



Mental Health in the Black Community:

Continuing the Conversation around Recognition, Recovery, & Resilience

AGENDA

June 21, 2023

Welcome & Opening Statement:

- **Tisha Leonardo-Santiago**, Interim Director of Outreach & Community Relations, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Introduction of Panelists:

- **Patricia D. Williamson**, Community Relations Specialist, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Panelists:

- **Chanel McCord, LPC, ACS, CCTP**, Owner and Clinical Director – Oasis Wellness Group Camden / Cherry Hill
- **Tashanna Bryant, AAS, BA, MS**, Founder & CEO – Never Hopeless Again | Executive Director – Emiijas Hope Center.
- **Valerie Mielke**, MSW Assistant Commissioner – New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Director, Division of Criminal Justice

Questions and Answers

Closing Remarks

Patricia D. Williamson, Community Relations Specialist, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights



Tisha M. Leonardo-Santiago

Interim Director of Outreach & Community Relations

Tisha M. Leonardo-Santiago (she/they) is Division on Civil Rights' first Latinx Interim Director of Outreach and Community Relations. A second-generation Latinx Hudson County native and a first-generation college graduate earning their undergraduate and graduate degrees in Criminal Justice from New Jersey City University. In 2017, Tisha joined DCR as a Bilingual Investigator in the Enforcement Unit, served as the bilingual subject matter expert for the New Jersey Bias Investigation Access System (NJBIAS) that launched in November 2020, and now serves as the Statewide

NJBIAS Community Liaison. In March 2021, they were promoted to the newly created Community Relations Unit as the Bilingual Community Relations Specialist prior to becoming the Interim Director in June 2022.



Patricia D. Williamson

Community Relations Specialist

Patricia D. Williamson (she/her) is a Community Relations Specialist and Community Mediator in the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights' Community Relations/Crisis Response Unit. Patricia is the unit's lead on programming initiatives for race and religion. She is based in Trenton, and her primary counties are Somerset, Warren, Monmouth, Middlesex, Mercer, Burlington, and Hunterdon. Prior to this position, Patricia was the New Jersey Counts Project Director at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. Patricia led the Institute's work to ensure a complete and accurate count of New

Jersey's urban communities in the 2020 Census. Patricia was part of the Census 2020 NJ Coalition, and convened a sub-coalition of African American community-based organizations, non-profits, and institutions (such as clergy). Patricia worked for over 20 years as a systems engineer in the optical networking area of various telecommunications companies in New Jersey. She was also an adjunct professor at Bloomfield College.

Patricia has plenty of voluntary experience in civic engagement and social justice. Patricia is the immediate past Eastern Region Social Action Committee Coordinator of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. She led the advocacy arm of the regional Sorority chapters between Maine and DC, the US Virgin Islands, Germany, the Arabian Gulf, and southern and western Africa.

Patricia resides in central New Jersey. She earned a BA in Mathematics from Hampton University, an MS in Computer Science from Howard University, and an MA in Education and Human Development in the Educational Technology Leadership Program at The George Washington University.

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Tashanna Bryant, AAS, BA, MS

Founder & CEO – Never Hopeless Again

Executive Director – Emiijas Hope Center

Tashanna Bryant is a wife to Robert Bryant and the mother of two daughters. Tashana was born and raised in Trenton, New Jersey. She has devoted herself to speaking up for the unseen and voiceless. Tashanna has earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, a Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling and Human Services, and an Associate of Arts in Liberal Studies. Tashanna is completing her doctorate in Strategic Leadership with the goal of continuing her work in the field of organizational mental health education, client care, and community

engagement. Tashanna is the CEO of Never Hopeless Again, a mobile social worker organization that connects community member to services, trains community agencies on cultural competency, trauma, and leadership, and engaging community members. Tashanna also established and serves as executive director of Emiija’s Hope Center, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to mitigate the effects of Adverse childhood experiences. Tashanna is a multi-talented artist; she sings, writes songs, and has performed for many Trenton, NJ, victims of violence. Tashanna believes that serving others is the highest calling, and she is dedicated to doing whatever it takes to ensure that everyone has access to the resources they need.



Chanel McCord, MA, LPC, ACS, CCTP

*Owner & Clinical Director – Oasis Wellness Group
Camden / Cherry Hill*

Chanel McCord is a Licensed Professional Counselor in NJ, an Approved Clinical Supervisor, and a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional. She is currently in pursuit of a doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision and holds a Master of Arts in Professional Counseling from Liberty University and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Seton Hall University. As part of her clinical work, Chanel specializes in working with black and brown individuals who are experiencing unfulfillment in their lives and having lost their voice due to unprocessed

trauma. Chanel utilizes the power of strength identification, storytelling, and emotional processing to assist her clients in reaching restoration and healing to begin living a more fulfilled life. As a Minister, Chanel also provides faith-based Christian spirituality integration into her therapeutic practices to assist clients who are struggling with or wanting to explore their spirituality. Chanel is a well sought-after Mental Health Speaker. She is passionate about spreading mental health awareness, breaking stigma, normalizing therapy, and helping people to embrace their humanity.



Valerie L. Mielke, msW

*Assistant Commissioner
Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services
NJ Department of Human Services*

Valerie Mielke is the Assistant Commissioner for the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) in the Department of Human Services and serves as the Single State Agency (SSA) for Substance Abuse and the State Mental Health Authority (SMHA) as designated by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Division is responsible for the coordination, administration, management and supervision of the community public mental health system, and is also responsible for regulating, monitoring, planning and funding substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery support services. Ms. Mielke holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Fairfield University and a Master of Social Work degree from Rutgers University.

Valerie serves on the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) Board of Directors and served as President from 2019-2021. NASMHPD's goal is to advance national, state and local mental health policy. Additionally, Valerie serves on the Board of Directors for the NASMHPD's Research Institute (NRI). NRI provides invaluable data and information to the state behavioral health agency commissioners and the public on various aspects of the public behavioral health system. Valerie also serves as a board member of the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD) Public Policy Committee. NASADAD's goal is to advance national, state and local addiction policy.

Valerie serves on the Advisory Board of The Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSGJC) which is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines membership association representing state officials in all three branches of state government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities. In addition, and led by CSGJC, Valerie serves on the National Justice Counts Steering Committee. This is a national consensus-building initiative designed to improve the availability and utility of criminal justice metrics/ data that can drive budget and policy decisions.