

# California Disability and Aging Community Living Advisory Committee (DACLAC)

## Committee Membership 2024-2025

### **Stakeholder Co-Chairs**

*Sheri Burns, Silicon Valley Independent Living Center*

Sheri Burns is a San Jose native and has worked in independent living/disability services for over thirty-eight years, with twenty-five years of experience as an executive or deputy executive director in Independent Living. Ms. Burns holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Therapy, is a Registered Occupational Therapist, and obtained a certificate in non-profit management from the United Way, Silicon Valley. She also has extensive training in disability rights and laws, ADA access standards, and disaster services focusing on Access and Functional Needs.

*Hagar Dickman, Justice in Aging*

Hagar is a Senior Attorney at Justice in Aging, where she works to achieve equity in California's Home and Community Based Services for low-income older adults. In that role, Hagar identifies barriers and solutions to increasing access to California's community support programs, and provides education, training and support to stakeholders and advocates statewide. Prior to Justice in Aging, Hagar started the Veterans Legal Project at Bay Area Legal Aid where she provided veterans wrap-around legal services in the areas of disability rights, health, economic and housing security. Hagar also ran a medical legal partnership with the Palo Alto Veterans Health Administration, and a reentry legal clinic for justice-involved veterans at Santa Clara's Veterans Mental Health Court. Hagar began her career at Law Foundation's Mental Health Advocacy Project, where she represented individuals with mental health disabilities in housing, benefits, health access and consumer issues. She earned her J.D. in 2010 from Loyola University Chicago School of Law, including a year studying international human rights law at the University of Copenhagen, and received her undergraduate degree in Anthropology from Brandeis University.

### **State Co-Chairs**

*Susan DeMarois, California Department of Aging*

Susan DeMarois joined the California Department of Aging (CDA) as Director on November 1, 2021. Previous to her current role, she served as Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the Alzheimer's Association since 2013 where she advocated for legislative, budget and regulatory changes at the state capitol on behalf of the 2.3

million Californians directly impacted by Alzheimer's disease. Prior to joining the Alzheimer's Association, she led government and community relations for the University of California health and clinical affairs, supporting the work of academic medical centers, schools of medicine/nursing and physician groups.

Susan currently serves on the California Health and Human Services Agency Secretary's Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee as well as the state's Disability and Aging Community Living Advisory Committee.. Prior to joining the Alzheimer's Association, she led government and community relations for the University of California health and clinical affairs, supporting the work of academic medical centers, schools of medicine/nursing and physician groups. A graduate of CSU Chico, Susan started her career working for the U.S. Congress and the California State Assembly. Susan resides in Sacramento, CA and draws inspiration for her work from her own family's experience with dementia.

*Joe Xavier, California Department of Rehabilitation*

Joe Xavier, Director of the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), has over 39 years of experience in business and public administration as well as many years participating in advocacy and community organizations. As an immigrant, a blind consumer, and a beneficiary of DOR's services, Joe has the experience and understands the challenges and opportunities available to individuals with disabilities, and the services required to maximize an individual's full potential. Joe believes in the talent and potential of individuals with disabilities; investing in the future through creativity, ingenuity, and innovation; ensuring decisions and actions are informed by interested individuals and groups; pursuing excellence through continuous improvement; and preserving the public's trust through compassionate and responsible provision of services.

### **Stakeholder Committee Membership**

*Patricia Blaisdell, California Hospital Association*

Patricia Blaisdell is Vice President, Continuum of Care for the California Hospital Association. Ms. Blaisdell provides membership support and advocacy for hospital-based post-acute care and case management services, including policy analysis and interpretation, communication with regulatory bodies and third-party payers, and planning and implementation of educational programs. Ms. Blaisdell has over 25 years of experience in hospital and health care management in acute and post-acute settings. She has expertise in clinical operations and reimbursement across the post-acute continuum of care. Ms. Blaisdell began her career as a speech/language pathologist: her work was recognized with the Outstanding Clinical Achievement Award from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation. Ms. Blaisdell, who is Fellow with the

American College of Health Care Executives, has also been recognized with the ACHE Regent's Award, and the Rural Champion in community leadership award from the California Rural Health Care Association.

