



# Early Childhood Advisory Council

## ECAC Members



**Patricia E. Persell, Co-Chair**

New York State Head Start Collaboration Office, Collaboration Director  
<http://www.ccf.ny.gov/HS/index.cfm>

Patricia E. Persell is New York State Head Start Collaboration Director, working to ensure that Head Start is included in state programs and policies. She began her career as a nursery school teacher, worked as Education Coordinator for Albany County Head Start and then served as Director of the Bank Street Head Start in New York City. A longtime La Leche League Leader volunteer, she also serves on the Obesity Prevention in Child Care Partnership, a state level steering committee.



**Dona Anderson, Co-Chair**

NY Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, Executive Director  
<https://www.earlychildhoodny.org/>

Dona Anderson is the Executive Director at the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, which is housed at the City University of New York within the Office of Academic Affairs. She leads the work of a dynamic, intelligent, and passionate team dedicated to building essential systems and services to ensure a highly effective early childhood workforce for New York in order to guarantee that all young children and their families have access to excellence. She is responsible for strategic planning, fund development, project growth, and all aspects of the successful management and leadership of the Institute and leads the organizational culture of inclusivity, diversity, teamwork, flexibility, responsiveness, and collaboration. Dona has presented at national conferences and co-authored a variety of public policy reports on the topics of child poverty, homelessness, early childhood, and trauma.



**Melissa Alexander**

NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Employment and Income Support Programs

Melissa Alexander has spent the last 13 years in the Division of Employment and Income Support Programs (EISP) at the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). Melissa has a background in administering employment-driven programs that support OTDA's mission to enhance the economic security of low-income individuals and families. She currently works in EISP's Temporary Assistance (TA) Bureau, and is primarily responsible for developing State policy, ensuring federal TANF compliance, and monitoring local public assistance programs. Melissa has a Master's degree in Public Administration from the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, and a Bachelor's degree in Social Welfare from the College of Saint Rose.



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**Fred Arcuri**

Community Development Specialist, Corning Incorporated

Fred Arcuri has spent the last 15 years in economic and community development, the first three in public service, while at the City of Utica, New York, then at a regional economic development agency headquartered in Rome, New York, and now is employed by Corning Community Engagement. Since coming to Corning Incorporated, Fred has focused primarily on child care, workforce development, and community education. Fred is registered to practice law in the State of New York, and is a graduate of Villanova Law School, and before that, the University of Vermont.

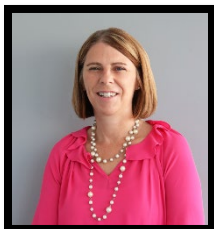


**Melodie Baker,**

Just Equations, National Policy Director

Rockefeller Institute of Government, Early Childhood Fellow  
Raising New York, Co-Chair

Melodie Baker is the National Policy Director at Just Equations where she works to advance the role of math education in promoting equity through national partnerships and policy initiatives. Melodie is also the early childhood fellow for Rockefeller Institute of Government's partnership with New York States' First 1000 Days on Medicaid Initiative. A nationally recognized education leader and advocate, Baker has devoted her career to expanding opportunities for children and families. She has chaired various national, and state-wide initiatives, including the Coalition for Community Schools and Raising New York, and was recently tapped to serve on New York's *Reimagining Education Advisory Council* to devise strategies for re-opening schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to joining Just Equations in 2020, she was Director of Education for the United Way in Buffalo, New York. Melodie earned her Bachelor's in Public Relations from Buffalo State College, a Master's in Executive Leadership and Change from Daemen College and is finishing a PhD in Educational Psychology and Quantitative Methods at SUNY Buffalo.



