



WED, APRIL 29 | 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM ET  
COPPIN STATE UNIVERSITY

# 2026 Maryland Aging Innovations Summit

DESIGNING FOR LONGEVITY



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The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation

AGING TOGETHER  
**KESWICK**

9:00 AM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Welcome Remarks</b></p> <p><b>Sarah Manekin</b>, Managing Director, Baltimore Grantmaking, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation</p> <p><b>Danista E. Hunte</b>, President and CEO, Maryland Philanthropy Network</p> <p><b>Joan Sylvia Tilghman</b>, PhD RN, WHNP-BC, CNE, Dean and Professor, Director of Health Centers, Coppin State University</p>
9:15 AM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Maryland Department of Aging Presentation</b></p> <p><b>Secretary Carmel Roques</b>, Maryland Department of Aging</p> <p>Introduction by <b>Cathy Brill</b>, Executive Director, Leonard &amp; Helen R. Stulman Foundation</p>
9:45 AM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Keynote Address</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Leanne Clark-Shirley</b>, President &amp; CEO, American Society on Aging</p> <p>Introduction by <b>Aileen Tinney</b>, President &amp; CEO, Keswick</p>
10:35 AM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Networking Break</b></p>
10:50 AM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Panel Discussion: Age-Friendly Systems Benefit All Communities</b></p> <p><b>Chelsea Wheeler (Moderator)</b>, Supportive Communities Program Manager, Maryland Department of Aging</p> <p><b>Emily Kearns</b>, Dementia Specialist Coordinator, Baltimore County Department of Aging</p> <p><b>Jane Rohde</b>, Founder, Live Together Intergenerational Communities</p> <p><b>Sharon L. Vanzego-Johnson</b>, Director of Aging Services of the Maryland Umbrella Group, Care Manager &amp; Dementia Care Practitioner, City of Greenbelt</p>
11:45 AM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reflective Group Dialogue</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Claudia Thorne</b>, PhD, LISW, LCSW, Assistant Professor, Coppin State University</p> <p>Introduction by <b>Tracey Barbour-Gillett</b>, Program Officer, Community Development, Abell Foundation</p>
12:15 PM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Musical Performance by the Iris Music Project</b></p>
12:45 PM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Closing Thanks &amp; Buffet Lunch</b></p>
1:30 PM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Post-Summit Networking &amp; Collaboration Session with Leading Age Maryland</b></p>

# Speaker Bio



## Carmel Roques, MA, LCSW-C State Secretary of Aging

Appointed by Governor Wes Moore in 2023, Secretary Carmel Roques has transformed Maryland's approach to aging through a career-long dedication to ensuring all Marylanders lead healthy, financially secure, and purposeful lives. Her tenure at the Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) is anchored by the 2025 launch of Longevity Ready Maryland (LRM), the state's first comprehensive multisector plan designed to address the unique challenges and opportunities of a growing older population.

Under the leadership of Secretary Roques, MDOA has begun the work of implementing LRM, modernizing the Department's operations, fostering new collaborations among partners, and expanding equitable access to vital resources across the state.

A recognized expert in dementia, palliative care, and community health, Secretary Roques brings over four decades of leadership experience to her role. Her distinguished track record includes a ten-year tenure as President and CEO of Keswick, as well as executive leadership positions at Catholic Charities, Virginia United Methodist Homes, and Episcopal Ministries to the Aging. She has proudly served as the Chair of the Maryland Philanthropy Network and the LifeSpan Network, while currently chairing the Maryland Commission on Aging.

In addition to her policy work, Secretary Roques is deeply committed to community service, having served on the boards of Maryland Humanities, The Village Learning Place, and the Friends and Foundation of Howard County Library. She currently serves on the Visioning Committee for the National Bureau of Economic Research Coordinating Center on the Economics of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias.

Secretary Roques' contributions to the field and the community have earned her consistent acclaim from The Daily Record, which has named her one of Maryland's Top 100 Women, a Top CEO, and an Influential Leader in Health Care. She holds a Master of Arts from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and a Bachelor of Arts from Mills College in Oakland, California. She resides in Columbia, Maryland.

# Speaker Bio



## **Leanne J. Clark-Shirley, PhD** **President & CEO, American Society of Aging**

Leanne Clark-Shirley, PhD, is the President and CEO of the American Society on Aging (ASA). A social gerontologist, she is committed to building a society in which everyone has a full and fair opportunity to live a long, meaningful life on their own terms.

