

# May 1, 2019 Disability Advocacy Conference Presenters

**Karla Baker (Intake Specialist, Disability Rights NC)** was born and raised in Raleigh, N.C. and has several family members who have disabilities including hearing loss, cerebral palsy, heart condition, sarcoidosis, and depression. Before joining the DRNC team, Baker studied computer science at St. Augustine's College and medical assistance at Wake Technical Community College. She has had the opportunity of learning and becoming proficient with alphabetic sign language.

**Paul Berry (Network Director and Programs Manger, NCServes Central Carolina)** joined NCServes in October 2017 after retiring from the United States Marine Corps as a sergeant major after 30 years of service. Berry served three years as the senior enlisted advisor to all of the Marine Corps recruiters in North Carolina, where he gained a greater understanding of the people of North Carolina and their commitment to the military and their families. Berry has vast experience working with organizations that support our active duty, guard, reserve and veterans.

**Cassie Crawford (Assistant United States Attorney, Middle District of North Carolina)** joined the M.D.N.C. U.S. Attorney's Office in October 2018. She received a bachelor's degree from Middlebury College and a juris doctorate degree from Boston University School of Law. Before joining the U.S. Attorney's Office, she worked in private practice in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Boston, Massachusetts.

**Corye Dunn (Director of Public Policy, Disability Rights NC)** practiced law in a small firm before joining Disability Rights NC in 2011. Dunn has served as a direct care provider to adults and children with developmental disabilities and has worked in nonprofits seeking to expand access to education and increase investment in low-wealth communities. Dunn was born and raised in Durham. She graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina Central University School of Law.

**Elizabeth Edwards (Senior Attorney, NHeLP)** works as part of the National Health Law Program's North Carolina litigation team to

develop innovative legal theories to advance the health rights of low income and underserved individuals. Her work also includes policy advocacy and legal education. Edwards joined NHeLP after five years with Disability Rights NC, where she used the Medicaid Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and public policy to ensure equal access and community integration for individuals and groups, with a special focus on ending the long-standing institutional bias toward placement of people with disabilities in large, isolating adult care homes. A graduate of UNC School of Law, Edwards obtained her bachelor's in environmental science and policy from Duke University.

**Meisha Evans (Policy Analyst, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in February 2018 after spending four years reviewing wrongful conviction claims for indigent North Carolina inmates. She received her bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech and her juris doctor degree from the University of North Carolina School of Law.

**Carolina Farmer (Intake Specialist, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in October 2014. She enjoys helping people with disabilities and gets to do that daily as she speaks to people who need help protecting their rights. Farmer grew up in New York City and moved to Raleigh in 2013. She enjoys spending her weekends exploring North Carolina with her son Lyiam and daughter Isabella.

**Virginia Fogg (Senior Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights in September 2014 to represent students in special education cases. Fogg, who grew up in Wilson, attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an undergraduate and received her law degree from Columbia Law School in 1994. After law school Fogg clerked for the N.C. Supreme Court, then practiced class action litigation and transactional law in northern California. Her legal background includes representing children in special education and discipline matters for six years in her solo law practice.

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**Iris Peoples Green (Senior Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** was named to oversee DRNC's pilot Disaster, Displacement and Disability project in April

2019. Prior to this new role, Green supervised the Intake Team at DRNC in addition to leading litigation for children and the agency's emergency management/disaster relief efforts. She began her legal career with Legal Aid of North Carolina/Advocates for Children's Services in the summer of 2001. In 2005, she began working for North Carolina's protection and advocacy system as a staff attorney in the fields of special education and assistive technology. Green grew up in the small town of Timmonsville, South Carolina. She received her bachelor's degree in political science from South Carolina State University in 1986 and her law degree from North Carolina Central University in 2001.

**Chris Hodgson (Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in August 2015. He received a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University, a master's degree from Texas A&M University, and a juris doctorate degree from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law. Hodgson developed his passion for disability rights prior to law school as a direct care aide, case manager, and day program coordinator.

**Carol Ann Hudgens (Section Chief, N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children's Division)** has more than twenty years of experience in education and has served as a general education and special education teacher, assistant principal, special education coordinator, special education instructional supervisor, and dispute resolution consultant at the elementary, middle, high school, school district, and state levels. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a master's degree in Special Education, and doctorate in Administration and Supervision.