**Mareva Brown, *Office of the Senate Pro Tempore***

Mareva Brown is the Human Services policy consultant for Senate President Pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins. In that role, she advises the Pro Tem on issues including Aging and Long-Term Care Services and Supports, Social Services programs such as Community Care Licensing, Developmental Services, the Department of Rehabilitation and other issues. Prior to joining the Pro Tem's staff, she was Chief Consultant for the Senate Committee on Human Services, and had worked at the Senate Office of Research, focusing on policy and fiscal issues related to social services, developmental disabilities, mental health, and others.

**Megan Burke, *The SCAN Foundation***

Megan R. Burke serves as a Program Officer for Policy and Advocacy at The SCAN Foundation. In this role, she executes the Foundation's public policy strategies and grantmaking to advance state and federal solutions that improve the lives of older adults, people with complex care needs, and their family caregivers. Megan has extensive experience in policy analysis, communications, and coalition building, as well as direct service in aging, family caregiving, health, and long-term services and supports. Previously, Megan served as the Senior Analyst for The SCAN Foundation, prior to which she was a Policy Analyst for Paraquad (a Center for Independent Living in Missouri), and for the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council. Megan holds a Master's degree in Social Work with a focus in Gerontology and Social and Economic Development from the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. She earned her Bachelor of Social Work from Valparaiso University.

**Sabrina Epstein, *Disability Rights California***

Sabrina Epstein (she/her/hers) is a Policy Analyst at Disability Rights California. She works on issues affecting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, such as health care and housing. Her prior work includes COVID-19 research at the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center and federal Medicaid policy research at the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC). Sabrina's work is informed by her experience as a disabled person.

**Melinda Forstey, *Serving Seniors***

Melinda Forstey is the Chief Operating Officer of Serving Seniors, where she is responsible for the oversight and overall management of all programs, services, housing operations and human resources. Over the past 13 years at Serving Seniors, Forstey has spearheaded multiple affordable housing projects throughout San Diego County, as well as the expansion of Serving Seniors' nutrition program, which grew from 650,000 meals to over 1.4 million in the last three years. Ms. Forstey serves on the Board of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP), a leading organization advocating for a wide range of essential services and policies for senior health and well-being. She is also an active member of LeadingAge. Forstey holds an MBA in Information Systems from San Diego State University. She received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

**Elizabeth Fuller, *Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care***

Liz Fuller has twenty years in the Capitol, with 13 learning on the job as Consultant to the Legislative Women's Caucus. Her policy knowledge has grown in all areas impacting women and children, with emphasis in inclusion and equity, lactation accommodation, early care and education, military families and women in the military, harassment and sexual violence, economic and reproductive justice, application of Title IX, maternal mental health and women's health and wellness. In the fall of 2019, she transferred her policy knowledge and passion for caregiving to the position of Chief Consultant to the Assembly Aging and Long-Term Care Committee, a policy area with endless opportunities for collaboration and growth. She is a proud mama bear, wife, sister, caregiver, and friend. She tries to live each day with her whole heart.

**Jason Gabhart, *Alzheimer's Association***

Jason Gabhart is a highly experienced government affairs professional, who began his role as the Government Affairs Director with the Alzheimer's Association in January 2024. In this position, Jason has helped advocate for the nearly 700,000 individuals living with Alzheimer's in California, and the over one million caregivers who support them. During his time with the association, he has focused on advanced policies to help individuals receive a timely and early diagnosis of dementia, and for increased funding for new and existing state programs designed to support individuals impacted by the disease. Prior to joining the Alzheimer's Association, Jason was the lead California lobbyist for the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) for 9 years.

**Barbara Hanna, *California Association for Health Services at Home***

In 1979, Dr. Barbara Hanna, started to provide temporary nursing staff for hospitals in Northern California. A short time later, she began to receive calls from community members asking her for assistance in caring for their loved ones at home.

Understanding that people preferred to be at home while recuperating rather than in the hospital, she founded Home Health Care Management, Inc. Dr. Hanna graduated from California State University, Chico with a Bachelor's degree in Nursing in 1975. Dr. Hanna received a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing Science and Health-Care Leadership from the University of California, Davis in 2015. She has worked in a variety of health care settings, including acute care hospitals, adult day health care centers, dialysis clinics and home health. She has also taught nursing and allied health at Butte Community College, and Administration of Long-term care at California State University, Chico. She is a nationally certified case manager and has a California lifetime teaching credential for Nursing and Allied health. She has expertise in the areas of fall prevention, medication management working with older adults living in the community. In 2002, she was selected by the Centers for Disease Control to be a CDC/ASPH Institute Scholar for HIV Prevention Leadership in Atlanta, GA. She has worked on a statewide advisory panel for UCSF and the "California Twenty-First Century Workforce Project" and was one of the founding board members of the Olmstead Advisory Group for the State of California (now known as the Disability and Aging Community Living Advisory Committee). Dr. Hanna enjoys working collaboratively with other agencies and organizations. She is skilled at partnering with diverse groups and organizations with varying purposes and roles to enhance and expand services in the community.