Leanne brings more than 20 years of leadership experience across aging-focused nonprofit, consulting, and academic sectors. Prior to joining ASA, she served as Senior Evaluation Advisor at AARP, where she led strategic planning initiatives, strengthened internal evaluation and research capacity, and advanced enterprise-wide impact measurement practices. Earlier, she directed the Aging and Disability research practice at IMPAQ International, a public policy research and consulting firm, overseeing research and evaluation projects that informed national policy and practice.

A Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America, Leanne also teaches courses on aging and public policy and mentors students pursuing non-academic careers in the field. She holds a PhD in Gerontology from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and a Master of Gerontological Sciences from Miami University.

The American Society on Aging (ASA) convenes the nation's largest multisector community of professionals working in aging, and is a trusted source for learning, collaboration, and activating the opportunities of our aging society through an equity-focused lens. Dr. Clark-Shirley will speak about ASA's innovative cross-generational learning spaces such as ASA RISE and Legacy Corps, and share insights from successful intergenerational initiatives that inspire a sense of belonging as we design for longevity.

# Speaker Bio



## **Chelsea Denise Wheeler** **Supportive Communities Program** **Manager, Maryland Department of Aging**

Chelsea Denise Wheeler leads the Supportive Communities initiative at the Maryland Department of Aging, where she is an advocate and collaborator for the “Longevity Ready Maryland” vision. With over a decade of experience in human services, Chelsea specializes in fostering environments that empower Marylanders to thrive independently within their own neighborhoods. She is a

prominent advocate for the Village Concept, championing neighbor-to-neighbor models that strengthen community fabric and social connectivity.

A proud alumna of Towson University with a degree in Family Science, Chelsea’s career spans local, state, and federal roles. She brings deep expertise in policy development, program management, and the equitable delivery of services. Her leadership is grounded in a commitment to diversity and a belief that age-friendly systems are the foundation of a more just society.

As a Third Cohort Fellow of the American Society on Aging’s ASA RISE program, Chelsea is at the forefront of national efforts to dismantle ageism and reshape cultural narratives around aging. A Baltimore native, she integrates her professional acumen with a lifelong passion for personal growth and community well-being.

# Speaker Bio



## **Emily Kearns, PhD, MBA**

**Coordinator, Dementia Friendly Baltimore County (DFBC)**

**Baltimore County Department of Aging**

Emily is the Coordinator for the community-based, cross-sector initiative Dementia Friendly Baltimore County (DFBC), led by the Baltimore County Department of Aging.

Emily gives in-person and virtual dementia and brain health sessions throughout the Baltimore County community including at senior centers, faith communities, staff trainings, and more.

Emily's personal experience caregiving/care partnering with her parents, who both lived with dementia, was life-changing, catapulting her into what is now her first love— supporting those living with dementia.

Emily earned a doctorate in sociology from Boston College and an Executive MBA from Northeastern University.

# Speaker Bio



**Jane M. Rohde, AIA, FIIDA, ASID,  
ACHA, CHID, LEED AP BD+C,  
GGA, GGF, EDAC**

**Principal, JSR Associates, Inc.  
Founder, Live Together, Inc.**

Jane is the Principal of JSR Associates, Inc. Her passion and design work serve vulnerable populations with the goal of achieving equitable access to housing, care, and services. She sits on various healthcare and sustainability committees supporting research, advocacy, and humanistic approaches to care and community design. Based on her 30+ years of experience, Jane founded Live Together, Inc., a nonprofit focusing on intergenerational care models and demonstration projects combined with workforce development opportunities to improve quality of life for residents of all ages. She is an advisor for the Ageless Living Collaborative, the first Changemaker Awardee for Environments for Aging from the Center for Health Design, received an ASID Design for Humanity Award, and is recognized as an Honorary Alumni of Clemson University's Architecture + Health program.

# Speaker Bio



## **Sharon Vanzego-Johnson, CMC, CDP, MAgS-C GAIL**

**Community Case Manager, Dementia Care  
Practitioner, City of Greenbelt**

Ms. Vanzego-Johnson, DCP, CMC is a dedicated advocate for older adults and individuals living with disabilities, serving the community through her work with the City of Greenbelt, GAIL Program, for almost 20 years. As the Community Case Manager, she works closely with residents and their families to identify, locate, and access services and supports that enable

individuals to safely age in place while maintaining independence and quality of life.

