

## California Department of Aging Long-Term Care Facility Access (LTCFA) Policy Workgroup Member Roster

*This document introduces LTCFA Policy Workgroup members representing organizations selected by California Department of Aging to join the workgroup, and includes brief bios submitted by workgroup members outlining their current roles and relevant previous experience with long-term care facility access and visitation.*

### **6Beds**

#### **George Kutnerian**

George Kutnerian serves as the Senior Vice President of Public Policy & Legislation for 6Beds, Inc. In his role advocating for 6-bed Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs) and Adult Residential Facilities (ARFs), George is regularly invited to participate in special workgroups, including the Evolution of RCFEs Strategic Planning Group, the Role of the Registered Nurse in RCFEs Workgroup, the Dementia Regulations Workgroup, and the Medical Care Regulations Workgroup. Most recently, George was invited to participate in the California Health & Human Services Congregate Care Expert Advisory Group and the California Long-Term Care Facilities workgroup of the COVID-19 Testing Task Force. George is also regularly invited to testify before the Assembly Human Services, Assembly Health, Assembly Aging and Long-Term Care, Senate Human Services, and Senate Health Committees.

George earned his Bachelor of Science in business administration with high honors from the University of California, Berkeley. He also earned an M.S. from the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University and an MBA with a triple concentration in finance, strategy, and entrepreneurship from the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago.

### **Alzheimer's Association**

#### **Eric Dowdy**

Eric Dowdy currently serves as the Vice President of Public Policy & Advocacy at the Alzheimer's Association. Prior to this, Eric worked for LeadingAge CA for more than 23 years in various capacities. As Chief Government Affairs Officer, Eric was responsible for the oversight of the LeadingAge's public relations, policy development, and advocacy efforts. Eric's policy expertise focuses on assisted living (specifically continuing care retirement communities) and other types of congregate care settings. Eric is the current Board Chair of the California Collaborative for Long-Term Services and Supports. He also serves on the Board of start-up nonprofit which develops employment opportunities for disabled adults.

Prior to joining LeadingAge California, Eric worked for CIPA, a nonprofit trade association and the American Red Cross. Eric is a founding member of the University of California, Sacramento Center's capitol scholar program where he interned in the California State Senate.

## **The Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee**

### **Darrick Lam**

Darrick Lam is an advocate for older adults and persons with disabilities. He was an appointed member of the California Master Plan for Aging (MPA) Stakeholder Committee from 2019 to 2021. He is the Vice Chair of the State of California Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee and an MPA Equity in Aging Advisory Committee member. Darrick is passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion; dementia; health promotion and disease prevention; and mental health issues. He has over 30 years of experience in aging and long-term services and support in the public and private nonprofit sectors. Before stepping down from his role as the President and CEO of ACC Senior Services, he was instrumental in providing strategic leadership to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on protecting staff, volunteers, and stakeholders at the organization through interventions including providing essential services, pivoting to the next normal, and providing guidance to the skilled nursing facility in the development of indoor, in-room visitation protocols for fully vaccinated residents and families. Darrick received his B.A. in sociology-organizational studies from UC Davis (1987) and both his MSW (1990) and MBA (2016) from UC Berkeley.

## **California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform (CANHR)**

### **Tony Chicotel**

Tony Chicotel is a Senior Staff Attorney for California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform (CANHR). Tony spends his days working to improve the quality of care delivered at long-term care facilities and the quality of life of long-term care facility residents, and he accomplishes this through consumer education, individual case advocacy, litigation, legislation, and working with regulatory agencies. Tony's primary concern is adherence to residents' rights. He is the author of CANHR's "Your Right to Visit," a review of the applicable rules and common problems regarding visitation in long-term care facilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Tony counseled or represented scores of long-term care facility residents and their loved ones to help them exercise their rights to in-person contact and worked with federal and state policymakers to maintain and enforce visitation and access rights. In 2022, CANHR co-sponsored AB 2546 (Nazarian), which led to the formation of the LTCFA Policy Workgroup.

## **California Assisted Living Association (CALA)**

### **Heather Harrison**

Heather Harrison is the Senior Vice President of Public Policy & Public Affairs for the California Assisted Living Association (CALA). For the past 22 years, Heather has focused on aging and long-term care issues, working to ensure a variety of vibrant housing and care options for California's older adults. During the early days of the pandemic, Heather fought for assisted living residents and staff to get access to vaccines, boosters, and testing. At the same time, Heather focused a great deal of effort on behalf of CALA members to restore the rights of older adults to visit with their loved ones in person and fully engage in their assisted living community and the broader communities in which they live. Heather holds a master's degree in public policy and administration.

