



RUTGERS

School of Management
and Labor Relations

**CENTER FOR INNOVATION IN
WORKER ORGANIZATION**



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

*Kalmanovitz Initiative
for Labor and the Working Poor*

**2023
2024**



**WILL
EMPOWER
EXECUTIVE
LEADERS**

Sulma Arias



Sulma Arias brings over 20 years of organizing experience to her role as Executive Director for People's Action. Sulma's organizing work spans many issues, including immigrant rights, voting rights, and economic justice, and her practice has always centered directly impacted people to build power. Sulma has worked closely with local and national organizations to build and advance strategic campaigns that build power. Sulma also has extensive experience training organizers and growing organizing capacity and building strong community-led organizations across the country. Sulma immigrated to Kansas from El Salvador at the age of 12 and ultimately went on to lead Sunflower Community Action, where she worked on training organizers and building a base of volunteers to fight for driver's licenses and tuition access for immigrants and fighting harmful policies during the Kobach era. Sulma worked for (National) People's Action on national campaigns and strengthening community organizing and also led the Fair Immigration Reform Movement in the fight for immigration reform and against the harmful policies coming out of the Trump administration for years. Sulma took over as Executive Director of People's Action in 2022 and is leading the charge to build a nationwide Organizing Revival to rebuild and reinvigorate the field of organizing to build community power across the country.

Cherika Carter



Cherika Carter (she/her) was elected Secretary Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO by its affiliated unions in October 2022 and was sworn in to begin her four-year term in January 2023. As Secretary Treasurer, Cherika is the chief financial officer of the council, taking charge of all financial documents and records, overseeing all receipts and expenditures, reporting on those activities to the WSLC Executive Board and convention. Along with WSLC President April Sims, she is part of the first leadership team of Black women to lead an AFL-CIO state federation. Prior to her election, Cherika served as the WSLC's Political and Strategic Campaigns Director since August 2019, developing and implementing the council's strategic political plan, running the WSLC's Labor Neighbor grassroots political action program, promoting member education campaigns on election issues, and helping recruit and elect pro-worker candidates at the direction of the WSLC officers and its affiliated unions via the Committee on Political Education (COPE). When she first joined the council's staff in March 2018, Cherika was the WSLC's Field Mobilization Director. She has advanced the WSLC's Race and Labor work and led the WSLC's Union Summer internship program to help educate and train the next generation of union activists and leaders. The activist bug first bit Cherika in 2011 as a Member Political Organizer of UFCW 1059 in Columbus, Ohio. She was part of the team that overturned SB 5, Gov. John Kasich's "Right-to-Work Is Wrong" bill, by taking it to a vote of the people of Ohio. After graduation from THE Ohio State University, Cherika went on to mobilize thousands of activists across the state to take action and win gains for working people as a Field Representative of the Ohio AFL-CIO. Cherika is committed to fighting all forms of oppression, and advancing the freedoms of all working people. In the struggle for justice, she is guided by these words: Not needing to clutch for power. Not needing the light just to shine on me. I need to be one in the number as we stand against tyranny. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes. She is a resident of Tacoma.

Lizeth Chacón



Lizeth Chacón is the Co-Executive Director of Workers Defense. Lizeth is an immigrant from Mexico who came to the United States at the age of 12, her lived-experience of the injustices immigrants face both informs her passion to fight for systemic change, and her leadership style in fighting for and with our communities. Lizeth has been organizing with immigrants, workers and communities of color for over 17 years. Lizeth is the Founder and former Executive Director of Colorado People's Alliance (COPA), a member-led, racial justice, multi-issue organization that under her leadership won unprecedented victories for working families and immigrants in Colorado. She co-founded the Statewide Immigrant Resistance Table in Colorado. She is the former Board Chair of People's Action where she served for 4 years. She also co-founded and serves on the Governing Council for the Transformative Leadership for Change (TLC), which nurtures the sustainability, solidarity and radical visions of BIPOC movement leaders in Colorado.