**Meredith Huml (Administrative Assistant, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in May 2017 as an intake specialist and now serves the agency by providing support to the CEO and the development and

communications and public policy teams. She previously worked as an independent living specialist at Alliance of Disability Advocates in Raleigh. Huml has FSHD, a form of Muscular Dystrophy, and is the director of the N.C. Chapter of the FSH Society. She and her father wrote a book on MD, published in July 2015, and continue to publish papers on FSHD in the hopes of spreading awareness and one day finding a cure.

**Lee James (Policy Analyst, NHLP)**, is a policy analyst in the National Health Law Program's N.C. office, focused on issues related to Medicaid's EPSDT benefit and the improvement of child health. Before joining National Health Law Program, James served as a Vanderbilt Public Service Initiative legal fellow in the Office of General Counsel at Meharry Medical College. He received his J.D. from Vanderbilt Law School where he interned with the Tennessee Department of Health, the Middle Tenn. Mental Health Institute, the Federal Public Defender for the Middle District of Tenn., and the Healthcare Division of the Tenn. Attorney General's Office. Before law school, James received a B.S. in Biology from Alabama A&M University and worked on molecular biology and genetics-based research projects for both the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, and Medical Neurogenetics in Atlanta.

**Emma Kinyanjui (Supervising Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in September 2016. She began her legal career as a Clifton Everett Fellow in the Morganton Office of Legal Aid of North Carolina, where she represented low income clients in housing, benefit, and consumer related issues. After completing her fellowship, she continued working for Legal Aid for seven years as a staff attorney, supervising attorney, and eventually as the managing attorney of the Smithfield Office. Kinyanjui also worked as a director in the Office for Career Services at NCCU School of Law before returning to her first passion – helping individuals receive the rights and services to which they are entitled. She received her bachelor's degree from Hollins University and her law degree from North Carolina Central University School of Law.

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**Virginia Knowlton Marcus, RYT 200\* (Chief Executive Officer, Disability Rights NC)** joined DRNC in September 2018. Knowlton Marcus is a nationally recognized disability rights attorney who has been advocating for disability rights at the federal, state, local and international levels for 25 years. Her prior positions include executive director at Disability Rights Maryland, director of legal advocacy and director of public policy at Disability Rights California, and executive director at the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. Her experience includes leadership positions on the National Disability Rights Network Board of Directors. Knowlton Marcus earned her J.D. and B.A. at the University of California, Davis and is a \*Registered Yoga Teacher.

**Tadra Martin (Senior Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in January 2015. Although she is originally from South Carolina, Martin is a proud Tar Heel. She received her bachelor's degree from UNC Chapel Hill and her law degree from Vanderbilt Law School. For over five years, she represented low-income individuals in various areas of civil law as a staff attorney at Legal Aid of North Carolina. Prior to joining Disability Rights NC, Martin conducted unemployment appeals hearings as a legal specialist at the N.C. Division of Employment Security. Martin's work at Disability Rights NC focuses on protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities to live in the most integrated community setting.

**Andrea Martinez (Advocate, Disability Rights NC)** was raised in Raleigh. She earned her bachelor's degree in child development at Brigham Young University in Idaho. Afterwards, she moved to San Francisco in order to work with AmeriCorps in their partnership with Prevent Child Abuse California. In California, she worked with children with delays and disabilities as a teacher, coordinator, and developmental therapist. She continued that work after returning to North Carolina. Martinez is currently pursuing her master's degree in education from UNC- Wilmington. Her work with Disability Rights NC focuses on advocacy and investigation in matters involving the education system.

**Lisa Nesbitt (Senior Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in April 2012. She received a bachelor's degree from Cook College at Rutgers and a juris doctorate degree from George Washington University. Nesbitt practiced law with several private firms in Washington and New Jersey where she gained valuable advocacy and argumentation skills which have greatly helped in raising three teenagers.