## **California Association of Health Facilities (CAHF)**

### **DeAnn Walters**

With a keen interest in and deep insight into quality improvement, DeAnn Walters is Director of Clinical Affairs and Quality Improvement for the California Association of Health Facilities (CAHF) and is a Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement (QAPI) Certified Professional. She provides membership support and policy guidance for providers of skilled nursing facilities and intermediate care facilities for developmentally disabled individuals.

With 24 years as a nursing home administrator, DeAnn has experience that includes overseeing short-term rehabilitation, Alzheimer's care, and mental health programs. During that time, she attained AHCA National Quality Bronze and Silver Awards and also received the Del Callaway Administrative Excellence Award from the CAHF in 2013. DeAnn's overall commitment to continually improving quality of care makes her a well-respected resource among CAHF and its members in enhancing the lives of residents.

## **California Association of Long-Term Care Medicine (CALTCM)**

### **K.J. Page**

K.J. Page, RN-BC, LNHA, has been an Administrator at Chaparral House, a unique 49-bed Joint Commission accredited and certified (post-acute and memory care) not-for-profit skilled nursing facility since December 2002. During the pandemic, Chaparral House scrambled to understand and process the voluminous communications from multiple jurisdictions relative to COVID-19 and infection prevention and control, and visitors and volunteers, group activities, and social dining were all curtailed. K.J. describes how policies and procedures changed rapidly, often several times a week, and how, in response, she and other infection prevention professionals attended extensive trainings and provided weekly updates to keep family, friends, and staff apprised of the changing protocols and information. Chaparral House successfully remained free from COVID-19 outbreaks until November 2022, when the facility experienced a mild outbreak with no serious illness, hospitalizations, or deaths.

## California Caregiver Resource Centers

### Jack Light

Jack Light is the Director of the Family Caregiver Resource Center and St. Jude Brain Injury Network at Providence St. Jude Medical Center in Fullerton, California. Jack serves on the policy workgroup on behalf of the Association of California Caregiver Resource Centers. His career as a clinician and administrator started in Orange County in 1989, working in the public and private sectors in social service, health care and in managed care insurance. Since 2008, he has worked exclusively in supporting unpaid family caregivers, contributing to several academic research studies about family caregiver stress, and serving as a graduate school lecturer on social work policy and graduate student fieldwork instructor. He also supervises candidates for clinical social work licensure and maintains a private clinical practice.

Jack has a 94-year-old mother with no cognitive impairments residing in a skilled nursing facility, who spent time in a COVID wing during her residence. Jack notes that he holds out hope that with favorable management of other chronic conditions, his mother will be transitioned to a lower level of care. In April 2020, Jack himself had an extensive inpatient surgery at a time when the hospital did not allow visitors, and he had no face-to-face family visits during his seven-day stay. Based on the isolation he felt during that stay, Jack chose to be at home for his recovery and rehabilitation process over the following six months. Jack notes that he is humbled by the opportunity to serve on this workgroup.

## California Commission on Aging (CCoA)

### Ellen Schmeding

Ellen Schmeding, a licensed marriage, and family therapist, served as the Chief Operating Officer at St. Paul's Senior Services from 2017 to 2023, overseeing all of St. Paul's residential communities and shared services (dining, facilities, human resources, marketing, and the Chaplaincy Program). She serves on the California Commission on Aging as a governor appointee and participated in developing the Master Plan for Aging for California. Prior to joining St. Paul's in 2017, Ellen worked as the County of San Diego Director of Aging & Independence Services (the Area Agency on Aging for San Diego County) as well as serving as the Public Administrator, Public Guardian, and Public Conservator for San Diego County. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ellen oversaw four residential communities, with responsibility for areas including skilled nursing, independent and assisted living, and memory care, and covered as administrator for two sites.

