack*

*Krystal Scott, Program Strategy Manager, Pivotal Ventures*

*Susie Kyle, Founder and President, Clubhouse Atlanta*

*Rachel Waford, PhD, Assistant Professor, Emory University and Lead Psychologist, Grady Hospital Clinical and Research Program for Psychosis*

**12:30 p.m. – 1 p.m.    Lunch**

**1 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.    Arts and Health Performance**

*Marcel Foster, CEO and Co-Founder, Performance Hypothesis*

*Atlanta Symphony Orchestra*

**1:10 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.    Prevention in Georgia: Youth Mental Health**

*Derrick and Dawn Townsend, Hopeful Change*

**1:15 p.m. – 2:10 p.m.    Youth Mental Health at the Intersection of Care and Justice**

*Kristin Denning, Program Associate, The Carter Center RCMHCP*

*Kim Schofield, Georgia House Representative, District 63*

*John Izzo, Assistant Director, Office of Behavioral Health Services, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice*

*Darlene Lynch, Legal and Policy Director, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice*

**2:10 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.**

**Prevention in Georgia: Mental Health Parity**

*Sarah Phillips, Associate Director, The Carter Center RCMHCP*

**2:15 p.m. – 3:10 p.m.**

**Keynote Address: Policy, Parity, and the Path Forward for Mental Health**

*Patrick J. Kennedy, Former U.S. Representative, NY Times Bestselling Author, Co-Founder of The Kennedy Forum*

**3:10 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.**

**Afternoon Break**

**3:20 p.m. – 3:40 p.m.**

**Mental Health as a Public Health Priority**

*Deb Houry, MD, Nationally Recognized Physician, Researcher, and Public Health Leader*

**3:40 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.**

**Prevention in Georgia: Cross-Sector Collaboration**

*Eve Byrd, DNP, MPH, Senior Advisor, RCMHCP*

**3:45 p.m. – 4:40 p.m.**

**Cross-Sector Collaboration to Advance Mental Health and Caregiving**

*Sarah Phillips, Associate Director, The Carter Center RCMHCP*

*Emily Anne Vall, Executive Director, Resilient Georgia*

*Becky Kurtz, Director, Atlanta Area Agency on Aging*

*Jana French, Community Partnerships Director, Crisis Text Line*

*Amera Bilal, Vice President of Policy and Programs, Caregiver Action Network*

**4:40 p.m. – 5 p.m.**

**Mental Health, the Arts, and Healing: A Special Guest Appearance by India Arie (TBD)**

*India Arie Simpson, Four-Time Grammy Award-Winning Singer and Songwriter*



**Neetu Abad, PhD, MA**

*Director, The Carter Center RCMHCP*

Neetu Abad is a seasoned leader who has implemented high-impact public health strategies in mental and behavioral health, vaccine-preventable diseases, and emergency response domestically and globally. In July 2025, she was named the first director of the Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program following the merger between The Carter Center and the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers.

Abad previously led the Behavioral Health Coordinating Unit in the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. In this role, Abad worked to elevate, advance, and coordinate the CDC's activities to promote mental well-being and prevent mental distress, substance misuse, overdose, and suicide through a primary prevention approach. She also served as the CDC's primary mental health subject matter expert and led the development of the CDC's first mental health strategy and mental health data channel.

Abad first joined the CDC in 2011 as an Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education HIV prevention in communities of color postdoctoral fellow in the Division of HIV Prevention, where she published a systematic review of behavioral interventions to reduce HIV transmission risk among female sex workers. In 2013, she joined the CDC's Division of STD Prevention as a behavioral scientist conducting social and behavioral research and evaluation on determinants of sexual risk behavior.

During the CDC's West Africa Ebola emergency response, she developed the first risk reduction counseling and semen testing program protocols for Ebola survivors. From 2016 through 2023, she served as senior subject matter expert and then team lead on the Demand for Immunization Team in the Global Immunization Division in the CDC's Global Health Center. During the CDC's COVID-19 Emergency Response, Abad served as co-lead of the CDC's Vaccine Confidence and Demand Team in the CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, overseeing the CDC's U.S. and global vaccine confidence research, program, and policy agenda. Her work focused on assessing and intervening

on the behavioral and social drivers of low vaccine uptake. Abad earned her doctorate and master's degree in social psychology from the University of Missouri.



**Paige Alexander**  
***CEO, The Carter Center***

Paige Alexander serves as chief executive officer of The Carter Center, a nonprofit organization founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter to advance peace and health worldwide. Alexander joined the Center in 2020 at a pivotal time for the organization and the country. In her first year, Alexander led the organization through the COVID-19 pandemic and a period of national social upheaval, while envisioning a path forward for The Carter Center as it transitioned from an organization that was founder-led to one that is guided by its founders' principles.

Since that time, Alexander has strengthened the Center's core peace and health programs and led the organization in new directions, including adding programs to address: the global mental health crisis; political polarization in the US; and the impact of climate change on global peace and public health.

During her tenure as CEO, Alexander has provided thought leadership on issues related to peace, health, and the nexus of the two, authoring essays and op-eds that have appeared in Newsweek, the Chicago Tribune, Financial Times, and CNN, and appearing on the BBC, National Public Radio, NBC, and other major outlets. Alexander has presented a [TEDWomen talk](#) on the close connection between human rights and access to information and a [lecture at the Chautauqua Institution](#) on the global rise of authoritarianism. She is the recipient of several awards, including Forbes' "50 Over 50," the Atlanta Business Chronicle's "Most Admired CEO," and Georgia Trend Magazine's "100 Most Influential Leaders."

