



## 2023 Children's Mental Health Advocacy Conference

### SPEAKER BIOS



**Steven Almazán** is the K12 Education Senior Program Manager at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition. Steven collaborates and communicates with coalition partners in national, state, and local civil rights organizations centered on policy proposals and policy remedies that advance educational equity and protect civil rights for all students in K12 education, explicitly addressing barriers for students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQI+ youth, immigrant students, students from families with low incomes, and students at the intersections of those identities.



**Representative Don Beyer** is serving his fifth term as the U.S. Representative from Virginia's 8th District, representing Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church, and parts of Fairfax County. He serves on Congress' Joint Economic Committee and the House Committee on Ways and Means.



**Christine Bingham** is a Staff Attorney with the Long Island Advocacy Center in New York. She leads the Reducing Suspension Disparity Program, which is designed to provide direct representation and education advocacy to families, as well as workshops, training, and outreach to communities, community-based organizations, and service providers. She collaborates with statewide and national stakeholders to reduce the reliance on exclusionary discipline and highlights the importance of alternatives to exclusion while meeting the needs of students and families. She started her career with the Legal Aid Society, Juvenile Rights Practice in Brooklyn, New York, as an attorney for children in abuse, neglect, and delinquency proceedings.



**Jan Blacher, Ph.D.**, is a Distinguished Research Professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Riverside (UCR) and in the Department of Psychology at UCLA. She is also the Director of the SEARCH Autism Center at UCR. Dr. Blacher's research focuses on the relationships of autistic children and youth with parents and teachers. She co-developed the Smooth Sailing program, a professional development program that equips general education teachers to build supportive relationships with autistic students. Dr. Blacher frequently consults on right-to-education suits for autistic children and youth. She is also the Executive Producer of Autism Goes to College, an award-winning documentary that follows five students and highlights their poignant experiences and insights regarding classes, professors, and roommates. [www.autismgoestocollege.org](http://www.autismgoestocollege.org).



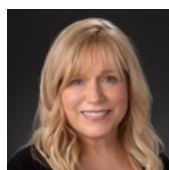
**Caroline Cole** is an entrepreneur, policy advocate, and co-host of Trapped in Treatment, a docu-style podcast from Paris Hilton's 11:11 Media and Warner Brothers, and Special Advisor to the International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion. After 2 ½ years in a "troubled teen" program, she knew she needed to change the system. Caroline has championed the rights of institutionalized people for over ten years. First, in her role at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health, then in the fight to end institutional child abuse that was spotlighted in Paris Hilton's documentary, This is Paris. Caroline, alongside Paris Hilton, penned the federal bill, The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act, and has successfully passed laws nationwide to prevent youth from being abused in institutional settings.



**Senator Dave Cortese** was elected in November 2020 to represent District 15 in the California State Senate. District 15 encompasses much of Santa Clara County in the heart of Silicon Valley. Along with his accomplished career as an attorney and business owner, the Senator previously served on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors for over a decade, with four years as Board President of the San Jose City Council, including two years as Vice Mayor and as a trustee for the East Side Union High School District for eight years. During his nearly three decades in public service, Dave has brought the community together to address and reduce homelessness, combat climate change, expand public transit options, reform Santa Clara County's jail custody operations, and fight for immigrant rights.



**Brian Dalla Mura** is a special education teacher in Vermont. He holds a master's degree in special education from Arizona State University. He has experience teaching students with emotional disabilities in kindergarten through high school. Brian began advocating for stronger and safer restraint and seclusion policies after witnessing prone restraints in his local school district where he worked and his child attends.



**Joan Durrant, Ph.D.**, is a senior scholar in community health sciences at the University of Manitoba. She has traveled extensively to understand the role of culture in parental beliefs and behavior and approaches to violence prevention. Her research has taken her many times to Sweden, where she has studied the history and implementation of the world's first ban on physical punishment. Dr. Durrant and her team have implemented Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) in countries throughout East and South Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, as well as across Canada. These experiences have helped achieve an understanding of historical and cultural forces that contribute to violence against children and to identify adaptations needed to support parents living in various contexts.



**Abbey Eisenhower, Ph.D.**, is Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Dr. Eisenhower's research focuses on developing and implementing neurodiversity-affirming training for teachers, early childhood educators, and others who work with autistic and neurodivergent children. With Dr. Jan Blacher (above), she has developed the Smooth Sailing program, a professional development program equipping general education teachers to build supportive relationships with their autistic students. Her research aims to amplify first-person autistic perspectives in working to improve the school experiences for autistic youth.