Through this work, she has developed an in-depth understanding of the evolving needs of older adults, caregivers, and individuals as they age and those living with cognitive impairment.

Ms. Vanzego-Johnson brings specialized expertise in dementia care, care coordination, and caregiver support. As co-lead for the North County team of the Dementia Friendly Prince George's Initiative, she collaborates with local government, healthcare partners, faith-based organizations, and community advocates to advance efforts toward building a more dementia-friendly and supportive community for residents and their caregivers.

In addition to her municipal role, Ms. Vanzego-Johnson serves as the Assistant Director of Aging Services with the MUG, where she supports initiatives that strengthen programs, partnerships, and resources for older adults in the region. Committed to both service and workforce development, Ms. Vanzego-Johnson also mentors and supervises students through the City of Greenbelt's Community Aging Internship Program, which includes partnerships with university schools of nursing, public health, and social work, working to prepare the next generation of professionals dedicated to serving older adults and their families.

# Speaker Bio



## **Claudia Thorne, PhD, LISW, LCSW**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Coppin State University**

Dr. Claudia Thorne has extensive professional experience working in health and human services nonprofit organizations at the local and national levels, addressing the lifespan. Dr. Thorne is an Assistant Professor of Social Work in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Coppin State University in

Baltimore, MD. Dr. Thorne was appointed to the Virginia Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council for the State of Maryland by the Governor and contributed to the Maryland State Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias. She has served as a Maryland Dementia Friends Champion, an Alzheimer's Association State Champion Program, and a member of the Age-Friendly D.C. Task Force. She is a member of the National Association of Social Workers and the National Association of Black Social Workers.

Dr. Thorne's current research interests are aging across the lifespan, caregiving among Black persons and persons of color, and social work pedagogy. Most recently, Dr. Thorne was awarded a research grant by Johns Hopkins University and appointed a research scientist at the Johns Hopkins Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center on Minority Aging. She holds a BA in Psychology from Boston University and an MSW and PhD from Howard University School of Social Work. She has completed the Master Faculty Program in Gerontology at the George Washington University Center for Aging, Health, and the Humanities.

# Speaker Bio



## Lauren Latessa

### Founder and Executive Director, Iris Music Project

Lauren Latessa, Iris Music Project Founder and Executive Director, has dedicated her career to exploring the ways music can infuse and transform communities. Her innovative work as the Manager of Music Enrichment at the Charles E. Smith Life Communities (CESLC), where she worked from 2015-2019, earned her awards and recognition from the Tarisio Trust, the Association of Jewish Aging Services and the National

Arts Strategies. Since 2019, as the Executive Director of Iris Music Project, Lauren has grown the organization to a team of four staff members and twenty-two musicians, who work together to provide meaningful musical engagement for older adults living in retirement and healthcare communities. Lauren holds degrees from Peabody Conservatory, Johns Hopkins University & Northwestern University. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Johns Hopkins University.



## Sofia Hailu, MA, MM

### Iris Music Project

Sofia Hailu is an artist and coach whose creative passion extends to leadership development and organizational sustainability. In her role as Managing Director, she works to build strong support structures around the bold visions of Iris Music Project's artists, collaborators, and stakeholders. She was previously a musician with the

United States Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps and later held administrative and management positions with The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, The Kennedy Center, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and Hailu Coaching & Collaborations, LLC (current.) When she's not working for Iris, Sofia offers workshops and coaching for executive leaders across the cultural sector and serves on the Board of BmoreArt. Sofia holds an MA in Arts Management (American U.), an MM in Flute Performance (Indiana U.), and a Certificate in Executive Leadership Coaching (Georgetown U.)

# Speaker Bio



## Britt Olsen-Ecker

### Iris Music Project

Britt Olsen-Ecker, hailed as a “renaissance woman” by *Urbanite Magazine*, is one of the most in-demand vocalists, session musicians, keyboardists, and portrait photographers in the D.C. metro area. She founded and fronted the award-winning band, *Outcalls*. Also known for her striking, expressive images, she owns a thriving headshot and portrait studio in Baltimore, MD. Britt is a graduate of the Peabody Conservatory. She has traveled the world singing and taking pictures—though not always at the same time. Learn more at [brittolsenecker.com](http://brittolsenecker.com)