**Jan Paul (Assistant Clinical Professor of Law, North Carolina Central University School of Law, and Legal Director, Center for Child and Family Health)** serves as a clinical faculty member at NCCU School of Law. Based at the Center for Child and Family Health, Paul advises the administration and staff on legal matters affecting the Center's medical and mental health professionals. Prior to joining the faculty at NCCU, Paul worked as a senior legislative analyst/staff attorney for the N.C. General Assembly; was assistant district attorney and supervisor of the Protection of Family Unit for the Fourteenth Prosecutorial District of North Carolina; was an appeals referee with the N.C. Employment Security Commission; was a program attorney for the Durham, N.C. Guardian ad Litem Program; worked in private practice; and was a law clerk at the North Carolina Supreme Court.

**Susan Pollitt (Supervising Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** was raised in Chapel Hill and attended Northeastern University School of Law. Pollitt started her legal career with the public defender's office in Charlotte. She moved back to the Triangle area with her husband, Bill Rowe, in 1987 and worked for NCOSH and NC Prisoner Legal Services (1989-2005). She joined the staff of Carolina Legal Assistance (CLA) in 2005. Since 2007, when Governor Easley designated CLA as the state's P&A (which became Disability Rights NC), Pollitt has focused on making the promise of community integration a reality for people in North Carolina and protecting the rights of people with disabilities living in institutions.

**Josh Prater (Paralegal, Disability rights NC)** works as part of Disability Rights NC's Community Inclusion Team to assist in

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Medicaid and Waiver appeals and litigation. Prater also assists the Investigation and Monitoring Team in reviewing reports of potentially suspicious deaths from state-funded facilities. Before joining DRNC, Prater worked as a lab tech, a teaching assistant for students with autism in Wake County Schools, and a paralegal at a small plaintiffs' wage and hour firm. Prater is a North Carolina native and a Triangle transplant.

**Cas Shearin (Director of Investigations and Monitoring, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC as an advocate in August 2007. After reporting for newspapers in Georgia and North Carolina for eight years, Shearin pursued a career in advocacy. For 15 years, she worked as an investigator, consultant, administrator, and legislative liaison for a Durham nonprofit law firm that specializes in defending people facing the death penalty. She now directs Disability Rights NC's Investigations and Monitoring Unit which investigates serious allegations of abuse or neglect of people with disabilities.

**Frank Skwara (EPSDT/Due Process Consultant, NC Division of Medical Assistance NC DHHS)** serves as a nurse consultant focused on state compliance with the federal EPSDT Benefit and Beneficiary Right of Due Process and manages Health Check, the state's program for early, periodic screening. Skwara's 30 year career includes the management of behavioral health and medical care delivery systems and the direct delivery of health care services as a provider in family therapy, palliative care, home care, prison and emergency room settings. Skwara has a nursing degree from Duke University and a master's degree in family counseling/psychotherapy from John F. Kennedy University.

**Kristine Sullivan (Supervising Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** has been with Disability Rights NC since 2007 and currently serves as the attorney for the Investigations and Monitoring Unit. Her work includes investigating allegations of abuse, neglect or suspicious deaths; monitoring the care and treatment provided at facilities throughout the state; and advocating for policy changes to

protect the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. Sullivan earned her bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and her juris doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is conversant in American Sign Language and is the author of a manual for attorneys and advocates who represent students in matters related to seclusion and restraint in schools.

**Larkin Taylor-Parker (Attorney, Disability Rights NC)** joined Disability Rights NC in August of 2017, shortly after graduating from the University of Georgia School of Law. Before and during law school, Taylor-Parker spent time as a grassroots organizer in Atlanta's disability community and in various roles at nonprofits that advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Outside of work, Taylor-Parker enjoys spending time with friends and family, playing the tuba, and tinkering with an old Land Cruiser.

**Sherry Thomas (Director, NC Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children Division)** was named director of the North Carolina Division of Exceptional Children in January 2019. Thomas previously worked in roles serving children with special education at UNC Charlotte, Gaston County Schools, and as a teacher in Gastonia. She won the 2018 Felix S. Barker Award from the Council for Exceptional Children for outstanding leadership in the field of special education. Thomas earned a master's of education degree in special education from UNC Charlotte and a B.A. in special education and teaching from Sacred Heart College.