**Corinne Jones, *Senior Network Services***

Corinne works as Director of Programs for Senior Network Services, serving Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Corinne is a Gerontologist with extensive experience in older adult services. She is responsible for older adult programs including HICAP, CalAIM, Senior Housing Services, Information & Assistance and Family Caregiver Support. She was previously Program Director and Supervising Care Manager for the Multipurpose Senior Services Program. She was a volunteer with AARP as a District Liaison, an "age-in-place" intern at Westside Pacific Villages, and a state certified HICAP Counselor for the Center for Healthcare Rights. She previously worked for AT&T as a sales and customer service specialist, retiring after more than thirty years. Ever active in California aging, Corinne is a former member of the Aging and Disability Resource Connection Advisory Committee. She is committed to having a role in providing programs and services to ensure the best quality of life for older adults throughout California; using advocacy, community engagement, and other resources, to insure their opportunity for

independence and dignity. Corinne holds a master's degree in Gerontology from the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology at the University of Southern California, and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Loyola Marymount University.

**Kathy Kelly, *Family Caregiver Alliance***

Kathleen Kelly is Executive Director of Family Caregiver Alliance, a national nonprofit organization that provides direct caregiver support services, public policy development, research, and public awareness regarding family caregivers. As director, she oversees programs of the Bay Area Caregiver Resource Center, California policy collaborations, and the National Center on Caregiving. During her tenure, the organization has grown from a grassroots program to a national organization that provides leadership on supporting family caregivers with best practice interventions, public policy, state system development, and leading-edge research.

**Kay Lee, *Commonwealth Adult Day Health Care Center***

Kay is the Executive Director of Burlingame Adult Day Health Care Center and the Executive Vice President of Commonwealth Adult Day Health Care Center. Kay has more than a decade of experience in adult day services, providing multidisciplinary services for older adults to help maintain their health and well-being and live within the community of their choice. As an advocate for the adult day services community, Kay has been an active member of the California Association for Adult Day Services (CAADS) and serves as the current President and Chair of the Legislative & Advocacy Committee for CAADS. Kay also strives for improved collaboration between providers, agencies, managed care organizations, and other stakeholders. Having served as an inaugural member of the Crisis/Vision Team, which consisted of providers and state agency representatives, Kay worked with the team both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to find solutions to continue providing essential services for California's most vulnerable adults throughout the uncertainties of the pandemic. Kay is also a member of the California Department of Aging (CDA) Community-Based Adult Services (CBAS) Quality Advisory Committee and the Cal Long Term Care Technical Advisory Committee. Kay is a trained attorney and received her Juris Doctor (JD) from Georgetown University Law Center, a master's degree in public health (MPH) from the University of California, Berkeley, and a bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy from Duke University. Kay is currently pursuing a master's degree in gerontology (MAG) from the University of Southern California.

**Peter Mendoza, *Consumer Advocate***

Peter Mendoza brings to the California State Independent Living Council four decades of disability advocacy experience. His work in advocacy began at the age of 17, when

he testified in front of the California State Legislative Subcommittee on the need for services and supports for people with disabilities for the Regional Center System. Peter became a tireless advocate for accessible transportation, housing, in-home support services, and employment for people with disabilities. His advocacy was recognized by President George H. W. Bush, who invited Peter to witness the historic signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

In 2001, Peter was appointed by California Governor Gray Davis to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities and was subsequently reappointed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Peter served as both Vice Chair and Chair of the Council during his tenure. Since leaving the Council, Peter served on the Tarjan Center Community Advisory Committee, the California State Rehabilitation Appeals Board, the City of Berkeley Commission on Disability, and on the Board of Directors for Easy Does It Emergency Services in Berkeley. Peter is still very active, currently serving as Chair of the Golden Gate Regional Center Self Determination Community Advisory Committee, Consumer Advocate for the California Olmstead Advisory Committee, member of the California State Independent Living Council as appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr., in addition to working at Marin Center for Independent Living as their Director of Advocacy and Special Projects. Peter lives in Elk Grove with his wife, Jennifer, and their dog, Latte. His phone rings frequently with calls from people with disabilities and their families requesting his advocacy expertise and policy advice.