Before joining The Carter Center, Alexander had a distinguished global development career, with more than two decades of experience in the government and nonprofit sectors. Between 1993 and 2001, Alexander worked at the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID), covering missions and development programs for the Europe and Eurasia region, including focusing on immediate post-conflict work in the Balkans. After leaving for 10 years to work in a leadership role in the nonprofit sector, Alexander returned to USAID in 2011 as a Presidential appointee to be the assistant administrator for Europe and Eurasia. In 2015, she was again Senate-confirmed to lead the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Bureau, overseeing 1,000 employees, programs in 12 countries, and more than \$1.4 billion in annual funding.

Between her assignments with USAID, Alexander was senior vice president and European founder/president of IREX, an international civil society, democracy, and education nonprofit organization. From 2017 until her appointment to The Carter Center, she served as executive director of the European Cooperative for Rural Development (EUCORD) in Brussels and Amsterdam, working to bring market-led solutions to marginalized farmers in Africa to improve the livelihoods of families and communities sustainably.

Earlier, Alexander was associate director of Project Liberty at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and a consultant to institutions including the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Open Society Institute in Prague. Alexander currently serves on the boards of the Romanian American Foundation, the World Affairs Council of Atlanta, the Free Russia Foundation, and the U.S. Chapter of the Society for International Development. She also serves on the Board of Visitors for Agnes Scott College and is an advisory board member of several human rights organizations.



**Irene Barton**  
**Executive Director, Cobb Collaborative**

Irene Barton was named the Executive Director of the Cobb Collaborative in September 2018 after joining the organization as its Resource Manager in July 2017. Using the collective impact model, the Collaborative convenes community stakeholders to improve outcomes for children and families in Cobb County and is the local presence for the Georgia Family Connection Partnership. The Collaborative focuses on three priorities:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency as the local contact for the Get GA Reading Campaign
- Mental Health through its Mind Your Mind (Cuida tu Mente) work
- Civic Engagement – voting and engagement at the grassroots level

Under Irene's leadership, the Collaborative has grown to a staff of 10 and its budget has increased ten-fold to \$1MM. The Collaborative leads the local coalition for Resilient Georgia and serves as the backbone agency for The Basics Cobb County, an evidence-based early learning framework. Irene has worked diligently to strengthen partnerships and is passionate about serving her community.

She currently serves on the advisory board of the McCleskey YMCA and the Kennesaw State University President's Community Advisory Board and is the 2026 President of the South Cobb Business Association. She was named the East Cobb Citizen of the Year by the Cobb Chamber and was nominated to receive the prestigious 2025 Nikki T. Randall Servant Leader Award by Georgia Representative Lisa Campbell. In 2022, Irene was named a Woman of Achievement by LiveSafe Resources. She was selected as a member of the 2021 Regional Leadership Institute Class and was an Education Policy Fellow for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education in 2017. She is an alumni of the Cobb Chamber's Honorary Commanders and Leadership Cobb programs and is active in several Chamber cohorts. Prior to joining the Collaborative, Irene held numerous volunteer leadership positions with Georgia PTA at the local, district and state level and served on several nonprofit boards in a variety of positions, including as Board Chair. She worked in the financial services field for a number of years prior to joining the Cobb Collaborative.

Irene and her husband Steve have resided in Cobb County for 35 years and are the proud parents of a daughter who is in law school in Washington, DC and a son who is a recent graduate of Auburn University. Irene enjoys reading nonfiction and exercising in her spare time.





**Aparna Bhattacharyya**  
***Executive Director, Raksha***

Aparna Bhattacharyya has served as Executive Director of Raksha, Inc. since 1998, leading efforts to address gender-based violence and crime victimization in immigrant and refugee communities. She began her career as a victim advocate with the City of Atlanta and helped coordinate the 1996 Olympic Crisis Response Team. A nationally recognized trainer, she provides expertise on cultural competency, language access, collaboration, and the intersectional needs of survivors, and has been faculty for Georgia's statewide Victim Assistance Academy since 2005.

Aparna has helped establish organizations including Tapestri, Inc. and International Women's House, and has served on numerous nonprofit boards. She was named a White House Champion of Change in 2013 and has received multiple state and community honors. In 2023 2024 and 2025, she was recognized among the Atlanta 500 Most Influential Leaders by Atlanta Magazine. She currently serves as board treasurer of Asian Institute on Gender-Based Violence and is a co-founder of SOAR – South Asian Survivors, Organizations Allied and Rising.



**Amera Bilal, MA**

***Vice President of Policy and Programs, Caregiver Action Network***

Amera Bilal currently serves as the Vice President of Programs and Policy at the Caregiver Action Network, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization representing over 63 million family caregivers residing within the United States. She has grown a career in service to older adults and their families via workforce development, senior housing, caregiver support, and equity program leadership across government and nonprofit sectors. Previously, Amera served in both Maryland State government as well as Prince George's County, Maryland, government in various capacities over grants and program management. A Longevity and Inclusion Fellow, Amera also serves co-chair of the National Capital Area CARES Mentoring Circle serving the greater Washington, DC area, a member of the national Aging While Black policy forum and the Equity and Justice Council of the American Society on Aging. She holds a BS in History and Government and an MA in Human Resource Development from Bowie State University, the oldest HBCU in Maryland.



