



**STATE OF ARKANSAS**  
**ASA HUTCHINSON, GOVERNOR**  
**Arkansas Women's Commission**

Commissioner Bios

**Gayatri Agnew**

Gayatri Agnew is a leader in corporate and social impact strategy focused on human capital trends and future of work. Agnew worked throughout her winding path to and through both her undergraduate degree and her MBA. She has dedicated herself to ensuring more people have access to meaningful work and to effective ways to learn and grow. Agnew serves on the leadership team for Walmart's Global Responsibility division, where she leads strategy and partnerships on economic mobility, specifically human capital, shared value, partnerships and philanthropy. Her team focuses on key issues such as changing employer practices, better serving the learning and development needs of frontline workers, and scaling work-based learning and skills-based hiring. Agnew lives in Bentonville, Arkansas, with her two young children Rohan and Kamala.

Committee: Family Caregiving (Chair)

**Mellie Bridewell**

Ms. Mellie Bridewell currently serves as the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Regional Director of Strategy, Management, and Administration and as the Chief Executive Officer/President of the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership. Mellie has over 22 years of experience in community and organizational networking, grant writing, and program development and implementation. vBridewell created the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership organization in 2008 which began with five critical access hospitals and has grown its membership to include 15 rural hospitals, 2 FQHCs, 92 owned and/or affiliated clinics, and three medical schools which serves the south Arkansas region. Bridewell currently works and resides in Lake Village, Arkansas.

Committee: Impacts of COVID-19 (Chair)

**Dr. Charisse Childers**

Dr. Charisse Childers served as the director of the Arkansas Department of Career Education from January 2015 to July 2019 where she was appointed by Governor Asa Hutchinson. Now, as director of the Division of Workforce Services, Childers directs the state's workforce system which includes multiple employment and training programs and grants along with Adult Education, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, and Services for the Blind. Along with a team of approximately 1200 employees and board members, she continues to use her experience and knowledge to provide the resources and services needed to strengthen Arkansas's economy.

Committee: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention

## **Senator Breanne Davis**

Arkansas Senator Breanne Davis lives in Russellville with her husband and four children. She served on the Russellville School Board for nine years and has been serving in the State Senate since 2018. Aside from her professional life, over the years her volunteer experience has included working with human trafficking survivors and Syrian refugees, being a respite foster family, and coaching a U8 girls soccer team. She is the owner of Deelyte Farms, a small flower farm in Russellville.

Committees: Family Caregiving; Impacts of COVID-19

## **Tamika Edwards, J.D.**

Tamika S. Edwards, a native of Little Rock, AR, serves as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Southwest Power Pool (SPP). Edwards has over 20 years of experience in social justice, public policy, government and community outreach. Edwards most recently served as the Special Advisor to the CEO on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Engagement at Central Arkansas Water (CAW). Prior to CAW, Edwards served as the executive director of the Social Justice Institute at Philander Smith College, director of governmental affairs at Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, director of public policy at Southern Bancorp Community Partners, and community affairs specialist for former U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln. Edwards earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, a Master of Arts in professional and technical writing from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and a J.D. from Bowen Law School.

Committees: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention; Research and Writing

## **Senator Joyce Elliott**

Arkansas Senator Joyce Elliott is a native Arkansan who has ceaselessly pursued a path of insisting Arkansas to live up to its former motto: "Land of Opportunity." She has spent her life working to help bring life to that motto for every Arkansans. Elliott is a 30-year retired public school teacher and is currently in her 20th year as a state legislator, all in pursuit of its promise of opportunity for all. Along with Tony McKay (Australia), she currently serves as the co-chair of the National Center on Education and the Economy.

Committee: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention

## **Marie Holder**

Marie Holder, from Little Rock, is currently serving on the Arkansas Highway Commission, she also served on the Arkansas State Medical Board. She is the former finance director for Asa for Governor, AsaPAC and executive director of the Republican Party of Arkansas. Holder is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Juliet Circle of Girl Scouts. She is active in Second Presbyterian Church where she has been ordained as elder and deacon. Marie is married to Ryan Holder, they have two daughters ages 18 and 11. They have a six-pound poodle that she is allergic to, but loves anyway.