### **Kim Mills, *A Better Life Together, Inc.***

Kimberly Mills has over 30 years of experience providing social services to youth, adults, and their families. Kim is the founder and CEO of A Better Life Together, Inc.(ABLT) that supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who live and work in the community. ABLT provides supported and independent living services and day services to adults in San Diego County. Kim is the proud mother of 3 amazing sons Antoine, Naeem, and Jaleni. Naeem passed away unexpectedly in 2016 at the age of 22 due to a seizure. Naeem's death reignited Kim's passion to continue advocating for the rights of communities of color who are underserved within the IDD community. Kim is originally from Ohio and holds a Master's degree in Community Counseling from Kent State University. Kim is a board member of the California Community Living Network and serves on the Disability Services Task Force.

### **Carolyn Nava, *Disability Action Center***

Carolyn serves the Independent Living community as the Community Relations Director for the Disability Action Center (DAC). DAC, a Center for Independent Living (CIL) is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1980 to meet specific needs of people with

disabilities living in Northern California. DAC serves Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Siskiyou, Shasta, and Tehama Counties and additionally serves a small eastern portion of the Trinity County community. Ms. Nava assists the DAC Executive Director with local, and statewide public relations, publicity, and helps ensure DAC team quality service delivery to persons with disabilities and the public. Ms. Nava also chairs the Center's flagship Systems Change Activity, the Diversability Advocacy Network that is currently conducting a series of Listening Sessions in the rural region, promoting the region's newly designated Aging and Disability Resource Connection, and supporting the far north state Local Master Plan for Aging Advisory Committee to further rural implementation of the CA Governor's Master Plan for Aging 5 Bold Goals for 2030. In her capacity as 20+ year multi-state licensed financial professional, she served as a Pre-Licensing and Continuing Education Instructor for the California Partnership for Long Term Care, Senior Ethics; and as a Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Registered Investment Representative, she helps the CIL with resource development; grantor relations and grant report preparations.

### **Marty Omoto, *California Disability Community Action Network***

Marty Omoto is a parent of a 31-year-old son with Down syndrome and autism spectrum disorders and family member of older sister with developmental and physical disabilities and behavioral/mental health needs. Marty's life as an advocate for disability rights, for social and economic justice and equity, for Asian/Pacific Islander awareness and rights, and for older persons had a foundation as a Japanese-American, whose parents, grandparents and other family along with 120,000 other Japanese-Americans, were imprisoned during World War II in internment camps in one of the greatest single act of racial discrimination of an entire population. Marty founded, California Disability-Aging Community Action Network (CDCAN) in 2000, as a vehicle to connect people to credible non-partisan information and public policy and advocacy across the state. Marty serves currently as member of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Developmental Services Task Force; the California Health and Human Services (CalHHS) Disability and Aging Community Living Advisory Committee (formerly Olmstead Advisory Committee); CalHHS Elder and Disability Justice Coordinating Council; the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) Medi-Cal Managed Care Advisory Group; and numerous other stakeholder workgroups and committees including those with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), California Department of Aging (CDA) and Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). He previously served as board member and late president of the board of the Sacramento Paratransit Inc; board member for 10 years on Resources for Independent Living (RIL) a Sacramento independent living center; State Bar of California Civil Justice Strategies Commission;



CalHHS Future of the Developmental Centers Task Force; CDSS Community First Choice Option stakeholder advisory group, and on several legislative task forces and workgroups covering issues from disability public access, special education, funding for developmental services, IHSS, and aging.

**Jeanne Parker Martin, *LeadingAge of California***

Jeanne Parker Martin, President & CEO of LeadingAge California and Vice Chairman & Principal of The Corridor Group Holdings and subsidiary companies, is a leader in the strategic development of innovative healthcare programs and aging services. Active in health service planning, development, and delivery of care for over 30 years, Jeanne has assisted organizations around the world – spanning the U.S., Central and South America, Thailand, and Turkey. Jeanne was the first and only home care and hospice expert to consult with the WHO Global Programme on AIDS, and for the U.S.