**Laurie Black**

United Way of CNY, Community Education Director

Laurie Black is the Community Education Director at the United Way of CNY, working on education advocacy and overseeing the Book Buddies program in partnership with the Syracuse City School District. Previously, Laurie worked for seven years at the United Way as the Director of the Early Childhood Alliance



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(ECA), a cross-sector collaborative working to improve school readiness throughout Onondaga County, NY. Laurie has worked for over 26 years in education policy, starting her career working within state government at the Maryland General Assembly and the New York State Legislature. Laurie departed state government to work on local education policy, working for fourteen years at SYRACUSE 20/20, a unique civic Board working to improve the quality of life in Syracuse and throughout the region. At SYRACUSE 20/20, Laurie became passionate about early childhood policy and worked with local leadership to launch the Early Childhood Alliance in 2015 and becoming its first Director in 2016. In her current role at the United Way, Laurie partners with the community to improve educational outcomes for children and adults in Onondaga County.



### **Evelyn Blanck**

New York Center for Child Development, Associate Executive Director  
<http://www.nyccd.org>

Evelyn Blanck is the Associate Executive Director of the New York Center for Child Development and Program Director for the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Treatment Program. She is Co-President of the New York Zero to Three Network and Chair of the New York City Early Childhood Mental Health Strategic Work Group, an advisory committee to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Evelyn has focused much of her work on the integration of mental health in education, primary care and all child serving systems. She has a New York City mayoral appointment to the Community Services Board Subcommittee on Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.



### **Suzanne Bolling**

NYS Education Department, Office of Special Education

Suzanne is the New York State 619 Coordinator and Assistant Counsel with the New York State Education Department Office of Special Education. She currently oversees the Preschool Policy, Nondistrict, and Incident Management Units in their work to issue guidance, provide technical assistance, facilitate stakeholder engagement, and conduct quality assurance and compliance monitoring activities to ensure equal opportunities and positive results for students with disabilities across New York State.

Prior to joining the Education Department, Suzanne worked for the New York State Assembly as Associate Counsel to the Assembly Education, Higher Education, and Libraries and Educational Technology Committees. Suzanne holds a Master of Public Administration from the State University at Albany and a Juris Doctor degree from Albany Law School.



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### **Bonnie Catlin, LCSW**

New York State Office of Mental Health  
Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives  
Director for Strategic Clinical Solutions

Since her arrival at OMH, Bonnie has pioneered prevention efforts, first as the Director for Strategic Clinical Solutions within the Division for Integrated Community Services for Children & Families, and now in the newly created Office for Prevention and Health Initiatives (OPHI). Her leadership on child and family prevention, infant and early childhood mental health, integration with primary care, cross system collaboration, and school-community partnership has helped move the dial on the social emotional wellness of children and families and helped lay the groundwork for OPHI. She has a knowledge base and wealth of experience in children's mental health, early childhood services, and Systems of Care. Prior to her tenure at OMH, she worked for nearly 20 years in county government. Having served as an Intensive Case Manager, Children's Single Point of Access (SPOA) Coordinator, and the Clinical Director, she has a deep understanding of the children's service delivery system and insights into how to continue to improve it.



### **Kelvin Chan PhD, MTS, MPH**

Early Childhood, Robin Hood Foundation, Managing Director  
[www.robinhood.org](http://www.robinhood.org)

Kelvin Chan, Ph.D., is the Managing Director of Early Childhood at Robin Hood. He leads the Foundation's ambitious efforts to optimize birth outcomes, maternal health and early childhood development. Dr. Chan's portfolio includes the Fund for Early Learning, one of the nation's largest philanthropic funds focused on optimizing brain development in infants and toddlers. Before joining Robin Hood, Dr. Chan was the director of early childhood development at the New York City Health Department. Dr. Chan's undergraduate, master's and doctoral training in public health are from Brown, Columbia and Cambridge Universities, respectively. He also holds a master's degree in comparative world religions from Harvard University. Dr. Chan is also a member of the Board of Directors of Child Care Aware of America ([www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)).



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**Meredith Chimento**

Early Care and Learning Council, Executive Director

<http://www.earlycareandlearning.org>

Meredith Chimento is the Executive Director of the Early Care and Learning Council (ECLC). Meredith began her career as a Community Education Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic, followed by many years at the Capital District YMCA. Prior to ECLC Meredith worked for the United Way of the Greater Capital Region focusing on ways to change community conditions specific to basic needs, education, income and health.