With over 20 years in long-term care, Ellen holds a Master of Science in gerontology, is licensed as a Skilled Nursing Home Administrator, and holds an RCFE certificate. She has served as both an Executive Director and a Skilled Nursing Home Administrator simultaneously and has led large continuing care retirement communities including skilled nursing, assisted living, memory care, and independent living facilities. Ellen has obtained the humility, humbleness, and knowledge that afforded her the ability to achieve national quality measures, earn CMS Five-Star Ratings, exceed key leading indicators, and

advocate for and develop modern policies and procedures governing the quality of care for older adults in communal multi-level senior care settings. She has been named a future leader by AHCA/NCAL, has been published by the National Association of Directors of Nursing Administration of Long-Term Care on staffing shortages, has been a researcher and presenter at the California Association of Long-Term Care Medicine, and was named CAHF 2022 Skilled Nursing Home Administrator of the Year. As an experienced Executive Director and Skilled Nursing Home Administrator, Ellen believes in a culture of caring, mentorship, and appreciation of every associate and the delivery of the highest quality of care for all seniors regardless of care settings or insurance coverages. One of her proudest achievements is leading associates on the front lines through the challenging times of COVID-19, a time like no other in our profession.

## California Conference of Local Health Officers

### Anissa Davis

Anissa Davis, MD, MPH, is a City Health Officer for the City of Long Beach and California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) President. Anissa's specialty is family medicine, and she has been the Health Officer for the City of Long Beach since 2016. Long Beach is one of three city local health jurisdictions (besides Pasadena and Berkeley) and has had to limit access and visitation as part of its outbreak management. She was a health officer during the pandemic, and her experience of long-term care facility access and visitation during COVID-19 has been focused on responding to and managing COVID-19 and other communicable disease outbreaks (influenza, norovirus, *C. auris*, etc.).

## California Department of Aging (CDA)

### Mark Beckley

Mark Beckley has served as the Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Aging since December 2019. Mr. Beckley previously served as the Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) from 2015 to 2019 and previously served in the capacities of DCSS Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Director of Administration from 2007 to 2012. Mr. Beckley also served as Deputy Director of Administration at the California Department of State Hospitals from 2012 to 2015 and previously served in a variety of capacities for the California Department of Finance from 2001 to 2006. He graduated from the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy with a Master of Public Policy degree.

### Brandie Devall

Brandie Grover Devall is an Attorney (III) with the California Department of Aging. Brandie has over 15 years of experience serving as an advocate for older adults, children, persons with disabilities, and incarcerated individuals, in both the public and private sector. Brandie's passions include racial equity,

prisoner's rights, and mindfulness. She is a certified mediator, and yoga/mindfulness instructor. Brandie received her B.A. from Loyola Marymount, and her J.D. from Loyola Law School.

### **California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet)**

**Thomas Martin**

### **California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC)**

**Dan Okenfuss**

### **California Long Term Care Ombudsman Association**

**Karen Jones**

### **County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California (CBHDA)**

**Michelle Cabrera**

### **California Department of Developmental Services (DDS)**

**Frances Chacon**

Frances Chacon has a combined 30 years of public- and private-sector experience. She has served over 20 years of this time within the legislative and executive branches. Currently, Francis serves as Strategic Initiatives and Operations Advisor at the California Department of Developmental Services. Her legislative background includes 10 years serving as a Principal Consultant on Assembly policy committees, including the Assembly Human Services Committee. In the executive branch, her legislative background includes serving as Deputy Secretary in the Office of Legislative Affairs at the California Health and Human Services Agency, Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs at the California Complete Count Census, and Legislative Consultant at the Department of General Services. She also has program experience serving as a Program Manager at the Department of Social Services. In the private sector, Francis was a licensed investment advisor and insurance producer, providing fee-only financial planning advice. During COVID-19, her father was living in an assisted living facility. His visits with family were limited to 30 minutes at a time via a balcony and a parking area, where communication was allowed at a safe distance.

### **California Department of Public Health (CDPH)**

**Cassie Dunham**

## **County Health Executives Association of California (CHEAC)**

Jayleen Richards

## **Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)**

Susan Philip

## **Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

Ana Acton

## **Department of Social Services (CDSS)**

Claire Ramsey

## **Disability Rights California (DRC)**

Todd Higgins

## **Foundation Aiding the Elderly (FATE)**

Carole Herman

## **Justice in Aging (JIA)**

Eric Carlson

Eric Carlson is an attorney and Director of Long-Term Services and Supports Advocacy at Justice in Aging. Eric has 30 years of experience in long-term services and supports (LTSS), including home- and community-based services, nursing facility care, and assisted living facilities. He counsels attorneys from across the country, co-counsels impact litigation that protects LTSS consumers, and is author of the legal treatise “Long-Term Care Advocacy” (Lexis Publishing) and the advocacy guide “25 Common Nursing Home Problems — and How to Resolve Them.” Eric recently served on the federal Coronavirus Commission for Safety and Quality in Nursing Homes.