Committee: Family Caregiving

## **Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch**

Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch is the James and Wanda Lee Vaughn Professor of History, Dean of the Graduate School at Arkansas State University-Jonesboro, and a 2021-2022 American Council on Education/Lumina Fellow at the University of Central Arkansas. A native of Charleston, South Carolina, she received her B.A. and M.A. from the College of Charleston, and a doctorate in History from The Ohio State University. Jones-Branch is the author of *Crossing the Line: Women and Interracial Activism in South Carolina during and after World War II* and the co-editor of *Arkansas Women: Their Lives and Times*. A second manuscript, *Better Living By Their Own Bootstraps: Black Women's Activism in Rural Arkansas, 1913-1965*, is now available from the University of Arkansas Press.

Committee: Research and Writing (Co-Chair)

## **Kim Lane**

Kim Lane is an award-winning business owner with experience leading strategy and operations for Fortune 500 companies and the nation's leading foundations. She is the COO of Right to Start, an entrepreneurial policy startup that is making entrepreneurial opportunity a public priority by changing minds, policies and communities. Additionally, she serves as a Regional Director for the Kauffman Foundation's 1 Million Cups program (a national initiative that educates, engages, and connects entrepreneurs), and a strategy & operations consultant for Meta. She is also a Senior Advisor to the Global Entrepreneurship Network, where she supports startup communities worldwide.

Committee: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention

## **Heather Larkin**

Heather Larkin joined the Arkansas Community Foundation in 1998 and became its President and CEO in January 2008. She is committed to engaging people and connecting resources to build stronger communities in Arkansas. She has overseen the growth of the Foundation from \$19 million in assets and \$1.4 million in annual grants to over \$600 million in assets and \$35 million in annual grants. Larkin has been named one of Arkansas' top influencers by both *Arkansas Money & Politics* and *Arkansas Business*. She has served as a "Scholar in Residence" at the Clinton School of Public Service for exemplary contributions in the field of community philanthropy. Heather is a native of Charleston, Arkansas, a Hendrix College alumna, and lives in both Pulaski and Pope Counties.

Committee: Family Caregiving

## **Auditor Andrea Lea**

Auditor Andrea Lea was raised in an Air Force family, moving several times before graduating high school in southern California. She married Phillip, a U.S. Navy sailor, and continued to move across the U.S. before settling in Arkansas, in 1982, where she spent the next 15 years devoted to raising children and to community involvement. Lea was elected to the Pope County Quorum Court and to the Russellville City Council. Starting her college education at 44 years of age, Lea graduated from Arkansas Tech University with honors with a degree in Emergency Administration and Management. She was elected and served six years in the Arkansas House of Representatives and after eight years as Auditor of State she will be term limited in December 2022.

Committee: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention

## **Beverly Morrow**

Beverly Morrow was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She attended and graduated from MIT with a BS in Chemical Engineering. She later on earned her master's degree in chemical engineering from Rutgers University. She worked in the oil industry for several years before she and her husband, Curtis, became McDonald Franchisee's. They owned and operated McDonald's for over thirty years. During those thirty plus years, Morrow served and worked on a number of local and state boards; including Simmons Bank, Women's Foundation of Arkansas, Arkansas Community Foundation, and Arkansas Children's Hospital. She is currently the chair of Arkansas Children's Hospital. Beverly and Curtis have four adult children; Achilia, Kiisha, Chane, and Asha.

Committees: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention; Impacts of COVID-19; Family Caregiving

## **Apprilla Porch**

Apprilla Porch serves as Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff for Governor Asa Hutchinson. Porch joined the executive team of Governor Asa Hutchinson's administration in March of 2022. Prior to serving on the executive team, Porch worked in the Criminal Justice Division of Governor Hutchinson's Administration for two and a half years. In this role, Porch prepared clemency files for the Governor's review and helped to facilitate prison issues. Porch also serves as Extradition Coordinator for the State of Arkansas. Porch is a Certified Administrative Professional and Notary Public. Her life motto is "Leave things better than you found them."

