

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE

ON THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING



BIOGRAPHIES OF SENATORS & SPEAKERS

October 24, 2019

Holman United Methodist Church
3320 West Adams Blvd.,
Los Angeles, California

Senate Select Committee on the Social Determinants of Children's Well-Being

The social determinants of health are conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Children's well-being is increasingly linked to the social determinants. For example, nearly a quarter of young children in California live in poverty— a fact that has profound educational, health, and economic repercussions now and in the long term in that they create inequities that are unfair, but that could be mitigated. For the scope of the Committee's work, we are defining children to include young adults up to age 26.

The Select Committee was formed in February 2019 and will be active through the two-year legislative session. The bipartisan Select Committee members will be tasked with presiding over hearings that focus on specific social determinants of health that drive negative outcomes such as housing and homelessness, health access, immigration, poverty and the safety net, land use, and education. The Committee seeks to understand challenges in the current systems with the various determinants and consider ways to improve outcomes for children. The geographic focus of the work will be on areas with high poverty rates that are inclusive of, but not limited to: Los Angeles, the San Joaquin Valley, the Inland Empire, the Central Coast, and Northern Border/Tribal Lands.

The Committee will study and make recommendations promoting the health of children in California. These recommendations will be posted on the Select Committee's website. To learn more, please visit <https://childwellbeing.senate.ca.gov/content/2019-20-hearings>.

SENATOR BIOGRAPHIES



Senator Holly J. Mitchell

First elected to the Legislature in 2010, Senator Holly J. Mitchell represents nearly 1 million residents of the 30th Senate District, which ranges from Century City to South Los Angeles and includes Culver City, Cheviot Hills, Crenshaw District, University of Southern California, downtown L.A. and a portion of Inglewood. A third-generation native Angeleno, Senator Mitchell is the proud daughter of career public servants and the protégé of community leaders who instilled in her a passion for service. She continued her family legacy of “firsts” when she was named the first African American to chair the powerful Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee in December 2016. Less than two months later, a profile in *The Los Angeles Times* described Senator Mitchell as “the Legislature’s moral compass.”

Senator Mitchell, the mother of a teen-age son, has devoted her professional life to creating a California where all children thrive. She has led the charge to reform the criminal and juvenile justice systems, expand access to healthcare, increase early care and education access, increase CalWORKS grants, improve foster care, secure women’s reproductive health and end the trafficking of minors. She is a passionate defender of women’s rights and the environment.



Senator Melissa Hurtado

Senator Melissa Hurtado grew up in the Central Valley. As the daughter of immigrant parents and the first in her family to graduate from college, Senator Hurtado advocates for access to healthcare, quality schools, good paying jobs and the opportunity for a better life.

Prior to being elected to public service, Senator Hurtado was a community organizer for public employees, where she helped lead the fight for good wages, healthcare coverage and retirement security. Thereafter, she served on the Sanger City Council from 2016 until her election to the Senate in November 2018. On the Sanger City Council, she helped create high-wage jobs, balanced the budget and built a reserve, all without raising taxes. In the Senate, Senator Hurtado will work across the aisle to improve the quality of life in the Valley and ensure Valley voices are heard at all levels of government.



Senator Patricia Bates

Senator Patricia Bates has served as the Senate representative for the 36th District since December 1, 2014, representing nearly 1 million people living in south Orange and north San Diego County. Prior to being elected to public service, Senator Bates was a social worker for Los Angeles County where she learned that government must not rob people of their self-esteem and initiative. Government has an important role in protecting public safety and health, but it must act within the limits placed upon it by the people.

In the Senate, she championed taxpayers by defending Proposition 13 (which limits property tax increases) from efforts to gut it and helping lead the opposition against the massive gas and car tax increase. Senator Bates has worked with Democrats to advance common goals. For example, she jointly authored SB 197 (2017) with Senator Toni Atkins and SB 1007 (2018) with Senator Robert Hertzberg to lower the cost of building needed medical facilities that would serve veterans and military personnel afflicted with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related conditions.



Senator Anna M. Caballero

Senator Anna M. Caballero was elected in November 2018 to the California State Senate to represent the 12th Senate District, which includes the Salinas Valley, San Benito County, Merced County and portions of Stanislaus, Madera and Fresno Counties.

Senator Caballero has a 30-year legacy of public service in her community. Her leadership has inspired generations of young leaders to work hard, and help build a strong community for the future. She has been a tireless advocate for families, farmers, veterans, workers, the disabled, seniors, and teachers. From 2010 to 2016, Senator Caballero joined Governor Edmund G. Brown's cabinet as Secretary of the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency. Under Senator Caballero's leadership, \$65 million was allocated to build housing and provide services for homeless veterans and rural communities, while providing struggling families access to home refinancing assistance. During her time working with Governor Brown, Senator Caballero was the highest-ranking Latina in state government.