Department of State in South Africa. Jeanne has advised some of the largest U.S.-based publicly-traded companies and non-profit healthcare organizations by providing them with effective strategies for growth and development, mergers and acquisitions, and operations and finance. Jeanne has served on 17 boards of directors and is sought out by boards and executive teams for her leadership and understanding of strategic, financial and governance matters.

**Joe Perales, *The Arc of California***

Joe Perales has been a leader and contributor to the intellectual and developmental disabilities community for over 40 years. He has worked for different organizations and school districts that provide support and education to families and their children. His passion for helping people with disabilities is close to his heart. Having a family member on the spectrum has allowed him to understand firsthand the challenges and needs of the I/DD community, especially the Latino community. Before joining The Arc of California as Director of El Arc de California, Joe spent 28 years of his career working at the Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center in various capacities. During his time there, he assisted and supported parents and loved ones in navigating and accessing the regional center system. Joe is an advocate by nature. He has led, organized, coordinated, and participated in various community efforts, such as grassroots, manifestations, and rallies, to address critical issues related to services and programs for those with disabilities. Joe's mission is to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their parents, siblings, and family members have meaningful opportunities to educate and empower themselves to become better advocates for their loved ones. Joe holds an MBA from Woodbury University in Burbank, California, a BA with a concentration in Public Relations from the Autonomous University of Nuevo León,

Monterrey, Mexico, and a Certified Adult Special Education Teaching Credential from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

**Andrea Robert, *Consumer Advocate***

Andrea is a very knowledgeable and intelligent person who suffers from mild cognitive impairment (MCI) as a result of a traumatic brain injury. She has years of experience working as a case manager in human services and mental health, as well as advocating for others to receive resources and services. Andrea previously worked as a Certified Nurse Assistant/Medication Aide in the healthcare field. During her 20 years in healthcare, she worked in a variety of settings, including hospitals, home health, hospice care, and assisted living facilities. As a Certified Nursing Assistant, she worked with people with various forms of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Andrea previously served on the California Health and Human Services (CalHHS) Agency's Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee. Andrea represents the voices of underserved and underrepresented people living in their homes and communities who require supportive services to live a quality life with this disease. These people experience daily limitations and impairments as a result of MCI, or dementia. Andrea is passionate about advocating for more direct services and resources for people living with dementia and Alzheimer's, as well as raising awareness that existing services do not always reach those in greatest need. She co-founded an Alzheimer's Association-hosted support group for people living with various types of cognitive impairment. Younger onset refers to individuals under the age of 62. The group was formed in 2021 with members from various states and is still going strong.

**Gabriel Rogin, *North Bay Regional Center***

Gabriel Rogin has worked with people with developmental disabilities for over 25 years. He is currently the Executive Director of North Bay Regional Center, providing support for individuals and families in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties. Prior to that, he served as the Chief Deputy Director for the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, leading the Council's advocacy, capacity building and systemic reform efforts throughout the state. He has served as a direct support professional, case manager, and in multiple other management positions. Gabriel holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from California State University, East Bay.

**Michelle Rousey, *Consumer Advocate***

Michelle Rousey is a community consumer advocate and activist, an organizer for seniors and people with disabilities for nearly 35 years. Michelle has worked on a number of initiatives, including Money Follows the person, Local IHSS, and CA statewide IHSS advisory committees. Michelle has been member of the Disability and

Aging Community Living Advisory Committee (formerly Olmstead Advisory Committee) for many years and currently works with local transportation committees.

**Rosanna “Rosie” Ryan, *Consumer Advocate***

Rosanna “Rosie” Ryan was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities in 2019. On the State Council, Rosie is a member of the Legislation and Public Policy Committee and Self Advocate Advisory Committee. Rosie is an active member of People First Region 2. She was a peer instructor at the We Care A Lot Foundation from 2010 to 2016. Rosie likes to keep in touch with family and friends on the Internet. Rosie enjoys watching movies and loves cats, especially her cat Queen Meeka.

**Robert Taylor, *Konocti Senior Support***

Robert Taylor is a Senior Peer Counselor with Konocti Senior Support.