Committee: Research and Writing; Role: organizational support to the Commission

## **Dr. Verónikha Salazar**

Veronikha Salazar is the Assistant Vice-Chancellor at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, AR. She was the Director of Hispanic Outreach and Retention at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, GA from 2011 to 2013, the Associate Director for Leadership, Education, and Development at the University of Arkansas's Multicultural Center from 2008-2011, and the program Coordinator for International Student and Scholars at the University of Arkansas from 2001-2007. She is originally from Chiclayo, Peru. She obtained her master's and doctoral degrees in adult education with an emphasis in Multicultural Education and Instructional Technology from the University of Arkansas. She is the founder of RBLL a non-profit organization that focuses on women's literacy in Peru.

Committees: Family Caregiving; Impacts of COVID-19; Research and Writing; Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention

## **Dr. Todd Shields**

Dr. Todd G. Shields, of Fayetteville, Arkansas, is dean of the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. Since joining the university in 1994, he has also served as professor, associate director of the J. William Fulbright Institute of International Relations, chair of the Department of Political Science, director of the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society, Interim dean of the Clinton School of Public Service, and dean of the Graduate School and International Education. Shields has published dozens of journal articles and is the co-author or co-editor of several books. His research focuses on public opinion, southern politics, elections, and applied statistics. He has received more than \$25 million dollars in grants and research support as a principal or co-principal investigator and raised over \$230 million in the most recent fundraising campaign.

Committee: Research and Writing (Co-Chair)

## **Maddie Spickard**

Maddie Spickard is the Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Women's Foundation of Arkansas. In this role, Maddie serves as the lead project coordinator for all WFA branded programs and initiatives including direct service, research, and advocacy activities. When she's not advocating for women and girls in Arkansas, Spickard loves to travel, spend time outdoors, and play tennis. Spickard was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, and is a proud graduate of Little Rock Central High School and the University of Central Arkansas. She holds a bachelors from UCA in public relations and a master's in public affairs from the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs from Indiana University.

Role: Lead Women's Foundation of Arkansas partner representative; organizational support to the Commission

## **Kathy Webb**

Kathy Webb serves as the CEO of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, the statewide anti-hunger organization, and Ward 3 City Director on the Little Rock Board of Directors. The first open LGBTQ person elected to office in Arkansas, Webb served in the Arkansas House of Representatives until term limited, and was the first woman in state history to Chair House Budget and Co-Chair Joint Budget. In 2011-2012, Webb chaired a group which presented an Interim Study Report on Women's Social and Economic Status in Arkansas, to the Joint City, County, and Local Affairs Committees.

Committee: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention

## **Naija White**

Naija White is a student attending Southern Arkansas University expected to graduate in May 2022. White is majoring in Information Systems with hopes to one day work as a business analyst. White served as one of the Women's Foundation of Arkansas' Tjuana Byrd summer interns in the summer of 2021, working for Windstream. She will return as a Tjuana Byrd summer intern in the summer of 2022, working for Stone Bank. White is originally from Lewisville, Arkansas.

Committee: Impacts of COVID-19

## **Dr. Kathy White Loyd**

Dr. Kathy White Loyd is a respected business leader and philanthropist. She served on the board of directors of the Women's Foundation of Arkansas and Arkansas Academy of Computing. She retired in 2018 from the Board of Directors for Mattel, Inc. after 17 years of service. She founded the Women's Leadership Center at Arkansas State University and ASU-Mountain Home in 2016 with a mission to cultivate confident and capable young girls and women for a successful path to college and careers.

Committee: Labor Force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention (Chair)

## **Alison Williams**

Williams serves as Governor Hutchinson's Chief of Staff, managing a team of more than forty professionals who support Governor Hutchinson's transformational vision for the State of Arkansas in areas as divergent as K-12 computer science education, licensing reform, a comprehensive reorganization of state government and conservation. Prior to returning to Arkansas in this position, she was the Governor's Director of State-Federal Relations in Washington, DC. Williams is a 1999 graduate of the University of Arkansas and holds a master's of Business Administration from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business.

Role: Chair of the Commission