**Anna M. Bourque, M.S., LSSBB**  
***Chief Executive Officer, Georgia Parent Support Network***

Anna M. Bourque, M.S., LSSBB, is a seasoned leader with over two decades of experience in developing and implementing policies and programs to support vulnerable and underserved populations. With a Master's degree in Conflict Management from Kennesaw State University and a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice (cum laude) from St. Leo College, Anna combines academic rigor with a passion for transformative community impact.

Her career is marked by expertise in leadership, strategic planning, project management, and change management. As the Director of the Office of Provider Relations and ASO Coordination for Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), Anna fostered collaborative relationships with providers, oversaw contract negotiations, and implemented structured team approaches to advance organizational goals. Currently she is the CEO of the Georgia Parent Support Network where she has responsibility for the strategic leadership, organizational management, financial oversight, Board relations and stakeholder engagement.

Certified as a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, Anna excels in performance and productivity improvement. Her prior roles include Transition Coordinator, Quality and Policy Director, and Chief Operations Officer, where she led initiatives to optimize mental health services, enhance compliance, and secure multimillion-dollar funding through strategic grant applications.

Committed to measurable outcomes and systemic improvements, Anna has facilitated strategic planning sessions with leadership teams, developed integrated service models

for vulnerable populations, and expanded organizational reach through innovative program design.

Anna's professional achievements are complemented by advanced certifications in nonprofit management (Georgetown University) and negotiation strategies (Harvard University), reflecting her commitment to excellence in all endeavors. Residing in East Point, Georgia, Anna continues to lead with integrity and vision, dedicated to building equitable systems and empowering communities.



### **Eve Byrd, DNP, MSN, MPH**

After serving as director of the Center's Mental Health program from 2017-2025, Eve Byrd has stepped into the role of senior advisor. Prior to joining The Carter Center, she was a faculty member of the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing at Emory University and served as executive director of the Fuqua Center for Late-Life Depression, Department of Psychiatry at the Emory School of Medicine.

She has held leadership positions both nationally and locally in work aimed at eliminating stigma and improving access to care for people with behavioral health disorders. She supported the Special Advisor to the Governor on Mental Health, engaging stakeholders in the process that resulted in a settlement agreement between Georgia and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Byrd has expertise in building coalitions to improve behavioral health policy. She has been a consultant to the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, the Georgia Division of Aging, the Atlanta Regional Commission, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and Georgia State Rep. Pat Gardner. Until she joined The Carter Center, Byrd practiced as a nurse practitioner in geriatric psychiatry, establishing onsite services in affordable housing for older adults and young disabled, as well as practicing in a patient-centered medical home for individuals with dementia. She began her career as a public health nurse in Georgia.

Byrd earned a doctorate of nursing practice with a concentration in health systems leadership and implementation science from Emory's School of Nursing, where she also earned a master of science in nursing with a concentration in psychiatric/mental health nursing. She earned her master of public health in health policy from Emory's School of Public Health. She earned bachelor's degrees in nursing from Emory and in psychology from Florida State University.





**Josh Carter**

***Grandson of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, Co-Founder and CEO, The VEO-IBD Foundation***

Josh Carter is the fourth grandchild of President Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter. Josh is the CEO of the VEO-IBD Foundation, the first and only organization dedicated to parents and caregivers of children with Very Early Onset Inflammatory Bowel Disease. Josh is a small business owner, and he is the writer, producer, and host of the Unchanging Principles Podcast, where he talks about his life in a Presidential family and the American values taught to him by his grandparents. Josh is also a spokesman for The Carter Center's Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program, where he advocates improving the support and services available to family caregivers. Josh lives in Atlanta with his wife Sarah, his two boys Charlie and Jonathan, and his cocker spaniel Copper.



**Kristin Denning, MPH, BSN, RN**  
**Program Associate, The Carter Center RCMHCP**

Kristin Denning supports the Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program's public policy work and chairs the School-Based Behavioral Health Collaborative. Her background is in pediatrics and school health, having worked as a pediatric intensive care nurse in Macon, Georgia, and as a school health nurse at the American International School in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Denning has also supported community-based mental health work in Georgia by working with Resilient Georgia, a statewide mental health coalition. She holds an M.P.H. in global health, community health development from Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health, and a certificate in public mental health.



**Mitul Desai, JD**  
***CEO and Co-Founder, The Care Hack***

Mitul Desai has spent the past two decades helping care for his brother, who lives with schizophrenia. Driven by a mission to ensure no other family suffers in isolation as his did, Mitul co-founded The Care Hack to provide evidence-based, practical support for families navigating the complexities of serious mental illness.

Currently supporting thousands of families, The Care Hack operates through a multi-state provider contract and an innovative Medicaid partnership in New York State to deliver tech-enabled support for family caregivers of high-acuity populations. The company's work is further bolstered by a strategic partnership with Harvard's McLean Hospital, the nation's leading psychiatric hospital.

Mitul served for over three years as a strategic advisor to the CEO of Fountain House, the organization that pioneered the "Clubhouse Model" for serious mental illness, now utilized in over 300 locations worldwide. Previously, Mitul spent five years at Mastercard leading global teams in data services and product, and served in the Obama Administration as a Senior Advisor at the U.S. State Department. He began his career in healthcare, first as an intellectual property attorney at Merck and later in healthcare equity research at Piper Sandler.

