

# 2022 Law & Disability Conference

## Speaker Bios



**Sponsored and hosted by the New Jersey State Bar Foundation**  
**Presented by Community Health Law Project**

**Sean M. Benoit, Esq.**, Managing Attorney, Community Health Law Project



**Sean M. Benoit, Esq.** is the managing attorney for the Community Health Law Project's Union / Hudson Regional Office. Prior to coming to CHLP, Mr. Benoit worked as an attorney for Disability Rights New Jersey advocating for children with special needs to receive appropriate special education services. Mr. Benoit also served as an elected councilman for the Borough of Garwood from 2019 to 2021. Mr. Benoit received his undergraduate degree from Boston College and his law degree from Rutgers Law School – Newark Campus.

**Robert N. Davison**, Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris, Inc.



**Robert N. Davison**, Chief Executive Officer of the North Jersey based Mental Health Association, has been serving the mental health needs of communities throughout New Jersey for more than 35 years. In his role as MHA's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Davison manages the overall operations of a comprehensive community mental health facility that each day serves the needs of more than 1800 individuals and their families who are confronted with mental illnesses, addictions or emotional disturbances. A 1984 graduate of Seton Hall University, Mr. Davison received his Master's Degree in Counseling from Montclair State University in 1990. In addition to his academic credentials, Mr. Davison is a Licensed Professional Counselor.

**Lisa Dressner**, Executive Director of Behavioral Health Operations, Trinitas Regional Medical Center



**Lisa Dressner, LCSW**, Executive Director of Behavioral Health Operations, oversees all child and adult inpatient and outpatient services for Trinitas Regional Medical Center's Department of Behavioral Health & Psychiatry. Among those programs are the iDD child and adult acute psychiatric inpatient programs and the CARES program, a statewide initiative which supports individuals with developmental disabilities in behavioral or mental health crises. Ms. Dressner has over 22 years of behavioral health leadership experience as a manager, trainer and published author.

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**Brian Fitzgibbons**, President/CEO, Heightened Independence and Progress Center for Independent Living



**Brian Fitzgibbons** is the President/CEO of Heightened Independence and Progress (hip), a non-residential Center for Independent Living offering services to enable people with disabilities to live successfully in the community. Previously, Mr. Fitzgibbons held various roles with the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), including front-line Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Unit Supervisor, Staff Development and Training Coordinator, head of the Program, Planning and Development Unit, and Director as part of executive management. Mr. Fitzgibbons holds a master's degree in public administration from Rutgers University and an undergraduate degree in Secondary Education from Seton Hall University. He is a certified teacher in New Jersey and was a nationally Certified Rehabilitation Counselor for 40 years.

**Lisa Ford**, Director, The Arc of New Jersey Family Institute



**Lisa Ford** is the Director of The Arc of New Jersey Family Institute, the "Go to Place" for information for families caring for a loved one with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Prior to her role as Director of the Institute, Ms. Ford worked as a Navigator for The Arc of New Jersey Planning for Adult Life Program, which helps students with I/DD transition out of their educational entitlement and into the adult world. Before joining The Arc, Ms. Ford taught for 17 years as a Special Education Itinerant Teacher in New York. She obtained a Master of Science in Special Education and a Bachelor of Science in Education from Wagner College.

**Harold Garwin, Esq.**, Associate Executive Director, Community Health Law Project



**Harold Garwin, Esq.** is currently the Associate Executive Director of the Community Health Law Project (CHLP), having served as CHLP's President/Executive Director for 45 years. He has been the Assistant Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate, Staff Director for the Federal New Jersey Mental Health Plan, Counsel to the Director of the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services, a Legal Services attorney, and Adjunct Professor at Seton Hall University's Master of Public Administration Program. He is the Past Chair of the Board of the Mental Health Association in New Jersey, Past Chair of the Board of New Jersey Shares, Past Chair of the Mental Health Association Public Policy Committee, Past Chair of the ARC of New Jersey Public Policy Committee and Past Chair of the Board of Arts Unbound.



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**Elizabeth Hill**, Executive Director, Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, NJ Department of Human Services



**Elizabeth Hill** has over 20 years of experience as a direct service provider, administrator, and an advocate for a better quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing children and adults. Ms. Hill most recently worked as a school social worker at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in Philadelphia. Previously, she served as Coordinator of Deaf Services with the Alabama Department of Mental Health and as Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Ms. Hill received a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Government and a Master of Social Work degree from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.

**Brigitte D. Johnson, Esq.**, Executive Sr.VP Corporate Affairs/In-House Counsel/ Compliance Officer, CarePlus New Jersey Executive Director, Care Plus Workforce Solutions



**Brigitte D. Johnson, Esq.** has been employed at Care Plus NJ since 1998, where she now serves as the Executive Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs and is a member of the Executive Management team and Board of Trustee's Governance committee. Care Plus NJ is a comprehensive mental health, addiction, and primary care organization, and one of New Jersey's first original Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic awardees. Ms. Johnson currently serves on the Board of National Council for Behavioral Health and the Bergen County Workforce Development Board. She is a graduate of Howard University School of Law and is a cum laude graduate of Virginia State University.

**Mary Remhoff, RN, MSN, APN**, Director, Center for Early Childhood Development and Family Support, Children and Family Health Institute, Visiting Nurse Association Health Group



**Mary Remhoff, RN, MSN, APN** –Director, Center for Early Childhood and Family Support and the Integrated Care for Kids (InCK) Center Director/Clinical Team Supervisor. Ms. Remhoff received a BSN in Nursing from Rutgers and MSN/APN from the College of New Jersey with a focus in Family Health Nursing. Ms. Remhoff has over 45 years of experience as a nurse working in clinical and leadership roles promoting the health and well-being of vulnerable children and their families. For twenty-seven years, Ms. Remhoff has worked at the VNACJ leading community-based care management programs including Early Intervention and Special Child Health as well as, community coalitions and advisory boards. For the InCK Initiative she serves as Center Director-Clinical Team Supervisor for the Care Integration Managers, Advanced Care Management Teams and supporting the Partnership Council.