## **Kern Medical**

Norka Quillatupa

## **LeadingAge California**

### **Amber King**

Amber King is the Vice President, Legislative Affairs for LeadingAge California. She has over 18 years of experience working with the state Legislature, legislative staff, committee and budget staff, key coalitions, and internal and external stakeholders advocating for health care, local government, and employment issues. In her role at LeadingAge California, she leads health policy and legislation and manages political action committees (PAC) activities.

## **LTCF Resident and Family**

### **Nancy Stevens**

Nancy Stevens is a disabled young adult resident in a nursing home and a member of Essential Caregivers Coalition. Before coming to live in the nursing home, she spent 27 years in high-end hospitality, 18 of those as a corporate trainer, traveling all over the U.S. In 2012, Nancy was in and out of the hospital, navigating several debilitating autoimmune conditions. She came to receive long-term care in her current skilled nursing facility starting in 2019. After two years of firsthand experience with and witnessing of a number of unfortunate and preventable abuses, neglect, retaliation, attempts at “patient dumping,” and many situations that caused negative and often deadly consequences to her neighbors, Nancy tried reaching out for help, but none was available. Restrictions on visitation and lockdowns due to COVID-19 prevented her essential caregivers from coming in to assist, comfort, or support her or her fellow residents. Nancy feared this would be what the rest of her life would be like, and related to her neighbors who said, “This is no way to live.” Each day, Nancy found herself in bed, under her covers, afraid to come out. She found that every local advocacy person/program referral was incentivized to just maintain the status quo. For a long while, Nancy was unable to help herself, but what hurt more than anything was the fact that she wasn’t helping her neighbors. That’s what motivated her to start getting bolder in speaking up for residents’ rights. When Nancy has better days, she spends time with her neighbors and also gets many of them set up to FaceTime or Zoom with their loved ones. In addition to her work with Essential Caregivers Coalition, she is an active member of the East Bay/Berkeley Gray Panthers, is on the steering committee of the Live Oak Project, serves as a People with Disabilities Cultural Community Liaison through Riverside University Health Systems-Behavioral Health, and is a consultant with several think tanks. Additionally, Nancy serves on the residents’ advisory panel with the Moving Forward Coalition and is a resident participant at annual Consumer Voice conferences and more, when her health allows.

## **LTCF Resident and Family**

### **Maitely Weismann**

Maitely Weismann is a family caregiver and co-founder of Essential Caregivers Coalition, a nonpartisan grassroots organization made by and for long-term care residents and family caregivers. Along with that



group, she's been instrumental in developing federal and state legislative bills that would help LTCF residents access their family caregivers (biological or chosen) during facility lockdowns. Maitely has over 30 years of lived experience as a hands-on family caregiver for her mother, who has navigated disabilities since she was young. Since moving to California in early 2020, her mother has resided in large and small RCFEs. Maitely acts as a power of attorney, health proxy, resident representative, and designated support person for her mother. Maitely first learned to don and doff substantial personal protective equipment (PPE) properly when welcomed as an in-person assistant per Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations during hospital visits throughout the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. That PPE training prepared her to assist her mother closely in the RCFE with abundant caution during a floor-wide COVID-19 outbreak in January 2021.

Motivated by what she saw as an opportunity to balance assets and risks in LTC, Maitely has returned to school in the past year to study Community Advocacy and Social Policy with a concentration in Public Health Innovation. This year she is honored to be one of four students chosen by her university's Project Humanities Program to complete an applied research project exploring consumer involvement in long-term care policy. Maitely is grateful for the efforts of LTC professionals, health experts, legal advisors, academics, consumer advocates, and legislators, who have empowered family caregivers and residents to join together to maximize person-centered care and quality of life in long-term care homes.

### **Melody A. Taylor Stark**

Melody brings over 10 years of advocacy and family caregiving experience. Her late husband, who had Post-Polio Syndrome, was in a nursing home. She is currently a Designated Support Person for two chosen families who are residents at a nursing home. She works diligently to advance positive system changes in disability rights and long-term care. Melody is a founding member of Essential Caregivers Coalition; a member of Caregivers for Compromise, and San Gabriel Valley Disability Collaborative; and Facebook co-administrator for Aging Enlightened, a group that was begun by a prominent reporter for Kaiser Health News. She also served at the Convalescent Aid Society as a volunteer and recently was a presenter for the Gray Panthers NYC Transformation Tuesdays webinar. Furthermore, Melody was a member of the team that developed the first iteration of CA AB 2546, the Resident-Designated Support Persons Act, and the bipartisan, co-sponsored HR 3733, the Essential Caregivers Act, which was introduced to U.S. Congress in June 2021.