Senator Dr. Richard Pan

First elected to the State Assembly in 2010, Senator Dr. Richard Pan represents Sacramento, West Sacramento, Elk Grove and unincorporated areas of Sacramento County. Senator Pan is a pediatrician and former UC Davis educator.

TIME magazine called Senator Pan a “hero” for authoring landmark legislation to abolish non-medical exemptions to legally required vaccines for school students, thereby restoring community immunity from preventable contagions. He also authored one of the most expansive state laws regulating health plans, which eliminated denials for pre-existing conditions and prohibited discrimination by health status and medical history. He demands transparency and accountability in state health programs, holding hearings on reducing fraud, investigating poor access to dental care, and ensuring children with cancer and other serious conditions have access to pediatric specialty care. Senator Pan provided leadership in enrolling families for health coverage, which reduced the number of uninsured Californians by 50 percent. He has sponsored numerous health fairs with resources such as free glasses, dental screenings, and vaccines.



Senator Susan Rubio

Senator Susan Rubio was born in Juarez, Mexico and is the daughter of immigrant parents. Her father came to the U.S. through the Bracero program in Texas. After the program ended, her father continued working on farms and in other jobs to ensure a better future for his family, eventually settling in California. Senator Rubio’s upbringing and personal family experiences taught her the importance of hard work and determination.

Senator Rubio is the product of public schools and has two decades of experience as a community leader, classroom teacher, and public servant. She was first elected to represent the City of Baldwin Park as the City Clerk, where she focused on providing transparency and protecting democracy for residents. In 2009, she was a councilmember and helped balance the city budget during the recession and protected vital programs. Senator Rubio also has a long record of volunteerism and partnership with local non-profits, providing mentorships and college scholarships for local students. Senator Rubio is a lifelong champion for children, working families, economic justice and the environment.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES



Jody Agius Vallejo, PhD

**Associate Professor, Sociology/American Studies & Ethnicity
Associate Director, Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration
University of Southern California**

Dr. Jody Agius Vallejo's research concentrates on immigrant integration, the Latino middle class, Latino business owners, Latino elites, race and ethnicity, wealth accumulation, and inequality and mobility mechanisms. Her book, *Barrios to Burbs: The Making of the Mexican American Middle Class* (Stanford University Press, 2012), examines the mechanisms—such as parental legal status, access to higher education, and business ownership—that expedite social mobility and integration into the middle class for Mexican Americans. She is currently writing a book about Latino elites in Los Angeles. Her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the John and Dora Haynes Foundation, and the American Association of University Women. Dr. Vallejo holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of California, Irvine.



Marcela Ruiz

**Branch Chief, Immigration and Refugee Programs Branch
California Department of Social Services**

Marcela Ruiz is responsible for the implementation, administration, and management of over \$75 million allocated to non-profit organizations to provide immigration legal services and humanitarian response during emergency situations. Through the Unaccompanied Undocumented Minors and One California programs, among others, Ms. Ruiz oversees funding to over 100 legal services providers throughout the state. She also oversees the State's Refugee Programs Bureau and the Trafficking and Crime Victims Assistance Program, which provide social services and cash aid to humanitarian migrants including refugees, asylees, and victims of crime.

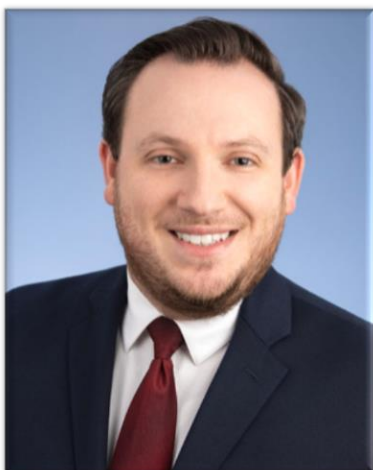
Previously, Ms. Ruiz served as deputy director at California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc., where she held several positions, including regional director, directing attorney, staff attorney, and a Berkeley Law Foundation fellow. She co-founded Casa México in New York City and was active in the green grocer campaign. She earned a JD from UC Berkeley Law School and a B.A. from Columbia College.



René Mollow

**Deputy Director, Health Care Benefits and Eligibility
Department of Health Care Services**

René Mollow has been with the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) since 1995. In the Medi-Cal program, she serves as the Deputy Director for Health Care Benefits and Eligibility (HCBE). She provides leadership for benefit and eligibility policy planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of health care services and delivery systems under Medi-Cal and for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). HCBE is comprised of five divisions and one office: Benefits, Eligibility, Pharmacy Benefits, Primary and Rural Indian Health, Dental, and the Office of Family Planning. Ms. Mollow works to ensure that policies, procedures, and related activities in HCBE conform to applicable state and federal policies, statutes and regulations. She assists the Directorate, Administration and State Legislatures in determining program direction consistent with legislative intent and consults with the Director and State Medicaid Director on issues of significant policy impact involving both Medi-Cal and CHIP. Ms. Mollow has played a major role in policy planning, development, and implementation on matters pertaining to health care reform implementation and coverage expansions for children.