Mitul serves on the Board of NAMI-NYC and is a regular speaker on mental health and the caregiving crisis. His work and insights have been featured in NPR, Forbes, and USA Today.



**Marcel Foster, MPH**  
***CEO and Co-Founder, Performance Hypothesis***

Marcel W. Foster, MPH, is an internationally recognized leader at the intersection of arts, policy, and public health. As CEO & Co-Founder of Performance Hypothesis, they directed the research for Georgia House Resolution 1007—the first legislative measure in the U.S. to formally link the arts to improved mental health outcomes. Performance Hypothesis co-directs an initiative with the Carter Center aiming to understand how the arts can be scaled to improve mental health among youth in GA’s Juvenile Justice system, as well as dozens of other clients with local and global arts & health initiatives.



**Jana French, MBA**

***Community Partnerships Director, Crisis Text Line***

Jana French is passionate about increasing access to and reducing the stigma around mental health care. Her ten year career has focused on mental health education and fostering conversations in communities about mental health. For the last seven years, she's helped communities connect with Crisis Text Line—a national nonprofit that provides free, 24/7 mental health and crisis support via text in English and Spanish. As the Public Sector Partnerships Director, she oversees the organization's work with federal, state, and local government agencies understand how their community is using Crisis Text Line. Previously, she worked at Phoenix House, a national nonprofit addiction treatment organization, focused on referral partnerships in the New York region.

Jana holds a Master's of Business Administration from Baruch College at the City University of New York, a Bachelor's in Journalism, and a Bachelor's in Family and Consumer Sciences from the University of Georgia.



**Amin Gilani, MD**

***Medical Director, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Alabama Psychiatry***

Dr. Amin Gilani is a double board-certified Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, serving as Medical Director at Alabama Psychiatry and Assistant Professor at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. He is an active Conciliation and Arbitration Board (CAB) member for the Southeast region and previously served as the Mental Health Lead for the Southeast AKSWB board, contributing to community-focused mental health initiatives and leadership development. He served as Captain in US Army Reserves from 2016 to 2025.



**Deb Houry, MD, MPH**  
**Nationally Recognized Physician, Researcher, and Public Health Leader**

Dr. Debra Houry is a nationally recognized physician, researcher, and public health leader with nearly three decades of experience guiding health care and public health strategy across federal government, health systems, and academia. She has consistently stepped up to address urgent challenges, ranging from hands-on trauma care in bustling county emergency rooms to tackling major issues at the forefront of the nation's most prominent public health agency. Through her current LLC she is an advisor to governors, state and regional health networks, health systems, and technology companies. She is also a senior fellow at the Yale University School of Public Health and an adjunct professor at Emory University.

A board-certified emergency physician, Dr. Houry brings a clinician's lens to national policy and organizational leadership. At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), she served across four presidential administrations, including as the Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Director for Program and Science. Over her tenure at CDC, Dr. Houry guided more than \$8 billion in public health programs, fostered cross-sector coalitions spanning all 50 states, and helped steer the nation through some of its most complex public health emergencies ranging from outbreaks to firearm violence. Dr. Houry has appeared on CNN, NPR, and major national outlets, and has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* for her leadership in crisis response and public health. An elected member of the National Academy of Medicine, she is the recipient of the American Medical Association Award for Outstanding Government Service, American College of Emergency Physicians Public Health Trailblazer Award, and has also authored 100+ academic articles.



**John Izzo, MS, LPC**  
**Assistant Director, Office of Behavioral Health Services, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice**

John Izzo has over 25 years' experience in the behavioral health field and has been working for the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) in several different capacities since 2005. He currently serves as the Assistant Director for the Office of Behavioral Health Services. John also serves as an expert consultant for The Seven Challenges and in that capacity provides training and consultation to programs and agencies that use this evidence-based model nationwide.

John is active and influential on a state-wide level as an executive board member for the Georgia School of Addiction Studies (GSAS) and serves on the Presentation Committee for the Annual GSAS Conference. In 2018, John received The Paula Crane Excellence in Addiction Treatment Award for outstanding achievement in the field of addiction.

John has also worked in Community Mental Health and has both facilitated and developed experiential treatment groups. John earned his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of South Carolina and a Master of Science in Psychology from Augusta University. Additionally, John has been a Licensed Professional Counselor in Georgia since 2003.



**Patrick J. Kennedy**

***Former U.S. Representative, NY Times Bestselling Author, Co-Founder of The Kennedy Forum***

Patrick J. Kennedy is an internationally recognized leader in mental health, addiction, and brain health policy, known for translating values, law, and evidence into operational systems of accountability. His career reflects a sustained commitment to ending discrimination, advancing health equity, and building institutions that deliver measurable outcomes across government, civil society, and the private sector.

During his 16 years representing Rhode Island's First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives, Kennedy emerged as a leading voice on mental health and addiction. He is best known as the lead sponsor of the landmark Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, passed with bipartisan support and signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 3, 2008. The law fundamentally reshaped access to care by requiring insurance coverage for mental health and substance use disorders to be no more restrictive than coverage for physical health conditions.