**Philip Cleary**

North Syracuse Central School District, Special Education Teacher

<http://nscsd.org/webpages/pcleary/>

Phil Cleary represents New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Phil is a career classroom teacher working at the North Syracuse Early Education Program (4410) in North Syracuse. Phil also serves as NYSUT's political action coordinator for education and social justice in Central New York.



**Pedro Cordero**

Goddard Riverside Community Center, Director of Child Development Services

<http://www.goddard.org>

Pedro Cordero is currently the Systems Specialist for the Region II Office of Head Start-Training and Technical Assistance Network. His career in early education spans 40 years in multiple positions: Classroom Teacher, Child Development Services Program Director, Operations and Policy work with the Mayor's Office for Children and Families and the NYC Administration for Children Services. In addition, he has served as a Federal Monitor of Head Start grantees and Adjunct Instructor at the City University of New York, Dept of Early Education. With the ECAC, he is the Co-Chair of the Strong Families subcommittee.



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**Andre Eaton MSW**

The Parent-Child Home Program, New York State Regional Coordinator

<http://www.parent-child.org>

Andre Eaton is the Regional Coordinator for The Parent-Child Home Program, a home-based literacy and parenting program for at-risk families. Before joining The Parent-Child Home Program, he worked for Covenant House New York, as Southeastern Regional Director for Jumpstart for Young Children, Inc. and served as Executive Director of Covenant House Georgia. He is currently a candidate for a Masters of Divinity at The Interdenominational Theological Center and works as a student supervisor to those studying social work.



**Robert G. Frawley**

Early Childhood Policy Consultant

Bob Frawley's work has been directed at building effective systems of supports and services for children and families. This includes working on a variety of research and policy initiatives, including projects addressing such issues as runaway and homeless youth, child abuse and neglect, juvenile justice, prevention programs, and services for children with disabilities. For the last 30 years, he has focused his efforts primarily on issues related to young children and their families. Bob has led many statewide early childhood initiatives. On the ECAC, he Co-chairs the Finance and Data Development Work Groups. Outside of the ECAC, he supports the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance, which is a project of the Adirondack Foundation and is a Board Member and Treasurer of NYS Association of Infant Mental Health and is also a board member and Policy Committee Chair of Hunger Solutions NY.



**Tara N. Gardner**

Day Care Council of New York

Tara N. Gardner is an executive leader with expertise in all facets of nonprofit management, operations, programming, and fundraising. Her work has consistently focused on leveling the playing field for those living in under-resourced NYC communities. Through her previous work at the New York City Mission Society, the Abyssinian Development Corporation, and The Fresh Air Fund, she has impacted the lives of thousands of NYC children and families. In her current role as the Executive Director of the Day Care Council of New York, she brings her experience to NYC's early childhood education and care sector. Because her

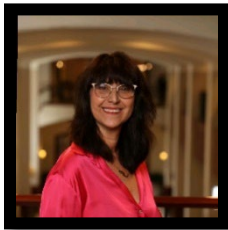




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dedication to children and families extends beyond the workplace, she serves on the following boards of directors: Ice Hockey In Harlem, Friends of St. Charles Borromeo School, and Delgracia Corp.