David O'Brien

**Director of Government Affairs
California Student Aid Commission**

David O'Brien has served as Director of Government Affairs for the California Student Aid Commission since October 2016. In this role, he serves as the Commission's primary liaison to the Legislature, the Governor's Office, the Department of Finance, and other external agencies and stakeholders, including California's higher education segments, on legislative and policy matters related to financial aid and college affordability. Since assuming this role, Mr. O'Brien has had primary responsibility over the Commission's efforts to reform and expand California's financial aid programs to best meet the needs of today's college students, which has entailed working with external research groups to study college affordability models, testifying before legislative budget and policy committees on policy options to make college affordable for all qualified students, and convening key stakeholders such as the Commission's Financial Aid Advisory Board, which Mr. O'Brien co-chairs.



Lea Bush, LCSW, MPA

**Senior Director of Family & Community Services
Jewish Family Service of San Diego**

Lea Bush, LCSW, MPA is the Senior Director of Family and Community Services at Jewish Family Service in San Diego (JFSSD). Founded in 1918, Jewish Family Service San Diego was built on a mission of serving refugees at the San Diego border that started over 100 years ago. JFSSD services for refugees and immigrants now include immigration legal services, the San Diego Migrant Shelter for asylum-seeking families, and a full-scope refugee resettlement program. JFS is also the fiscal sponsor and a core partner in the San Diego Rapid Response Network.

Ms. Bush holds dual master's degrees in social work and public administration from the University of Southern California. Lea has held roles supporting families and youth in a variety of settings for more than 17 years and has worked at JFSSD for 8 years. She currently leads the team that has served more than 18,000 asylum seekers at the JFS Migrant Family Shelter.



Senait Admassu, MSW

**Executive Director
African Communities Public Health Coalition**

Senait Admassu is the founder of the African Communities Public Health Coalition (African Coalition). Ms. Admassu assists in the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) African/African America (AAA) Under Served Cultural Competence (UsCC) subcommittee in assessing mental health service provision in the African Communities. She is also certificated and accredited by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to provide immigration services.

Ms. Admassu runs multiple hands-on, professional and culturally sensitive programs that focus on migrants and refugees. She is active in a number of other community advocacy and advisory groups regarding cultural competence in services for African descent communities. Ms. Admassu has presented a range of training seminars in various nationwide sponsored cultural competency events. Ms. Admassu's education and community advocacy efforts demonstrate her diligence to mental health consumers, especially those of the African Communities.

Ms. Admassu received a bachelor's degree in Psychology from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and a master's degree in Clinical Social Work at University of Southern California (USC).



Odessa Berry-Powers

**Immigration Attorney
Children's Law Center of California**

Odessa Berry-Powers is a former foster youth and a longtime advocate for immigrants and undocumented children. She is the in-house immigration attorney for the Children's Law Center of California (CLC), which is a nonprofit organization that represents all children in dependency proceedings in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer Counties. As CLC's immigration attorney, Ms. Berry-Powers trains CLC attorneys as well as other stakeholders on the challenges that undocumented foster youth face, assesses the immigration needs of CLC's undocumented clients, and links CLC clients with immigration representation. She works closely with child welfare agencies, legal service providers, and other stakeholders to provide undocumented foster youth in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer Counties with an opportunity to seek legal status.

Prior to joining CLC, Ms. Berry-Powers represented unaccompanied children in removal proceedings at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). Ms. Berry-Powers has assisted many trauma survivors seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, asylum, U-Visas, T-Visas, and other forms of humanitarian relief. She also advocated for parents who were forcibly separated from their children and placed in expedited removal due to the Trump administration's 'zero-tolerance' policy.



Joseph Villela

**Director of Policy
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights**

Joseph Villela is the Director of Policy at the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA). CHIRLA is an immigrant-centered and immigrant-powered organization working to achieve a just society fully inclusive of immigrants.

Mr. Villela has dedicated his career to effecting policy change through direct engagement with recent immigrants and other impacted communities throughout California. A committed government relations professional and political adviser, Mr. Villela has more than a decade of experience in monitoring and analyzing legislation. During that time, he established a successful track record in developing and managing legislative and budgetary campaigns, helping to improve the lives of California's most vulnerable. Mr. Villela graduated from the University of Los Angeles California (UCLA).