Beyond parity, Kennedy authored and co-sponsored dozens of bills addressing neurological and psychiatric disorders, including the Positive Aging Act, Foundations for Learning Act, National Neurotechnology Initiative Act, COMBAT PTSD Act, and Alzheimer's Treatment and Caregiver Support Act. He served on the House Appropriations Committee and key subcommittees overseeing health, education, labor, human services, and veterans' affairs—providing deep experience across statutory, regulatory, and budgetary systems.

In 2013, Patrick and his wife Amy founded The Kennedy Forum, the strongest demonstration of his ability to execute on a public-interest value proposition: ensuring that laws achieve their intended impact. Under his leadership, The Kennedy Forum moved beyond advocacy to develop practical, scalable tools that enable governments and institutions to assess performance, identify gaps, and drive reform. These include Parity Track, the Parity Resource Guide for Addiction & Mental Health, and the

Member's Guide to Mental Health Parity—tools that translate complex statutory and regulatory obligations into actionable guidance for policymakers, regulators, employers, and advocates.

Kennedy is the author of the New York Times bestseller *A Common Struggle* and the founder or co-founder of several national initiatives, including *Don't Deny Me*, *One Mind*, and *Psych Hub*. In 2023, The Kennedy Forum launched *Alignment for Progress*, a national 90/90/90 initiative to expand screening, access to evidence-based care, and sustained recovery.

In 2024, Kennedy joined Healthspieren as a Partner. In 2025, he launched the Center for Behavioral Health, along with *Action for Progress* and *Invest for Progress*, extending his execution-focused model globally.

He lives in New Jersey with his wife, Amy, and their five children.



**Becky Kurtz, JD**  
*Director, Atlanta Area Agency on Aging*

Becky Kurtz is passionate about supporting policies and services that maximize well-being as we and our communities grow older.

Since 2017, she has directed the area agency on aging within the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), which administers services and prepares for the rapidly aging metro Atlanta region.

Much of Ms. Kurtz's career has focused on protecting the rights and well-being of long-term care facility residents, as the national Director of the Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs within the U.S. Administration for Community Living, as Georgia's State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, and as attorney with the Atlanta Legal Aid Society.

Ms. Kurtz is a graduate of Columbia University School of Law and Emory & Henry College (Virginia). Ms. Kurtz is also an adjunct professor, teaching Aging Policy and Services within Georgia State University's Gerontology Institute.



## **Susie Kyle**

My story in mental health advocacy started over 30 years ago. At age 6, my son, Bo, was diagnosed with Pervasive Development Disorder. He was later diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a mood disorder, bipolar, and substance abuse. I began my advocacy work trying to help Bo and others like him longing to have the life that people around them seemed to find so easy to manage. I spent years advocating at the Capitol. I met with legislators, joined rallies to celebrate successes and fought hard for bills badly needed to support our loved ones.

In Bo's lifetime of challenges and efforts to navigate the world each day, I experienced firsthand the effects on a person diagnosed with a mental illness. I searched for years to find the right place or program to fit Bo's needs without success.

In October 2020, Bill McClung and I co-founded Clubhouse Atlanta. After years of involvement with NAMI( the National Alliance on Mental Illness) and having personal experience caring for family members struggling with mental illness, we determined that a personalized approach to care in a community-based setting was an effective way to help one achieve recovery and reach their potential.

When Bill and I discovered Clubhouse International, we were sold on the concept. Clubhouse International has accredited over 300 clubhouses that subscribe to a set of 37 specific standards. This approach has been proven to provide significant benefits to both the individual members and the community. A Clubhouse provides the space and support structure which an individual requires to recover, perhaps come to terms with their illness, make sense of the world, and build self-confidence.

I was so hopeful and excited that I had finally found the place.

Bo strongly influenced me and was a major part of my life. I lost Bo on September 11, 2020, at the age of 39. He is gone, but his spirit lives on through me. Bo is my driving force and to this day instills my determination as an advocate to help others like him. He was and still is my motivator. He has continued with me to establish the place he so

badly needed and the place I wanted for him. I am reminded of him every time I pass a box of Goober's in the grocery store, hear a song by Tool or see a MARTA bus/train go by. But it will always be his voice echoing in my head that will inspire me and drive me to continue on. Bo said to me on the last day I spoke with him, and many times before, "you aren't listening, you don't understand, I need a place to go where I will be accepted and understood. I want to work, have friends, and have a meaningful life.

Our Clubhouse Atlanta mission is "Clubhouse Atlanta is an inviting place for adults living with a mental illness that gives them respect, dignity and courage to reach their potential as valued and contributing members of their community". I believe clubhouse Atlanta is a solution.

I live in Vinings with my husband, Vernon, and our little dog, Pearl. I am Grandmom to five ages 2 to 26.



**Darlene Lynch, JD**

***Legal and Policy Director, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice***

Darlene Lynch is the Legal & Policy Director for Georgia Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, overseeing the housing and school justice programs and policy initiatives. She is a highly respected public policy expert and lawyer, with over 25 years of experience in social justice and economic empowerment at the state, federal, and international levels.

Before joining Georgia Appleseed, Darlene was the head of external relations for the Center for Victims of Torture Georgia. In this role, she spearheaded advocacy efforts to expand access to education, employment, and health care for Georgia's refugees and immigrants. She led the award-winning Business & Immigrant for Georgia (BIG) Partnership and other statewide coalitions, making significant strides in the integration and empowerment of immigrant communities.

