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TAIFA BUTLER
Deputy Director
Georgia Budget & Policy Institute

As GBPI’s deputy director, Taifa provides strategic direction on public policy research and data analysis. She leads a team of four analysts covering a wide range of policy areas including tax and economic development, health care, education, social services and economic security.

Taifa brings nearly 20 years of experience in strategic communications, public policy research and data analysis in the public, nonprofit and private sectors. Prior to joining the GBPI team, she served as the policy and communications director for Georgia Family Connection Partnership where she co-managed the Georgia KIDS COUNT project and monitored public policy and its impact on children, families and communities. Additionally, Taifa has held various positions with the Georgia Academy for Children and Youth Professionals and MBIA Muni Services/Municipal Tax Bureau Company in Philadelphia.

Taifa is an avid education and family advocate. She has served on host of statewide and national steering committees, advisory boards and coalitions. She served in various roles in youth, children’s, and family ministries. In Henry County, Taifa has served on various committees and boards, including the Chamber of Commerce education committee, Henry County Education Foundation, Ferst Foundation of Henry County’s Community Action Team, and the Henry County Economics and Education Alliance. She’s most proud of mentoring two young girls for the last four years.

She was an education policy fellow with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education’s Class of 2009 Education Policy Fellowship Program, and is a graduate of the Georgia Academy for Economic Development. Taifa holds a bachelor’s in politics and economics from Mount Holyoke College and a master’s in public management and policy from the Heinz School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University, with a concentration in economic development and financial management. She has been quoted in both state and national publications, including The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Macon Telegraph, NPR Atlanta and Georgia Trend magazine, to name a few. Taifa was named 5 under 40 by H Magazine in 2011, and a Woman of Substance in the Southern Journal Magazine in 2013.

Taifa resides in McDonough, GA with her husband André’ and daughter Jasmine. She is an active member of Radiant Church and loves running and playing tennis.

MELISSA CARTER
Executive Director
Barton Child Law and Policy Center

Melissa Carter is a member of the Emory Law faculty and Executive Director of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center. The Barton Center is an interdisciplinary child law program founded to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of abused, neglected and court-involved children through legislative advocacy, policy development, and holistic representation and to develop dedicated and knowledgeable juvenile law professionals. As Executive
Director, Melissa is responsible for the administration of the Center, including supervision of clinical faculty, staff and students; development and budgeting; strategic planning; and directing the Center’s policy and legislative agendas. Melissa oversees the Center’s three student legal clinics, directs the public policy and legislative advocacy clinics, and teaches a related course in child welfare law and policy.

Prior to joining the law faculty, Melissa served as the appointed Child Advocate, leading the staff of the Office of the Child Advocate in the fulfillment of the executive agency’s statutory mandates to provide independent oversight of the child welfare system and coordination of activities related to child injury and fatality review and prevention. She has extensive experience in public administration and policy, having also worked in Illinois and Georgia for the states’ Court Improvement Projects, a federally—funded program focused on improving the processing of civil child abuse and neglect cases in juvenile courts. Ms. Carter formerly practiced with the law firm of Claiborne, Outman & Surmay, P.C., representing clients in adoption, assisted reproductive technology, and juvenile court cases and was previously affiliated with Emory Law as Barton’s 2002 post—graduate fellow.

Ms. Carter has authored several publications on child welfare topics, contributed to the drafting and passage of multiple pieces of state legislation, and is a frequent presenter on juvenile law topics. In 2012, she was appointed by Governor Deal to serve as a member of the Georgia Commission on Family Violence. She also serves as an advisor to the Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children and as an ex—officio member of the Board of Directors of VOICES for Georgia’s Children. Ms. Carter was selected as a 2009 Marshall Memorial Fellow, has received multiple awards for service to the State Bar of Georgia, and was honored in 2010 by the Georgia EmpowerMEnt Group for her advocacy on behalf of Georgia’s foster youth. She was recently named by the Fulton County Daily Report as one of Georgia’s top lawyers under 40 “On the Rise.”

TERRY CARTER
Advocate
Georgia EmpowerMEnt, Multi-Agency Alliance for Children

Terry Carter originally entered foster care as an infant in New York City, but re-entered the system at age fifteen in the state of Georgia. Terry remained in care until he aged out on his 21st birthday. While in the foster care system Terry lived in eight different placements, including foster homes and group homes, and attended ten different schools.

Terry is currently a junior at Georgia Gwinnett College working toward his Bachelor’s degree in International Business and Finance. While a full-time student, Terry works at a local family entertainment center, where he has the opportunity to gain experience in management, cash control, and customer service.