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**Logan Kelly, MPH**, Senior Program Officer, Center for Health Care Strategies



**Logan Kelly, MPH** is a senior program officer at the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS), where she provides strategic consultation and technical assistance on initiatives related to integrating care for populations with complex health and social needs. She leads projects related to physical-behavioral health integration, as well as innovative approaches to financing and payment for behavioral health care. She also leads the Better Care Playbook, an online resource center to provide health care stakeholders with the best available knowledge about promising approaches to improve care for people with complex needs, and supports initiatives focused on individuals dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid.

**Erika Kerber, Esq.**, President/Executive Director, Community Health Law Project



**Erika Kerber, Esq.** is the President / Executive Director of the Community Health Law Project (CHLP). Her career at CHLP began over 18 years ago, first as Supervising Attorney of its Monmouth/Ocean office, then as the Managing Attorney of that office and then advancing to Director of Litigation, Associate Executive Director, and now Executive Director. Ms. Kerber also sits on several boards and committees. Prior to joining CHLP, Ms. Kerber practiced law at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. Before then, she litigated child welfare cases while working for the City of New York and spent time in private practice. Ms. Kerber received her law degree from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and her bachelor's degree from the NYU Leonard N. Stern School of Business.

**Hon. Verna G. Leath** – Superior Court, Criminal Division, Essex County



**Judge Verna Leath** was appointed to the bench of the Superior Court of the State of New Jersey in 2005. She is currently assigned to the Criminal Division. In her present assignment Judge Leath presides over two calendars, regularly assigned criminal cases, and a second calendar of cases accepted by the Essex County Prosecutor's Office diversionary program, a program for certain defendants who have been diagnosed with a mental illness. Judge Leath sat in the Family Division for three years where her primary caseload was Children in Court cases. Judge Leath's first appointment was to the Civil Division.



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**Tina McDuffie, B.A.,** Intake-Intensive Case Management Statewide Coordinator, Division of Developmental Disabilities



**Tina McDuffie, B.A.** joined the Division of Developmental Disabilities in 2000 where she has worked in Case Management, Community Development and Intake-Intensive Case Management. She is currently the Statewide Coordinator for the Intake and Intensive Case Management Unit. Ms. McDuffie has worked in the social services field for over 30 years serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as individuals dually diagnosed with I/DD and mental health.

**Charles Patterson (Pat) McKenna, Esq.,** Assistant Division Director, New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, NJ Department of Human Services



**Charles Patterson (Pat) McKenna, Esq.** is currently employed by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NJCBVI) as the Assistant Division Director. Mr. McKenna is highly knowledgeable about vocational rehabilitation services, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Service Animal public access, social security and veterans benefits, and Alternative Dispute Resolution. He is a frequent presenter on these and related topics. Mr. McKenna is classified as totally blind having lost his sight to an auto-immune disease at the age of five. He is a practiced Guide-dog handler currently working with his fourth Seeing Eye dog, a yellow Labrador retriever named Finn.

**Valerie Mielke,** Assistant Commissioner, Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services NJ Department of Human Services



**Valerie Mielke** is the Assistant Commissioner for the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services in the Department of Human Services and serves as the Single State Agency for Substance Abuse and the State Mental Health Authority as designated by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. She currently serves on the Board of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, the Public Policy Committee of the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, the Steering Committee of the National Justice Counts, and the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness. Ms. Mielke holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Fairfield University and a Master of Social Work degree from Rutgers University.

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**Tracy Parris-Benjamin** Intake-Intensive Case Management Statewide Coordinator, Division of Developmental Disabilities



**Tracy Parris-Benjamin** is the Director of Clinical Design Community Health at Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, where she translates executive strategy into tactical implementation for a broad variety of community health initiatives and care models. Ms. Parris-Benjamin serves as an advocate leading several workgroups and discussions around Substance Use Disorders focused on increasing awareness and stigma reduction. In addition, she promotes the need for increased awareness on impact of health disparities and inequities in healthcare for underserved populations and persons of color. Ms. Parris-Benjamin holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Social Work from St. Johns University and a Masters in Social Work from Fordham University.

**Deliza Rodriguez, Parent**



**Deliza Rodriguez** is a resident of Kearny, NJ where she lives with her adult son. She became his guardian in 2021.

**Theresa Santana, M.A.,** Division of Disabilities Employment & Transition to 21



**Theresa Santana, M.A.** has worked in the field of applied behavior analysis for over 25 years with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her experience includes curriculum development, behavioral and inclusion strategies, and transitioning. She joined the Division of Developmental Disabilities in 2012, where she worked with day service and supported employment providers and assisted in the process of accessing services in the fee-for-service model. She currently works in the Employment & Transition to 21 unit.

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**Meena Song, Esq.**, Director of Litigation, Community Health Law Project



**Meena Song, Esq.** is the Director of Litigation at the Community Health Law Project (CHLP). She began serving as Managing Attorney of the CHLP Union and Hudson County Offices in 2018 and was promoted to the position of Director of Litigation in 2021. Ms. Song is a member of the Mental Health Association of New Jersey (MHANJ) Public Policy Committee as well as The Arc Government Affairs Committee. She also takes part in the HUD Stakeholder meetings and is involved in statewide tenancy advocacy initiatives. Prior to joining CHLP, Ms. Song practiced housing, consumer, and family law at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services.