Darlene's dedication to social justice extends beyond national borders. She led the U.N. advocacy office for the global nonprofit ECPAT International in Geneva, Switzerland, focusing on access to justice for child survivors of human trafficking.

In Georgia, Darlene has been a steadfast advocate for children's rights. She served as a staff attorney at Emory's Barton Child Law and Policy Center, where she worked tirelessly to advance the welfare and rights of children across the state.

Beyond her professional achievements, Darlene is deeply committed to community service. She volunteers as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for foster youth, provides pro bono legal services to immigrant victims of violence, and has served as a member of Georgia's Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force.



**Temple Moore, MScOT, MScGHD**  
**Director, Community Wellness and Outdoor Leadership, Refugee Women's Network**

Temple Moore, MScOT, MScGHD, is the Director for Community Wellness and Outdoor Leadership at Refugee Women’s Network, where she leads transformative community programs centered on inclusive community-driven approaches. She runs the Outdoor Wellness Program, Community Health Worker program, and Community Health research projects, and for the past 4 years she co-chaired the Clarkston Health Equity Coalition (CHEC). Temple holds a Masters in Global Health and Development from University of College London and a Masters in Occupational Therapy from Brenau University. She has a certification in Global Mental Health and Refugee Trauma from the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma. She has designed and implemented psychosocial programming and participatory research with displaced persons in national and international contexts including working with unaccompanied minors and adults via first response and community based participatory research and academic writing. She applies her clinical occupational therapist experience from rehabilitation and acute care hospitals, and community mental health centers to the refugee and immigrant space in metro Atlanta. She is five times published in peer reviewed journals and textbooks. At RWN, she combines trauma-informed community driven approaches to public health research, innovative programming and storytelling for refugee and immigrant women.



**Aashna Panjwani, MPH**  
***Senior Program Associate, The Carter Center RCMHCP***

Aashna Panjwani supports the Mental Health Program's public policy initiatives at The Carter Center. She leads the Center's mental health parity monitoring efforts, tracking Georgia's progress in implementing and enforcing parity laws. Her work includes convening the Georgia Parity Collaborative, managing the Parity Awareness Campaign, and organizing Mental Health Parity Day at the Capitol.

Aashna's passion for public mental health stems from her own journey with mental well-being. Through various volunteer efforts, she has worked to reduce stigma around mental health.

Prior to joining The Carter Center, Aashna served as a social and behavioral health analyst, supporting state health agencies in developing and implementing substance use prevention and harm reduction programs. While earning her Master of Public Health at George Washington University, she worked as a program manager for the Urban Health Programs, connecting Milken Institute School of Public Health students with community organizations across the D.C. metro area to strengthen local health initiatives.

She holds an M.P.H. with a concentration in global health program development, monitoring, and evaluation.



**Sarah Phillips, MPA**  
***Associate Director, The Carter Center RCMHCP***

Sarah Phillips is an experienced policy strategist and government affairs leader with expertise in legislative relations, policy analysis, and coalition-building. As Associate Director of Public Policy for The Carter Center’s Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program, she leads the program’s domestic policy portfolio across multistate, regional, and national contexts. In this role, she directs strategy and implementation-focused advocacy to advance equitable mental health and caregiving policies, with a particular emphasis on translating policy into practice.

Sarah oversees a multidisciplinary policy team and leads initiatives focused on behavioral health parity implementation and enforcement; coverage and payment for youth mental health services; systems of care for older adults with behavioral health conditions; supports for family caregivers; and policy approaches to improve crisis response systems. Her work emphasizes regulatory engagement, payer accountability, and cross-sector coordination to strengthen access, affordability, and quality of care.

A core throughline of Sarah’s career is the intersection of health access and financial protection. She is a recognized coverage and payment policy expert and serves as a Consumer Representative to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, providing national policy leadership on insurance regulation and consumer protections. Previously, as Director of Policy Strategies at Georgia Health Initiative, she designed and implemented statewide strategies to advance health equity through policy reform and systems change. As Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy at Georgia Watch—the state’s leading consumer advocacy organization—she identified disparate impacts on underserved communities and helped develop policy solutions to address inequities in health coverage and access to care. Earlier in her career, Sarah worked at the

Georgia State Capitol, where she conducted policy analysis on proposed legislation, advised legislators on pending measures, and tracked and advanced key policy priorities.

Sarah graduated with honors from Georgia State University with degrees in Political Science and Public Policy, and a Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation. She is currently a Doctor of Public Health candidate at Georgia State University.



**Gita Pullapilly, MA**  
**Award-Winning Filmmaker and Author**

Gita Pullapilly is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker, award-winning director, and author recognized as a powerful voice shaping the future of Hollywood storytelling. An Indian-American woman directing major studio films and television, Pullapilly has built a career at the intersection of cultural influence and commercial success. Her work blends sharp social commentary with bold entertainment, demonstrating that distinctive voices can drive both audience engagement and industry impact.

The daughter of Indian immigrants who came to the United States to pursue careers in education, Pullapilly grew up in a household grounded in curiosity, resilience, and the belief that stories can change how people see the world. Those values continue to shape her work today, as her films often explore the systems that shape everyday life—from economic inequality to institutional power—while remaining entertaining and globally resonant.

After earning a finance degree from the University of Notre Dame and a master's degree from Northwestern University, Pullapilly began her career as a television journalist. Reporting on real-world events sharpened her instinct for human stories and deepened her understanding of how narrative shapes culture, a perspective that continues to define her filmmaking.