### **Doctor Laura V. González-Murphy**

NYS Department of State, Director of Immigration Policy and Research

Doctor Laura V. González-Murphy, as of 2022 formally the Executive Director of the Office for New Americans (ONA) and previously Immigration Policy and Research at the NY State Department of State, serving as lead policy advisor on the State's response to federal immigration policies. In this capacity she has led the design and implementation of unique initiatives to ameliorate the human impact of the latest federal immigration policies and demographic flows, such as Governor Cuomo's Golden Door program which provides mental health assistance to immigrant families across New York and the Ramirez June Navigator, which focuses on empowering immigrant families with developmental disabilities support as they seek to access services they are entitled to. Prior to this position she served as Director of ONA, overseeing the operation of the Office's network of service providers across the state, a model of immigrant integration in the country, and the implementation of NaturalizeNY, the first public-private partnership of its kind, aimed at lifting the financial barrier to citizenship faced by New Yorkers. She has also served as consultant on immigration policy issues with the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Welcoming International and the Mexican Congress, etc. Prior to this position she was a Research Assistant Professor at Rockefeller College, SUNY at Albany, where she has taught a variety of courses on foreign policy, immigration, human rights, and immigration and Latin American politics. She is the recipient of several awards, such as: Empire Justice Center Leadership Award, Mexico's Foreign Ministry's Mexican American Leader, and in 2020 she was awarded Mexico's highest recognition granted to individuals who have dedicated their lives to improving the well-being of Mexicans and other Latinos outside its borders, the Othli Award. González-Murphy earned her PhD in comparative politics and in international relations from SUNY at Albany. She holds an MS in urban planning and environmental studies from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a BS in political science from Elmira College, graduating *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa. Her book *Protecting Immigrant Rights in Mexico: Understanding the State-Civil Society Nexus*, was re-published by Routledge (June 2015). She is also the author of various papers and book chapters on immigration trends and policies, including New York's first public overview of its immigration policy.

- "New York State's Immigration Policy: An Immigrant Policy Perspective." Co-author of Chapter in Scott Fein's *Immigration: Key To the Future*. New York State Bar Association, 2021.



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**Alexis Harrington**

NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Regional Offices, Associate Commissioner for Program Implementation and Service Access, Division of Service Access, Program Implementation and Stakeholder Support

[www.opwdd.ny.gov](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov)

Alexis Harrington supports service access as well as several program areas at OPWDD including self-direction, employment and meaningful community activities and day services, housing, family and support services, and crisis services. Ms. Harrington has worked in the field of healthcare policy, as a Master of Social Work, focused on Medicaid reform and transformations for nearly 10 years and has supported initiatives such as Children's Health Homes and the children's behavioral health transition to Medicaid Managed Care. She has supported policy development and implementation by collaborating with many state agencies over the years such as Office of Children and Family Services, NYS Education Department, NYS Office of Mental Health, NYS Department of Health, and Office of Addiction Services and Supports. She also serves on the Commissioner's Advisory Panel representing NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities.



**Liz Isakson, MD**

Docs for Tots, Executive Director

Dr. Isakson is the Executive Director of Docs for Tots, a non-profit organization that promotes practices, policies, and investments that will enable young children to thrive. Docs for Tots creates linkages between doctors, policymakers, early childhood practitioners, and other stakeholders to ensure that children grow up healthy. Dr.

Isakson is a pediatrician and public health practitioner with over 20 years of experience. She has multiple publications published across the systems of early care and education, health, and family economic security. She teaches advocacy to graduate level students at Mt. Sinai School of Public Health. Dr. Isakson trained in general pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of New York where she was Chief Resident. She received her medical degree from the University of Connecticut Medical School.





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**Kristen Kerr**

New York State Association for the Education of Young Children, Executive Director <http://www.nysaeyc.org>

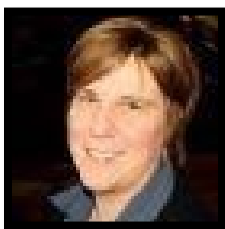
Kristen is the Executive Director of the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children, (NYSAEYC), a membership association for early childhood professionals. She first joined NYSAEYC as Public Policy Coordinator and as a longtime member of the association, brings more than 20 years of experience as an early care and education professional. She represented NYSAEYC as co-convener of the Winning Beginning NY coalition.



**Karen Kissinger**

NYS Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services, Bureau Director

As the Director of the Bureau of Program and Community Development, Karen Kissinger leads a team to strengthen families across the state by enhancing protective factors. This work includes Healthy Families New York home visiting, Family Resource Centers, Family Opportunity Centers, and other voluntary primary prevention services that help families and communities thrive. Karen's past experience includes supporting families through work in the OCFS Division of Child Care Services, at a licensed child care program, and volunteering at pediatric hospital unit.