Tanya Coats



Prior to her being elected to her local and state executive boards, she served as an educator for the Knox County School System as a Curriculum Facilitator. Tanya has over 25 years of experience working at all levels of public education. She has been a high school math teacher, middle school science and social studies teacher, an elementary educator, having served as a Kindergarten and fourth grade teacher. She has a dual degree with a B.A. in English & Math and a M.Ed. in Inclusive Early Childhood Education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, followed by an Ed.S in Leadership from Lincoln Memorial University, where she is also a doctoral candidate with an emphasis on administration and supervision. Tanya is the proud mother of two adult children, Dreama and Christian. She also has custody of her nieces, Brooklyn, Felicity and Taegon. She takes great pride in her family. Having served as a public education advocate for more than 25 years, Tanya is increasingly aware of issues that negatively impact students and educators in Tennessee public schools. Early in her career, Tanya realized she could no longer just “go to my room and teach,” ignoring issues affecting her school, her coworkers and her students. As a result, she has built relationships with educators and community organizations across her community, state, and nation -- relationships with advocates who share a passion for preserving and improving our great public schools. An key part of this journey was becoming an active member of the TEA, an organization advocating for our students, schools and communities for more than 150 years, with the goal of eliminating poverty and inequalities our students face through racial and social injustices.

Rebecca Dixon



NELP is led by President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rebecca Dixon. Rebecca is a respected national leader in federal workers' rights advocacy and is in great demand for her thought leadership on issues of labor and racial, gender, and economic justice. Rebecca's commitment to advancing workers' rights and economic justice is deeply rooted in her lived experience growing up in rural Mississippi at the intersection of race, class, and gender—characteristics that have long defined one's ability to participate in our democracy and economy. As the descendant of enslaved people and daughter of sharecroppers and domestic workers, Rebecca knows firsthand what is lost when workers of color are relegated to the lowest rungs of our labor market, without respect, rights, and protections. Prior to taking the helm in 2020, Rebecca served on NELP's Executive Management team as Chief of Programs. Since joining NELP in 2010, she has advanced NELP's growth and impact while serving in several positions, including policy analyst and senior staff attorney. During the Great Recession and its aftermath, Rebecca was a leader in winning unprecedented unemployment insurance coverage expansions in 20 states and multiple extensions of federal emergency UI benefits for long-term unemployed workers. In 2012, Rebecca was selected by the State of New York for its Empire State Leadership Fellows program and served in the Office of the Governor in its Labor and Civil Rights Division. She is a member of the Mississippi Bar Association; a board member of The American Prospect, Americans for Financial Reform, the Coalition on Human Needs, the Hope Enterprise Corporation, and the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation; and a member of the Economic Analysis and Research Network in the South, the 2020 Aspen Institute SOAR Leadership Fellowship, and the 2021 National Academy of Social Insurance's Unemployment Insurance Reform Working Group and COVID-19 Task Force. Rebecca holds bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Duke University, and a law degree from Duke Law School.

Ricarra Jones



Ricarra Jones is the Political Director for 1199SEIU, the largest healthcare union in the country. She has spent her career empowering underserved communities and building coalitions to fight for social and economic justice. Ricarra has worked tirelessly to improve the lives and working conditions for low wage workers and successfully led the fight to increase the state's minimum wage to \$15. She also spearheaded efforts to ensure full-time employees earn paid sick leave.

Ricarra is currently working to ensure frontline workers have adequate health and safety protections at work during the pandemic. She is a champion for working families. She serves on the Executive Board of the MD/DC AFL-CIO, NAACP.

Rebecca Martinez



Rebecca Martinez has 20 years of community and labor organizing in Chicago. Her first experience recognizing the power of community was in 2001 when ordinary Little Village residents went on a 19 day hunger strike to demand a high school that was promised but never built. This bold community action changed her path in life and the way she viewed herself and her community. Rebecca has dedicated the last 10 years to the labor movement as an organizer and now director of organizing for the baddest union, the Chicago Teachers Union. Rebecca spends her free time doing whatever her 3-year old says.

Resha Thomas



Resha Thomas has thirteen years of experience in organizing and advocacy for community organizations and nonprofits. Since 2010, Resha has focused on creating and implementing political field programs geared towards increasing the vote of the rising American electorate communities. For the past seven years, Resha Thomas has served as the statewide political director for the Service Employees International Union- Texas. She recently led the SEIU Texas Houston airports division, which organized 1,700 airport service workers and increased wages for thousands of essential workers. Resha serves as the vice-chair of the Planned Parenthood Texas Votes board and the secretary for the Coalition of Black Trade Unionist Houston chapter. She received her Masters in Public Policy and Administration from the University of St. Thomas in 2018. Resha is a native Houstonian who enjoys spending her weekends exploring Houston's diverse food scene.