Her Emmy-nominated documentary, *The Way We Get By*, premiered at SXSW, won 18 international festival awards, and aired nationally on PBS's *POV*. Her narrative feature, which she co-wrote and co-directed, *Beneath the Harvest Sky*, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and Tribeca, establishing her as a filmmaker capable of bringing deeply human stories to global audiences.

Pullapilly's breakthrough into mainstream commercial filmmaking came with the dark comedy, *Queenpins*, which she co-wrote and co-directed. Starring Kristen Bell, Kirby Howell-Baptiste, Vince Vaughn, and Paul Walter Hauser, the film was a global Netflix Top 10 hit—demonstrating that bold storytelling led by diverse voices can reshape industry expectations while delivering significant commercial impact. She is also a Black List-recognized screenwriter, underscoring the strength of her voice not only as a director, but as a creator of original material.

Pullapilly's influence extends into television as well. She directed two episodes of Paramount+'s hit series, *Tulsa King*, starring Sylvester Stallone, becoming the first female director to work on the series. She has also directed for Apple TV+'s acclaimed series, *Little America*, and was selected for the Ryan Murphy Half Initiative for Television Directing.

A Presidential Leadership Scholar, Guggenheim Fellow, Fulbright Scholar, recipient of the 23rd Annual Gotham Award Calvin Klein Spotlight on Women Filmmakers award, and one of *Variety's* 10 Directors to Watch, Pullapilly is recognized not only for her creative achievements but for her leadership at the intersection of storytelling, culture, and global dialogue—representing a new generation of creative leaders shaping the future of global storytelling.



**Jason Resendez**

**President and CEO, National Alliance for Caregiving**

Jason is a nationally recognized family policy expert and advocate. As President and CEO of the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), he leads research, policy, and systems change initiatives to transform how America values and supports its 63+ million family caregivers. In 2023, Jason was named one of the most consequential leaders in health and medicine by STAT News.

Prior to joining NAC, Jason was the founding executive director of the UsAgainstAlzheimer's Center for Brain Health Equity where he pioneered the concept of Brain Health Equity through peer-reviewed research, public health partnerships, and public policy. In 2020, Jason was named one of America's top influencers in aging by PBS's Next Avenue alongside Michael J. Fox and former Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. He has been quoted by The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, STAT News, and Univision on issues related to caregiving and healthcare. Jason is from South Texas and graduated from Georgetown University.



## **Representative Kim Schofield**

State Representative Kim Schofield serves the citizens of House District 63, which includes areas of Southeast Atlanta, East Point, College Park, Forest Park and Hapeville. She was elected to the Georgia General Assembly in 2017 and currently serves as Secretary of the Urban Affairs Committee. She also serves on the Creative Arts & Entertainment, Health, Industry and Labor and Small Business Development committees. She is an appointed member to the Atlanta Commission on Women. As a public servant, Kim lives out her core values of access, action and accountability. Kim's professional career spans across healthcare, financial, transportation, education and nonprofit agencies. Kim has more than 15 years of experience in consulting, coaching, teaching, training workshops and engagement seminars, bringing alignment within political, corporate, community, law enforcement, healthcare and faith-based organizations. Kim holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in theology and organizational leadership. In 2020, she will hold a doctorate from Oral Roberts University. In her health policy work, Kim was appointed by former Governor Nathan Deal to serve as the chair of the Georgia Council on Lupus Education and Awareness. She holds a federal appointment to the Health IT Policy Committee and crafts legislative policy recommendations to the National Coordinator for Health IT as a framework for the development and adoption of a nationwide health information infrastructure. Kim has also worked as a lupus research specialist at the Emory School of Medicine, and she serves as an advocacy chair for the Georgia Chapter of the Lupus Foundation of America. Kim has authored several articles and has been a reoccurring guest on television, radio and other media outlets.



**Krystal Scott, MPH**

*Program Strategy Manager, Pivotal Ventures*

Krystal Scott (she/her) is Program Strategy Manager at Pivotal, a group of organizations working to accelerate the pace of social progress for women and young people in the U.S. and around the world. At Pivotal, Krystal supports a portfolio of impact partners with the goal of making caregiving more affordable for families in the U.S. Krystal has held leadership roles in organizations focused on health and care policy, specifically aging and disability policy, and has convened advocacy coalitions in several states and Washington, D.C. Krystal holds a BA and an MPH from the University of Florida. She lives in New York City with her husband and two young children.



**Derrick Townsend**  
**CEO, Hopeful Change, LLC**

Derrick Townsend is the CEO of Hopeful Change, LLC and the Founder of The Hopeful Change Project, Inc., organizations dedicated to supporting youth and families impacted by trauma and violence. Derrick has over 20 years of experience working with inner-city, at-risk youth via community outreach, development, and programming. He was compelled to develop a strong, effective, and reliable mentoring and mental health program to address the socioemotional and socioeconomic disparities facing inner-city youth. Derrick offers a rare blend of passion, vision, and leadership, playing a critical role in advancing violence prevention and intervention efforts across Metro Atlanta and the nation. As a bridge builder with a deep understanding of the root causes of violence, he translates insight into action through innovative strategies and impactful interventions within his organizations. Under his guidance, Hopeful Change has become an invaluable resource for the community, providing essential services and support to those who need it most.