**Andy Feinstein** has, as an attorney, protected the rights of students with disabilities and their families for the past twenty-five years, first in Hartford with David C. Shaw, from 2008 to 2015, as a solo practitioner in Mystic, Connecticut, and, since July 1, 2015, as the owner of Feinstein Education Law Group, LLC. He serves as co-chair of the Government Relations Committee for the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) and a Board member, as treasurer and Government Relations Chair for Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), and co-chair of the legislatively mandated Task Force on Special Education Services and Funding in Connecticut. He also serves as adjunct professor of special education law at Central Connecticut State University. He has served as a professional House Committee on Armed Services staff member and Chief Counsel of the House Civil Service Subcommittee.



**Senator Sara Gelser Blouin(D-OR)** has served in the Oregon Legislature since 2005 and has been the Chair of the Senate Human Services Committee since 2015. She advocates for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in education, the workforce, housing, and the community. In 2009, she was appointed by President Barack Obama to the National Council on Disability. In the legislature, Sara successfully spearheaded efforts to strengthen Oregon's child welfare system, regulate the use of seclusion and restraint in schools and kids' residential programs, and eliminate zero-tolerance school discipline policies. She sponsored Oregon's Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, legislation to create the nation's first LGBTQ Veteran's Coordinator, and Melissa's Law to end Oregon's rape kit backlog. She proudly carried legislation banning so-called "conversion therapy" in Oregon, including the inappropriate use of restraint or seclusion in Oregon's child abuse statute and ending out-of-state placement of at-risk youth in dangerous out-of-state residential programs.



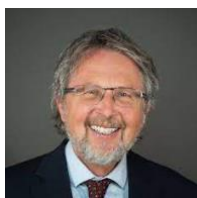
**Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.** is Founding Director of the non-profit Lives in the Balance and originator of the evidence-based Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS) model, as described in his books *The Explosive Child*, *Lost at School*, *Lost & Found*, and *Raising Human Beings*. He served on the faculty at Harvard Medical School for over 20 years and is now adjunct Professor in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Tech and in the Faculty of Science at the University of Technology Sydney in Australia. Dr. Greene developed and executive produced the award-winning documentary film *The Kids We Lose* and consults to parents, schools, and therapeutic facilities throughout the world.



**Dr. Melissa Houser** is a Board-certified family physician with particular expertise in child development and the brain science of co-regulation and mental health. She is also the Founder and Executive Director of All Brains Belong VT, a nonprofit community health organization in Montpelier, Vermont. All Brains Belong provides community-driven, neuroinclusive healthcare, community education, and social connection opportunities for all ages, focusing on community connection as the path to health.



**Ben Jones, J.D.** is Director of Legal and Policy Initiatives at Lives in the Balance. Before joining Lives in the Balance, Ben practiced as an attorney for Disability Rights Maine, advocating for children's rights and systemic change. He has represented hundreds of children with disabilities and their families in pursuit of safer, better lives. In his role at Lives in the Balance, he promotes legal initiatives on behalf of children and families nationally and internationally.



**Senator Stan Kutcher** is an internationally renowned psychiatrist in adolescent mental health. He is a leader in mental health research, education, advocacy, policy, and service innovation. He previously worked at the University of Toronto and Dalhousie University, where he was the Department Head of Psychiatry, the Associate Dean of International Health, and the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health. Senator Kutcher and his team at Dalhousie University led the development of a national child and youth mental health framework for Canada (Evergreen). He has conducted award-winning research into the neurobiology and treatments of mental disorders in young people. He has developed and deployed innovative mental health care systems nationally and internationally. Recently, he focused on primary care mental health interventions and mental health literacy development in school systems and postsecondary institutions. Ensuring that the best available evidence is used to advance mental health and enable rapid access to effective mental health care is essential to all of Senator Kutcher's initiatives.



**Representative Ian Mackey** serves in the Missouri legislature and is on the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee and the House Judiciary Committee. He is a Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee on Administrative Oversight. Rep. Mackey has successfully sponsored numerous pieces of legislation that have become law, including a law to limit the use of seclusion and restraint of schoolchildren in Missouri's K-12 schools.



**Chelsea Maldonado** is an Atlanta-based investigative researcher and lived experience expert for Trapped in Treatment, a docu-style podcast from 11:11 Media and Warner Brothers. She is also a researcher and social media campaign manager for 11:11 Impact's campaign to pass The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act. Chelsea has spent the last decade working behind the scenes to expose the individuals, corporations, and societal systems responsible for the harms occurring in the troubled teen industry. Her deep historical knowledge, passion for lived experience storytelling, and investigative know-how have helped Chelsea become a credible expert and historian on this important topic.



**Peter Mills** is the Legislative Assistant to Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT). Peter has served as Sen. Murphy's education staffer for the past five years. Over this time, he negotiated the education provisions of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, drafted legislation to reform school climate and safety policies, negotiated COVID relief funding to increase summer enrichment opportunities, and secured appropriations funding to expand services for students with disabilities and increase school diversity. Before his time with Sen. Murphy, Peter worked on education policy at the Louisiana Department of Education and was a junior high school math teacher in rural Arkansas. He's originally from Meriden, Connecticut, and received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina and his M.P.P. from Duke University.





it happen.