**Jeff Thom, *California Council of the Blind***

Jeff Thom graduated from Stanford Law school in 1978, after obtaining a bachelor’s degree in political science from Willamette University. Jeff worked as an attorney for the California Legislature for 30 years. He is a past president of the California Council of the Blind and its current voluntary Governmental Affairs Director. Jeff is a current board member and former first vice president of the American Council of the Blind. He has served in a variety of blindness-related capacities on the national, state, and local level, including as a board member of the American Foundation for the Blind. He is a past president of both the board of directors of Disability Rights California and of the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss. Jeff also served on the Blind Advisory Committee to the California Department of Rehabilitation. He is married, is a father of five, and grandfather and has had more than a dozen foreign exchange students. Among the awards he has received is the 2008 California Public Lawyer of the Year.

**Debbie Toth, *Choice in Aging***

A native Californian and fierce advocate for the underserved, Debbie Toth fell in love with her oldies in her high school years. She has been with Choice in Aging for two decades, beginning her career as the adult day health program director and now as President & CEO. Debbie has served on a multitude of advocacy and advisory bodies including the Paratransit Coordinating Council, the Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee, co-chair of the East Bay Leadership Council Healthcare Task Force, and most notably the California Master Plan for Aging Stakeholder Advisory Committee. She is a wife, a mother, a nagyi (Hungarian granny), and a friend. In 2015,

Debbie was awarded Assembly District 14 Woman of the Year by Assemblymember Susan Bonilla.

**Nina Weiler-Harwell, *AARP California***

Nina Weiler-Harwell Ph.D. is Associate State Director for AARP California. During her more than 25 years at AARP, Nina has managed federal and state advocacy campaigns on multiple aging-related topics, including caregiving, long-term supports and services (LTSS), Social Security, Medicare, and the federal Affordable Health Care Act. Nina currently serves as AARP's California lead on caregiving, home and community-based services, LTSS and state budget advocacy. She led AARP's efforts on the legislation that created the California Task Force on Family Caregiving (ACR 38-Brown) and represents AARP on the California Aging & Disability Alliance (CADA), which is leading statewide efforts to create a model long-term care insurance benefit. Nina served on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the LTSS Subcommittee for the California Master Plan for Aging, where she worked to ensure that AARP caregiving, LTSS financing, and age-friendly priorities were included in the Plan's final recommendations. Nina holds an MA and Ph.D. degrees in Political Science from the University of Southern California.

**Janie Whiteford, *California In-Home Supportive Services Consumer Alliance***

Thirty-five years ago, Janie Whiteford was in an accident resulting in an injury causing paralysis and quadriplegia, an incident that changed her life's focus. After college she became a social worker and then a teacher. After her injury she obtained a Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling and focused on educating and advocating for disability issues, particularly about the Americans with Disabilities Act after. Her professional work is dedicated to counseling persons with disabilities and seniors at both the Independent Living Center in Santa Clara and at the local County hospital.

Whiteford has always been passionate about volunteer work. When IHSS initiated the Public Authorities and the Advisory Committees, she became involved in its development in Santa Clara County, drawing on her many years of experience educating persons with disabilities about how to hire, manage, and if necessary, fire providers. As the current President of the California In-Home Supportive Services Consumer Alliance, she advocates on issues affecting both seniors and persons with disabilities both at the local, State, and Federal levels. Being involved with other state organizations has helped to broaden her perspective and identify opportunities for engagement.

**Sylvia Yeh, *Friends of Children with Special Needs***

Sylvia Yeh, a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), serves as the Executive Director of Friends of Children with Special Needs (FCSN). Since her employment with FCSN in 2006, she has focused on building a solid foundation and robust infrastructures, developing holistic programs, securing financial stability, and building networks with community organizations and governmental resources to ensure the delivery of exceptional services for individuals with disabilities. She has successfully established 17 programs and services through the vendorization process of the CA Departments of Developmental Disability Services (DDS) and Rehabilitation (DOR). Under her leadership, FCSN has received many awards, such as Non-Profit of the Year (2020), Leadership in Community Services (2018), Innovation Award (2017), Distinguished Honoree Award (2014), and Service Provider of the Year (2014). With over 20 years of dedication in the developmental services and social work sector, Sylvia is committed to helping the underprivileged populations, advocating for racial and social justice, seeking solutions to decrease cultural inequity and service disparity, promoting civil engagements, and building a brighter future for them. She is dedicated to empowering individuals with special needs and families to make decisions for their lives, direct the care and services based on their preferences, live out their best through support, and be included and treated with respect in the community.