**Dawn Townsend MS, LPC, NCC, TF-CBT**  
**COO, Hopeful Change, LLC**

Dawn Townsend, MS, LPC, NCC, TF-CBT is the COO of Hopeful Change, LLC and the Founder of The Hopeful Change Project, Inc. Dawn earned her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Spelman College, graduating summa cum laude and in the top 10 of her class, and received her Master of Science in Community Counseling from Mercer University. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Georgia and a National Certified Counselor with more than two decades of experience helping young people navigate trauma, amplifying their voices while promoting healing and resilience through

effective, evidence-based holistic care. Dawn creates safe spaces where wounded stories are honored, and where youth, families, schools, and communities can rise—rewriting pain into pathways of power and possibility. Passionate about systemic change and prevention that enhances community health, wellness, and equity, Dawn has poured her experience and expertise into Hopeful Change, providing responsive, trauma-informed, community-centered interventions that foster hope and create change.



**Belisa Urbina**  
***CEO, Ser Familia***

For more than 25 years, Belisa Urbina has been on a mission to break the stigma around mental health and ensure that Latino families have access to the support they need to thrive. She believes that strong, healthy families are the foundation of strong, healthy communities. In 2001, she and her husband, Miguel, co-founded Ser Familia Inc., Georgia's leading nonprofit providing culturally responsive family, social, and mental health services to the Latino community. As CEO of Ser Familia, she led the organization to earn national CARF accreditation and national recognition for its family-centered model from the American Psychiatric Association, SAMHSA, the American Public Health Association among others.

Belisa has been celebrated as a Braves Community Hero, recipient of the NFL Hispanic Heritage Leadership Award, honoree of the Georgia Women's Legislative Caucus and received 2 congressional commendations. In 2024, Gov. Brian Kemp appointed her to the Commission on Equal Opportunity. She also serves on multiple national and state boards, including the National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Mental Health and Voices for Georgia's Children.

Belisa is a graduate of Leadership Atlanta and the Regional Leadership Institute and remains a passionate advocate for strong families and equitable access to mental health services.



**Emily Anne Vall, PhD**

*Executive Director, Resilient Georgia*

Emily Anne Vall has dedicated her career to improving children’s health. In 2019, Vall became Executive Director of Resilient Georgia where she has led the creation of a statewide coalition of trauma-informed organizations by convening diverse private and public partners to create a birth through 26 year old integrated behavioral health system. The statewide coalition includes over 700 stakeholders working to prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and support healing through integrated behavioral health resources and services.

She is a proven leader of collaborative, multi-agency initiatives impacting Georgia’s children having served as the Child Health and Wellness director at the Georgia Department of Public Health where she oversaw Georgia Shape, the Governor’s childhood obesity initiative. She spearheaded robust employee wellness efforts at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, including leading the employee wellness team for the pediatric health care system. She began her career as a Title 1 middle school public school educator.

Vall earned her PhD in Physical Education and Health Pedagogy with a cognate in Diversity Studies from the University of South Carolina. She completed her undergraduate teaching degree at Florida Southern College before attending the University of South Florida focusing on physical education and special needs populations.



### **Rachel Waford, PhD**

Rachel Waford, PhD, ABPP is a licensed and board-certified clinical psychologist in Atlanta, GA. She is an Assistant Professor at the Emory University Rollins School of Public Health, Hubert Department of Global Health and Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. Dr. Waford is a Lead Psychologist in the Clinical and Research Program for Psychosis at Grady. Her clinical research interests focus on understanding barriers to care in community settings for individuals living with psychosis, promoting care continuity through health systems-strengthening models, and implementing facilitators of recovery. She uses public mental health frameworks to inform innovative models of service provision, community engagement, and peer-led initiatives. Dr. Waford is co-author of *The Psychosis Response Guide: How to help young people in psychiatric crises*, and has delivered a TEDx talk entitled, *Early Intervention in Psychosis: Broadening our Mental Health Community about the importance of communities in supporting recovery for young people with psychosis*.



**Kaitlin Ward, MPA**  
**Senior Program Associate, *The Carter Center RCMHCP***

Kaitlin Ward is a public policy professional with extensive experience in healthcare policy, state government, and legislative affairs. She is passionate about advancing policies that improve access to mental health care and strengthen communities. She serves as a Senior Program Associate for Public Policy with the The Carter Center's Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program, where she supports state-level policy initiatives across Georgia and the broader Southeast through policy research, analysis, stakeholder engagement, and strategic collaboration.

Her work focuses on key policy priorities including mental health parity, school-based behavioral health, support for caregivers, older adults with serious mental illness, and crisis response systems for mental health and substance abuse. In her role, she works closely with advocates, journalists, legislators, state agencies, and community stakeholders to elevate mental health policy issues, foster cross-sector relationships, and support effective policy reform efforts.

Prior to joining The Carter Center, Kaitlin served as Legislative Liaison for the Georgia Department of Community Health, where she represented the agency at the Capitol on healthcare policy matters including the State Health Benefit Plan, Medicaid, and facility regulation. She previously worked in the Georgia State Senate and has experience in both state and federal government relations.

Kaitlin holds both a Bachelor of Arts from Auburn University in Political Science with a concentration in American Politics and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Georgia specializing in Public Policy, Public Management and Organizational Theory, and Local Government Administration.