**Maile Munson, LICSW**, is the Director of Advocacy at Lives in the Balance and has over 20 years of experience supporting young people with emotional and behavioral challenges in various school settings, including residential homes, therapeutic day schools, and public schools. She is passionate about doing everything possible to heighten awareness, end the use of punitive exclusionary disciplinary practices, and bring people together to participate in the process and make



**Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT)** has dedicated his career to public service as an advocate for children and families in Connecticut and nationwide. Senator Murphy has been a strong voice in the Senate, fighting for affordable health care, sensible gun laws, forward-looking foreign policy, and ensuring all kids receive a great education. Last year, Senator Murphy led a bipartisan group in passing the first gun violence prevention legislation in decades, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. As a member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) committee, Senator Murphy fights for education funding and policies that ensure all kids are safe and supported in their schools. To this effort, Senator Murphy is the lead sponsor of several bills to promote positive school climates and eliminate harmful disciplinary practices. Specifically, he has sponsored the Keeping All Students Safe Act, which would prohibit seclusion and dangerous restraint practices in schools; the Protecting Our Students in Schools Act, which would prohibit corporal punishment in schools; and the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act, which would divert all federal funding for police in schools to fund schools' counselors, psychologists, and related personnel.



**Naomi Nova** is an education attorney representing students with disabilities and their families. She is deeply committed to education reform with a special focus on exclusionary discipline, including the use of restraint, seclusion, suspensions, and expulsions against schoolchildren. Naomi is Vice President of Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut, an organization dedicated to improving special education through policy reform. She proposed legislation to end the use of seclusion and further restrict the use of restraint in public schools. The legislation, which included a private cause of action, was taken up by the Legislation Committee in Senate Bill 1200 earlier this year, and she organized parents, advocates, and healthcare providers to testify before the Education Committee in support of the bill. Naomi graduated law school from Case Western Reserve University and is in private practice in Connecticut.



**Amanda Simmons, Esq.**, is an attorney and the founder of Ambika Law, PC, a law firm dedicated to estate, business, and charitable planning, with a focus on special needs trusts and nontraditional families, psychiatric issues, and disability planning. Amanda's deep commitment to charitable impact is reflected in her extensive pro bono work to prevent institutional child abuse. Her work includes high-profile legal analysis and writing on issues regarding congregate care, child sexual assault, juvenile mental health policy, and children's rights. She is a sought-after speaker and presents nationwide at conferences, including the National Association of Women Judges, the American Bar Association, the National Association of Counsel for Children, and the Conference on Juvenile Justice. Her work on juvenile strip searches is pending publication, and she has also contributed to numerous other peer-reviewed articles.



**Assemblywoman Michaelle C. Solages**, a fifth-term legislator, is a lifelong resident of Elmont, New York. Assemblywoman Solages represents the communities of Valley Stream, North Valley Stream, Elmont, South Valley Stream, South Floral Park, Floral Park, the Village of Bellerose, Bellerose Terrace, North Woodmere, Stewart Manor, and sections of Franklin Square. Michaelle was elected to represent the Twenty-second Assembly District in 2012 and is the first person of Haitian descent to be elected into the New York State Legislature. She is the Assembly Deputy Majority Leader and Chair of The New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus. Through her work, she strives to ensure everyone is treated with dignity and protected equally under the law throughout New York State.



**Representative John Talley** represents Oklahoma's 33rd District and is Chair of the Children, Youth, and Family Services House Committee. Representative Talley has worked with youth for over 45 years as a minister and director of youth programs and is a driving force behind legislation banning corporal punishment in his state.



**Representative Theresa Wood** grew up in Waterbury, Vermont, and attended Champlain College, earning a Legal Assistant degree and later a Bachelor's degree in Business from JSC. Her career has been primarily in state government, helping people with disabilities live full lives as valued citizens in our communities. She was formerly director of Developmental Disability Services and deputy commissioner of the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living. The Theresa Wood Citizenship Award was created upon her retirement from State service. This is an annual award to a person with developmental disabilities who embodies her qualities.



**Dawn Yuster** is a civil rights lawyer with over twenty years of experience advocating for racial, social, and mental health justice. Dawn has successfully led teams that integrated direct legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education to improve mental health, education, and juvenile/criminal legal systems. Dawn's legal advocacy is informed by her own experiences in the mental health system, particularly as an adolescent when she was in emotional crisis and once handcuffed by the police and, other times, placed in restraints and seclusion in inpatient clinical settings.