**Abbe Kovacik**

BrightsideUp, Executive Director

Abbe Kovacik is the Executive Director of the BrightsideUp. located in Albany, NY. BrightsideUp is a non-profit agency focused on improving the quality of early childhood education and after-school programming across the community. Abbe served as faculty at Schenectady County Community College, Fulton Montgomery Community College, and at the College of Saint Rose where she taught courses in early childhood education. Abbe holds a B.S. in Psychology from Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, and a Master of Education in Educational Psychology from the College of Saint Rose. She is the co-author of *Observing and Understanding Child Development: A Child Development Manual* published by Delmar Cengage Learning.



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**Larry Marx**

The Children's Agenda

Larry Marx is CEO of [The Children's Agenda](#), an advocacy organization for effective policies and evidence-based solutions for the health, education and success of children, especially those who are vulnerable because of poverty, racism, health inequities and trauma. Larry has been an organizer and leader of political campaigns and social change organizations for the past 40 years. He serves on the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, ROC the Future, and is past co-chair of the Board of Directors of the national Partnership for America's Children, a network of 52 state and local children's advocacy organizations in 44 states.



**Kate McCormick, PhD**

State University of New York at Cortland, State University of New York at Cortland  
Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education

Kate McCormick is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the State University of New York (SUNY) Cortland. Dr. McCormick is a former preschool teacher and current teacher educator who has been teaching and researching in the field of early childhood education for nearly fifteen years. She is the President of the New York State Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NYSACTE).



**Jenn O'Connor**

The Education Trust- NY  
Director of Partnerships and Early Childhood Policy

Jenn O'Connor is Director of Partnerships and Early Childhood Policy for The Education Trust-NY, where she works alongside Raising NY coalition members to set goals for the coalition's path forward. She also supports Ed Trust-NY's external relations by ensuring strong relationships with statewide partners.

She previously served at several nonprofits, both state and national, including: as Director of Policy and Advocacy for Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY), where she was also Director of the NYS Home Visiting Coordination Initiative (HVCI); as NYS Director of Council for a Strong America; as Senior Associate for the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy; as Senior Analyst for the National Governors Association; and as Director of Legislative Affairs and Education for the National Conference of Insurance Legislators. In addition to a background in early childhood, maternal and child health,



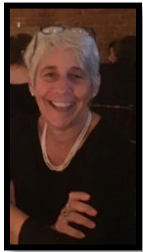
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mental health, health insurance, and education policy, she has several years of campaign and legislative experience.

Jenn is currently a board member and policy committee co-chair of New York Zero to Three. She is immediate past co-chair of Winning Beginning New York, as well as former public policy chair for both the NY Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) and the NYS Network for Youth Success, and former vice president of the board of PCANY.

She sits on the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and the Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force. She represents the Empire State Campaign for Child Care on the ECAC.



### **Jackie Orr**

NYS Community Action Association  
<https://www.nyscommunityaction.org/>

Jackie is currently the New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) CEO and has been since 2018. NYSCAA is the membership association, providing training and technical assistance to the 47 Community Action Agencies across the state. Jackie worked at NYSCAA as the Director of Operations at NYSCAA from 2010-2016. She left NYSCAA to work for the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP) as the CSBG State Assistance Director. During her time with NASCSPP, Jackie worked to assist state offices with their management of Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) responsibilities, helped to organize the new CSBG Annual Report and created tools and resources for state office administrators. Jackie is a Certified Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) Master Trainer and has several years of experience in facilitation and training. She has also worked in community-based organizations in the areas of mental health and literacy.



### **Raymond Pierce**

NYS Department of Health, Bureau of Early Intervention

Ray Pierce is the Director of the Early Intervention Program in New York State which serves nearly 70,000 children and families. He has over 20 years of experience helping people with disabilities to live independently in the community with appropriate services and supports. His previous experience includes working at state rehabilitation and developmental disability agencies in NYS and Massachusetts. In the nonprofit world, he enjoyed assisting people to access public benefits, employment, housing, and health care. A Binghamton University graduate, Mr. Pierce concentrated his studies in human development, public administration, and leadership.