Some of Terry’s advocacy efforts have included representing his peers in Georgia at the governor’s mansion where he met with stakeholders to discuss and ultimately achieve the extension of health benefits for foster youth to the age of twenty-one. Terry has also participated in the Jim Casey Raise Me up Campaign and was able to spread awareness about foster care and the importance of permanency in his local county in Georgia. His current efforts include being a peer support to his local advocacy group, called Georgia EmpowerMEnt, and remaining informed about policy and procedures that affect the lives of foster children in Georgia.
Recently, Terry has become a member of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Young Fellows program. The Young Fellows are a group of young people currently or formerly in foster care who have gained knowledge and skills at the Jim Casey Initiative Youth Leadership Institute and spend time identifying, discussing, and sharing solutions to issues that affect young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

Terry plans to combine his passion for youth advocacy with his interests in international business to provide support for underprivileged youth, globally. This endeavor will ensure youth across the world get the opportunity to be successful and experience normalcy in their lives.

**Benita Dodd**  
Vice President  
Georgia Public Policy Foundation

Benita Dodd is a journalism graduate of Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, who immigrated to the United States in 1986. The Cobb County resident was an editorial writer and columnist for The Atlanta Journal Editorial Board and an editorial writer for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Editorial Board before joining the Georgia Public Policy Foundation as vice president in March 2003. A member of the 2007 class of Leadership Georgia and a faculty member of the Leadership Institute of Virginia, she leads the Foundation’s Environmental Initiative and is responsible for the Foundation’s communications. She served on the board of Common Cause Georgia and is a member of the Board of Advisors for America’s Future Foundation Georgia. She addresses civic and leadership groups across Georgia on current issues and free-market solutions. She is a frequent contributor to newspapers and radio programs around the state and provides free-market perspectives as a commentator on a weekly radio program.

**Shemeka Frazier-Sorrells**  
Program Director  
CHRIS Kids

Shemeka Frazier Sorrells brings over a decade of experience in the field of social services ranging in parenting services, case management for child protective services, supervision of child welfare workers, and policy and program management, development and implementation. She is a precise and confident professional with a solid career reflecting strong leadership skills in developing and implementing policies and projects, managing programs, and monitoring for outcomes to facilitate change. She has worked in the government and private sector and has a passion for serving young adults by assisting and supporting them in their transition to adulthood. The best part of her job is knowing that she has provided a young adult, that some otherwise would have written off, a chance at learning and realizing their individual worth and contributions to society.
MARY PHALEN HOOD
Executive Director
Prevent Child Abuse Athens

Mary received her MBA in Healthcare Management from Northeastern University in 1976 and was Director of Utilization Review and Patient Care Studies at Beth Israel Hospital from 1972-1977. She moved on to become the Assistant Director of Health Planning for the State of Tennessee from 1985 to 1991. After which, she joined St. Joseph’s Mercy Care Services in 1992 where she served as Program and Clinic Director until 1999, managing both community health centers and mobile services for homeless and uninsured.

From 2001-2002, Mary worked for Prevent Child Abuse Georgia providing technical support for northeast GA programs. She accepted a Program Director position with Prevent Child Abuse Athens in 2002 and became its Executive Director in 2008.

Mary is passionate about the importance of helping families when children are young to both prevent abuse and improve outcomes for children.

JUDY LANGFORD
Senior Fellow and Associate Director
Center for the Study of Social Policy

Ms. Langford is a Senior Fellow and Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, DC. She serves as a key consultant on child and family issues for foundations, federal and state agencies, and private organizations on the development and implementation of family support policy and practice. She is the originator and national director for Strengthening Families, a family development framework adopted by more than 40 states to guide action across agencies to promote healthy child development and prevent adverse childhood experiences. She currently serves as leader of the management team for the federal Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood (funded by the Children’s Bureau in the Administration on Children Youth and Families). Ms. Langford previously worked as a member of the management team for the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections Initiative and has served as an advisor for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Pew Trusts, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Casey Family Programs. She serves on a number of national advisory boards and review panels related to child and family issues.

Judy Langford is the former Executive Director of the Family Resource Coalition, the national association of community based family resource programs based in Chicago, and former Executive Director of Chicago’s Ounce of Prevention Fund, a nationally recognized public private partnership for child development innovations. She was a founder of the Chicago Foundation for Women, the National Forum for Women and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia and has served as an early childhood teacher in the public schools of Clarke County GA. She formerly served as honorary Chair of President Carter's Advisory Committee on Women and was an award winning columnist for REDBOOK magazine.
Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D., is the Julius B. Richmond FAMRI Professor of Child Health and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health and the Harvard Graduate School of Education; Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and Boston Children’s Hospital; and Director of the university-wide Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. He currently serves as chair of the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, a multi-university collaboration comprising leading scholars in neuroscience, psychology, pediatrics, and economics, whose mission is to bring credible science to bear on public policy affecting young children. In 2011, Dr. Shonkoff launched Frontiers of Innovation, a multi-sectoral collaboration among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, investors, and experts in systems change who are committed to developing more effective intervention strategies to catalyze breakthrough impacts on the development and health of young children and families experiencing significant adversity.