In her professional life, Melody is an Electronic Health Records (EHR) Specialist for a large mental health agency. In addition to her work with EHRs, she has a background in quality assurance and quality improvement with Department of Mental Health (DMH) contract agencies; has served as co-chair for an LA County DMH Quality Improvement committee; has provided case management work with at-risk youth; and has served as a family mediator, a peer mediation trainer, and a mediation case coordinator. Knowing firsthand the value of psychosocial support to residents of long-term care, along with the challenges consumers and their biological/chosen families face in navigating long-term care systems, Melody views her service on the LTCFA Workgroup as a chance to be the voice of and support for those in long-term care now as well as in the future. She is also raising awareness in support of strengthening the role of biological/chosen family in health care settings.

## **Mercedes Vega**

Mercedes Vega currently works in the field of public health doing COVID-19 response work for LTCFs, but she is here as her brother's representative and advocate. Mercedes is an LA native who grew up in the Pico-Union area, where she witnessed how the depletion of resources in her community often led to an unhealthy living environment that impacted everyone's quality of life. This prompted her to dedicate her work to nonprofit organizations that address various social determinants of health impacting many areas in the county. For over 10 years she served as an educator and professional advocate for students and families in programs like Para Los Niños, Gang Reduction & Youth Development, and A Place Called Home. Public health was always at the forefront of Mercedes' interests; however, it was not until 2015, after her brother suffered a traumatic brain injury, that she learned about the challenges of long-term care as she struggled to find him a good skilled nursing home. This inspired her to pursue a master's degree in public health. During that program of study, she introduced many colleagues to the dialogue surrounding long-term care topics including policy, provisions, resident/consumer rights, challenges, and potential solutions. Mercedes also gained experience interning in both the LA Department of Public Health (DPH) and CDPH during her studies, where she helped develop program evaluation tools. Mercedes and her mother have been caregivers for over seven years. Her brother can't speak or move much; they have become an extension of him.

Mercedes' favorite part of her day is spending time with her brother watching movies or football games, listening to music, and helping him with his care. During the first two years of the pandemic, she and her family were not able to visit her brother in person for over 18 months. Despite DPH guidance and requirements to allow in-person visits, the facility kept them out for an additional six months without any clinical reason. This prohibited them from properly caring for him and led to significant health decline. After months of perseverance along with other advocates, Mercedes was able to get the facility to reopen indoor visits. She believes in balancing all aspects of consumer and resident health needs to bring the best quality of life and care because it is never about just one life: caring for loved ones who are ill has ripple effects in our lives, our families, our communities, and our country.

## **Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OSLTCO)**

### **Blanca Castro**

Blanca is a seasoned Agency Director and Executive Leader with over 20 years of experience providing executive-level public policy advocacy at the state and federal levels. During her career, Blanca has advocated on behalf of older adults in nursing homes and other long-term care settings at the state level and through her work with AARP; she has also worked in collaboration with stakeholders representing labor, people with disabilities, and older adults through the California Disability and Aging Alliance. This stakeholder group was instrumental in helping increase awareness about the need for a solution to pay for long-term services and provide support for Californians earning a moderate income so they can afford LTSS if and when necessary.

In 2021, Blanca was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom as the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (SLTCO). She is responsible for the effective management and leadership of the state office as well as the 35 local Long-Term Care Ombudsman offices. Blanca knows that the staff and volunteers at California's local Long-Term Care Ombudsman offices are the eyes and ears of the public and the first line of defense against abuse and exploitation of older adults and individuals who lack the capacity to continue living independently. In her work with AARP, one critical advocacy issue was the lockdown, and the impact lockdown policies were having on residents and their families who were unable to visit or be with them during their end of life. When Blanca became the SLTCO, one of her priority issues was working with the CDPH to revise those policies to allow families to visit with loved ones in LTCFs. During COVID-19, Ombudsmen had to find new ways to do their jobs, such as witnessing Advance Health Care Directives remotely. Blanca worked with the local LTC Ombudsman programs and the Office of Legal Counsel to issue formal cease-and-desist letters to facilities that were preventing LTC Ombudsman representatives from entering facilities even after the CDPH and CDSS issued guidance to providers that Ombudsman representatives could not be prevented from doing their jobs and entering facilities.

### **Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**

**Tiffany Whiten**

### **State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD)**

**Ken DaRosa**