



SCHUYLER CENTER FOR ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY POLICY FORUM

Transforming Child Welfare and Children's Lives: Proven Strategies that Strengthen Families

SPEAKERS BIOS

Anni Keane



Anni Keane is a foster care alumna who has worked in the foster care system for over 13 years. She is a fierce advocate for youth and has touched the lives of hundreds of youth in care through her direct service and advocacy on their behalf. Annie is the Director of You Gotta Believe's Nobody Ages Out Youth Movement. In this capacity, she leads the core group of alumni Advocates for Youth—all working to change the system with a laser focus on permanency. Using their personal stories, the team advocates with public officials and child welfare leaders, works directly with young people in care, delivers workshops to youth and caseworkers, and co-facilitates all foster/adoptive parent training. Anni spent time in the foster care system during her childhood, was placed into her permanent family at 17, and chose to be legally adopted at 24. She has been sharing her story publicly for many years on a local and national level, including as a panelist at a US Senate Caucus on Foster Youth and Homelessness. She is a powerful speaker and a source of ongoing support and inspiration to her team and to youth throughout the child welfare system.

Sheila J. Poole



Sheila J. Poole is Acting Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). She joined the agency in 2007 as Associate Commissioner in the Division of Child Welfare and Community Services before being promoted to Executive Deputy Commissioner.

As former Commissioner of the Albany County Department for Children, Youth, and Families, Ms. Poole brings a comprehensive understanding of local social service agency needs to OCFS. She led the transformation of the former Albany County Department of Social Services to the current model of an integrated social services district providing child welfare, early intervention, youth development and children's mental health services.

Ms. Poole began her career in the not-for-profit mental health sector, creating community-based housing and rehabilitative services for individuals transitioning from state institutional settings. Ms. Poole also spent five years working in the Tennessee child welfare system.

Ms. Poole earned a master's degree in Psychology from Russell Sage College in Troy, New York after completing her undergraduate work in psychology at Siena College in Loudonville, New York. She lives in the Capital District with her husband, Ryan and daughters, Claire and Olivia.

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Linda S. Spears



Linda Spears was appointed as Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) by Governor Charlie Baker in February 2015.

A veteran social worker and child welfare policy expert, Commissioner Spears leads an agency of 3,500 social workers and staff that serves approximately 50,000 children in the Commonwealth with a budget of \$941 million. Shortly into her tenure, the Baker administration, child protection workers and DCF jointly initiated a system-wide reform to support frontline social workers and protect the Commonwealth's children. The ongoing effort has already produced two new key policies on intake and supervision, both of which are currently being implemented.

Prior to DCF, Commissioner Spears served as Vice President of Policy, Programs and Public Affairs at the Child Welfare League of America for 22 years. In this capacity, she performed assessments on local and state child welfare agencies nationwide, including a 2014 quality improvement review of the Massachusetts DCF that set the stage for the agency's current reform.

Commissioner Spears began her child welfare career as a caseworker for the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Four years later, she moved to Massachusetts to work for what was then called the Department of Social Services and remained for nearly a decade, serving in a variety of roles, the last of which was Director of Field Support.

Commissioner Spears attended the University of Rhode Island and earned a B.A. in Psychology. She holds an M.S.W. from the University of Southern California.

Molly McGrath Tierney



Molly McGrath Tierney is the Director for the Baltimore City Department of Social Services where she manages the City's child welfare and public assistance programs. Over the past nine years, she has led a massive reform effort that dramatically improved the impact of services to vulnerable citizens of Baltimore, including reducing the number of children in foster care by 60%. Ms. Tierney created a business model for sustainable agency performance that is now considered a national model for modern social services. She joined the Department after 5 years in the City of Chicago where she designed and managed the social service programs that supported Mayor Richard M. Daley's major human service reform plans. Prior to that, she spent 15 years in public child welfare systems in Illinois and in Washington D.C.

Ms. Tierney holds a master's degree from Loyola University and is a fellow with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. She lives in Baltimore with her family.

Jeanette Vega

Jeanette Vega is a Parent Leader at Rise, which trains parents to write and speak about their experiences with the child welfare system: www.risemagazine.org. Jeanette has been dedicated to advocating for change in the child welfare system for the past 12 years. At Rise, Jeanette regularly presents to child welfare frontline staff about parents' perspectives. She previously has been a parent advocate at the Child Welfare Organizing Project and Episcopal Social Services. She is a proud mother of four boys.

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Rosie Williams



At 23 years old, Rosie serves as a Youth Advocate with You Gotta Believe's '*Nobody Ages Out*' youth movement. Rosie entered foster care at just 8 months after her birth. For the next 18 years, she was placed in over 30 placements, including foster and group homes, residential treatment centers and hospitals. At the age of 19 Rosie met a woman named Danielle who made a commitment of unconditional love and support to her. She now calls Danielle Mom.

Rosie obtained her GED and believes she was able to focus on that important milestone because of the support, encouragement (and late night tutoring) that she received from Danielle.

Rosie shares her powerful, thoughtful message that family is every youth's right because she does not want youth in the system to suffer the same losses or live through what she lived through.