Nafisah Ula



Nafisah Ula serves as the organizing director for the national office of Jobs With Justice. Now based in Portland, OR, she has been an organizer and campaigner since she was a teenager in Laramie, WY. Nafisah has worked with the domestic and international trade union movement since 2009. She's hopped all over the country for the AFL-CIO's Center for Strategic Research, built campaigns with SEIU, and supported working people who provide behavioral health and head start services in Oregon join together with AFSCME. In recent years, Nafisah aided members of the National Guestworker Alliance and the New Orleans Worker Center for Racial Justice in experimenting with new models of building their power. Her experiences in campaigning and movement building have instilled a deep commitment to using the strengths inherent in our communities by organizing in the most strategic and impactful ways possible. Nafisah holds degrees from the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago.

Tanya Wallace-Gobern



Tanya Wallace-Gobern is the first executive director of the National Black Worker Center Project. Born in Chicago, Illinois, after graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from Loyola University of Chicago she moved to the deep south in 1991 to launch an organizing career empowering women and people of color. Her professional experience includes organizing with UNITE HERE (formerly the Union of Needle trades, Textiles and Industrial Employees) AFL-CIO and the Association of Flight Attendants. Aggravated by the low number of African Americans among staff and union leadership, she created the AFL-CIO's Historical Black College Recruitment program. In 2004 she entered the nonprofit community to led the field operation for Women's Action For New Directions. Based in Atlanta, GA she directed national programs to educate the public and elected officials about the need to reduce and redirect excess military spending. Returning to labor in 2008 Tanya relocated to Sacramento, CA where she learned a different, non-adversarial approach to trade unionism and joined the staff of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions (CKPU). Initially hired as the National Affiliations Coordinator she led the affiliation of the Hawaii region into the Coalition. Being promoted several times she served in the roles of Southern California National Coordinator, Director of Transformation, East Coast Field Director and National Field Director. As Executive Director of the National Black Worker Center Project she lives out her lifelong passion while executing the mission of empowering black workers to advance their rights and improve the quality of jobs in key employment sectors. Tanya leads a cadre of membership-based, and member-driven black worker centers that utilize a combination of leadership development, organizing, policy advocacy, and strategic communications to build power to address the black job crisis. Partnering regional black worker centers are located in Los Angeles, CA, Chicago, IL, New Orleans, LA, Baltimore, MO, Raleigh-Rocky Mount, NC, Greenville, MS, Washington, DC and Oakland, CA. Ms. Wallace-Gobern has an advanced knowledge of community and political structures. She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School Executive Leadership program and her opinions and contributions have been featured in YSB magazine, The Los Angeles Times and on ABC Nightly News.

Erica Webber Jones



Erica Webber Jones is the President of the Mississippi Association of Educators. A dynamic scholar, transformative leader and forward-thinking visionary, Jones is committed to building upon MAE's strong and historic legacy, while advancing its mission to new levels of excellence. Her focus is on strengthening the teaching profession, growing and engaging membership, increasing the organization's presence, and better equipping educators with skills and resources that will allow them to compete in the globalized 21st century educational setting. In 2018, Erica was selected by The NEA Foundation to serve as a Global Fellow Educator. She traveled to South Africa during the summer of 2019 to gain educational experience with the Foundation. Erica served as the National Education Association Director for Mississippi and State Secretary-Treasurer for MAE. In May 2022, Erica completed the rigorous Cornell University Labor Leadership Institute where she focused on conducting research on engaging early career educators in association work. In addition, she serves as a Praxis Trainer and has helped to place dozens of teachers in Mississippi classrooms. Jones holds membership in several professional organizations, including the Mississippi Association and the National Association of Educators, The Byram-Terry JSU Alumni Association, Byram-Terry Junior Auxiliary, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. In her leisure time, Jones enjoys JSU football, reading and traveling. She is married to Arthur Jones and is the proud mother of two children: Nicholas and Kenley Grace.