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**Suzanne C. Sousa**

Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation, Executive Director

Suzanne C. Sousa, Executive Director of the Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation, is responsible for all aspects of the organization's grant making, including both daily operations and broader program strategy development. Before joining the Foundation, Ms. Sousa was the Director of Development and Special Projects at New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS), where she served as the lead liaison to the philanthropic community as well as state and federal agencies and secured and managed millions in funding for several strategic initiatives. She had first served as the agency's Director of the Central Mentoring Office overseeing efforts towards expanding mentoring opportunities for children and youth in foster care. Ms. Sousa has also held senior positions at the National Guild for Community Arts Education and The Peter F. Drucker Foundation, both in New York City. Suzanne holds a B.A. in Art History and Geography from Rutgers University and a M.S. in Public Policy and Management from The New School University.



**Lauri Strano**

Children's Institute, Director of Programs

As the Director of Programs and Services at Children's Institute, Lauri Strano manages large-scale community-wide collaborations and assessment systems serving young children and youth. Her experience includes working with providers, parents, and policymakers in the context of local, state, and federally funded grants and initiatives. She holds BS degrees from University of Rochester in Psychology and Political Science, and an MS in Elementary Education and NYS certification with specialization in early childhood from Nazareth College. Lauri also has fifteen years of experience in early childhood development programs as an administrator, teacher, and caregiver.



**Carolyn L. Wiggins**

NYS Head Start Association, Fort George Community Services, Executive Director/CEO  
<http://www.fortgeorgecenter.org>

Carolyn brings over 30 years of experience as an early childhood and higher education administrator to the Head Start Community. She is skilled in nonprofit organizations, event planning, program evaluation, strategic planning and organizational development. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education from Antioch College and a Master of Education from



Antioch College Graduate School of Education in Elementary Education. She holds both New York State Permanent Teacher's Certification and California Community College Instructor's Credential in Early Childhood Education, valid for life. Under Carolyn's leadership she has expanded Fort George from a NYC Head Start Delegate Agency, serving 186 children, to a Direct Head Start/ Early Head Start Grantee serving 422 children. The agency now covers two boroughs and four communities: Washington Heights, West Harlem, and Hamilton Heights in Manhattan and Morrisania in the Bronx. In partnership with NYP Hospital Fort George provides community health workers serving children with chronic health conditions. Carolyn is also a member of NYP/PPS Finance Committee. She is member of South Bronx Rising, the New York City DOE Birth-Five Advisory Group, the National Head Start Association State Leadership Team and the President of the New York State Head Start Association.



### **Nora Yates**

NYS Office of Children and Family Services, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Child Care Services

Nora Yates is the deputy commissioner in the Division of Child Care Services and is responsible for overseeing all aspects of New York's early care and education system supported by the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), which currently includes more than \$2 billion in federal funding. The division also oversees all federal training requirements for early childhood providers supported by CCDF, provider health and safety and quality compliance, state licensing and regulations and the child care assistance program to support families accessing care, and regularly collaborates with a wide variety stakeholders on key priorities related to children and families.

Previously, Ms. Yates served as the director of the Center for Community Health at the New York State Department of Health where she oversaw more than \$2 billion in state and local funding that supported key public health programs, including chronic disease prevention, communicable disease control, family health and nutrition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic response, she led the creation and stand up of the state Contact Tracing Initiative, the largest contact tracing program in the country, and also directed the COVID-19 testing sites and testing initiatives. Before joining the Department of Health, Ms. Yates served as the Governor's assistant secretary for human services and the director of the Community, Opportunity, Reinvestment (CORE) Initiative, where she worked to align state and local agencies on a common framework to examine key issues in distressed communities. Ms. Yates joined the State as part of the



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inaugural class of Empire Fellows, one of nine individuals selected to serve in policy-level positions throughout Executive agencies.

Before joining the state, Ms. Yates served as the executive director of the Pride Center of the Capital Region and worked at the Empire State Pride Agenda as field director leading New York's marriage equality effort. She earned bachelor's and master's of arts degrees at the State University of New York at Albany, a master's in public administration from the Sage Graduate School and a master's in women's studies and public policy from the University at Albany.