Under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences, Dr. Shonkoff served as Chair of the Board on Children, Youth, and Families and chaired a blue-ribbon committee that produced the landmark report, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. He also served as a member of the Panel on Child Care Policy, the Committee on the Assessment of Family Violence Interventions, and the Roundtable on Head Start Research.

Dr. Shonkoff has received multiple honors, including elected membership to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, elected membership to the American Pediatric Society, designated National Associate of the National Academies, the C. Anderson Aldrich Award in Child Development from the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Award for Distinguished Contributions to Public Policy for Children from the Society for Research in Child Development.

Dr. Shonkoff has served on numerous professional networks and public interest advisory boards, including the core scientific group of the MacArthur Research Network on Early Experience and Brain Development, the Governing Council of the Society for Research in Child Development, and the Executive Committee of the Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics of the American Academy of Pediatrics. He has authored more than 150 publications, including nine books; co-edited two editions of the widely heralded Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention; and served on the editorial board of several scholarly journals, including Child Development.

Dr. Shonkoff completed his undergraduate studies at Cornell University, medical education at New York University School of Medicine, pediatric training at Bronx Municipal Hospital Center and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and fellowship in developmental pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and Boston Children's Hospital. He has been a visiting professor or delivered named lectureships at more than 30 universities in the United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Prior to assuming his current position, he was the Samuel F. and Rose B. Gingold Professor of Human Development and Social Policy and Dean of The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.
Bill Verner
Senior Vice President of External Affairs
Georgia Electric Membership Corporation

Bill Verner serves as Sr. Vice President for External Affairs for Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (Georgia EMC). Verner began his electric cooperative career with Carroll EMC in 1980 in various part-time capacities while pursuing an undergraduate degree at the University of West Georgia, and joined Georgia EMC in 1984 as Coordinator of Member and Youth Activities. As head of Georgia EMC External Affairs, he coordinates the representation of EMCs' interests before government including the Georgia General Assembly, the Georgia Public Service Commission, the United States Congress, and state and federal agencies. In addition to government relations, Verner is also responsible for communications, public relations, member services, media relations and the publication of the EMCs' popular monthly consumer publication, Georgia Magazine. During a brief departure from Georgia EMC, Verner expanded upon his cooperative experience as Director of Government and Member Relations for Gold Kist, Inc. from 1999 to 2001. Then the world's second largest poultry company, Verner's role covered Gold Kist operations in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and the Carolinas. Verner was a member of the 1998 Class of Leadership Georgia, served on its Board of Trustees from 2001 through 2002, and recently co-chaired Leadership Georgia’s first international program in Costa Rica in June 2009. He currently serves on NRECA’s Community Engagement Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors for the Georgia Humanities Council. Verner has also served on the Board of Directors of the Georgia Agribusiness Council, the Professional Association of Georgia Educators Foundation, the Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation, the Executive Committee of Georgia’s Friends of Agriculture Foundation, the Dean’s Advisory Council for the University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, the Georgia Agri-Leaders Forum and the Georgia Cooperative Council, where he served as President from 2001 until 2002.

Verner, born and raised on a Centennial family farm 50 miles East of Atlanta in Rutledge, Georgia, received a Bachelor of Science degree in Geology from the University of West Georgia. Bill and his wife Betsy have 2 daughters – 5 and 7 yrs old -- are members of Northside United Methodist Church and reside in Atlanta.

Dr. Page Walley
Strategic Consulting Managing Director
Casey Family Programs

Dr. Page B. Walley serves as Managing Director of Strategic Consulting for Casey Family Programs, a multi-billion dollar private operating foundation based in Seattle whose mission is to provide, improve and ultimately prevent the need for foster care in the United States. In this role he works with states to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care.

Dr. Walley previously served as the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Prior to that he served as Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs.
During his term as commissioner over the 4,500 employee, $1.3 billion department, Dr. Walley helped advance the Department to national recognition as a leader in providing for the safety, permanency placement, and well-being of children and families in the state. While presiding over the Department’s successful exit from long-standing federal oversight of its child welfare program, he also worked to help lead the Food Stamp Program to national recognition in its response to the Hurricane Ivan disaster declaration of 2004.

Prior to coming to Alabama, Dr. Walley was Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services. Dr. Walley is a licensed clinical psychologist with over 25 years experience in the field, and is also a licensed minister.

Dr. Walley was elected to and served in the Tennessee House of Representatives from 1990 to 2000.

Dr. Walley received his bachelor's degree in psychology from Davidson College and received his master's and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology from the University of Georgia. He serves as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and as a Graduate Faculty Member at Alabama State University.

Dr. Walley and his wife Terry have three children, Blake, Jordan, and Annelise.