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Autism & Related Disorders



## Taskforce on Equity & Diversity for Regional Center Autism Services

### Brief Biographies

#### Taskforce Members:

**Areva D. Martin, Esq.** (Taskforce Co-Chair) is the founding and Managing Partner of Martin & Martin, LLP, one of the largest African American-owned female law practices in Southern California. She is also the co-founder and President of Special Needs Network, Inc., a 501 © grassroots organization whose mission is to raise awareness of developmental disabilities and provide resources to families in underserved communities and to impact policies that impact children and adults with autism. The organization has provided resources and training to more than 20,000 families in the South Los Angeles community and is recognized by elected officials, community and business leaders and parents as the “go to organization” in Los Angeles on issues of autism and its impact on families of color and those in low-income communities.

The recipient of numerous awards including *the Los Angeles County Women of the Year* and the *California Legislative Black Caucus’ Martin Luther King Trailblazer Award*, Areva served as one of the Vice-Chairs on the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism and the Chair of the South Los Angeles Regional Task Force for the Senate Select Committee on Autism. An honors graduate from the University of Chicago and Harvard Law School, Areva shares her story as a mother of an autistic child and legal expertise in her best-selling second book, *The Everyday Advocate: Standing Up for Your Child with Autism and Other Special Needs* (Penquin 2010).

**Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, M.D., Ph.D.** (Taskforce Co-Chair) is a Professor of Clinical Internal Medicine, School of Medicine, University of California, Davis. He is the Founding Director of the Center for Reducing Health Disparities at the UC Davis Health System and the Director of the Community Engagement Program of the UCD Clinical Translational Science Center (CTSC) and co-chair of the NIH’s Community Engagement Key Function Committee for the NIH-funded Clinical Translational Science Awards (CTSAs). Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola’s research includes cross-national comparative epidemiologic research on patterns and correlates of mental disorders and substance abuse in general population samples. His applied research program has focused on identifying unmet mental health needs and associated risk and protective factors to better understand and meet population mental health needs and reduce mental health disparities in



underserved populations. Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola received his M.D. degree at the School of Medicine, Autonomous University of Guadalajara in Mexico and his Ph.D. in Clinical-Community Psychology at Vanderbilt University, and completed a postdoctoral fellowship on health services research at the University of California, San Francisco.

**Jan Blacher** received her A.B. in Psychology from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and her Ph.D. in Special Education/Developmental Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is currently Distinguished Professor of Education and former Faculty Chair of the Graduate School of Education, at the University of California, Riverside. She is known nationally for her research on developmental disabilities, and for her expertise in special educational programming and autism. Dr. Blacher is the Founding Director of SEARCH, a family autism resource center newly established at UC Riverside. Her research, which is longitudinal in nature, focuses on the family context of children and adolescents with and without developmental disabilities, including predictors of later psychopathology. She has published on family coping in Anglo and Latino families, and is currently studying the cultural context of autism and the transition to early schooling for children with autism (*Smooth Sailing*, funded by the Institute for Education Sciences). Dr. Blacher was recently appointed to the National Research Council of The National Academy of Sciences, and the Johnson & Johnson/Rosalynn Carter Institute Caregivers Program. As of February, 2002, she wrote a column for EP, Exceptional Parent Magazine. She is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

**Catherine Blakemore** has worked in disability and advocacy programs, both as an attorney and Director, for more than 30 years. She currently works as the Executive Director of Disability Rights California, the agency established under federal law to protect and advocate for individuals with disabilities. Disability Rights California's staff directly represents thousands of Californians each year and helps tens of thousands more through the systemic litigation and amicus work. As the Executive Director of the largest protection and advocacy agency in the nation, Ms. Blakemore has been involved in numerous national efforts to enhance the rights of individuals with disabilities and the effectiveness of advocacy systems. Ms. Blakemore received her law degree from Loyola Law School. Prior to working for Disability Rights California, she was an attorney for the Western Law Center for Disability Rights and the Legal Aid Foundations of Los Angeles.

**James M. Burton** is the Executive Director of Regional Center of the East Bay, which has responsibility for community services and supports for over 16,000 people with developmental disabilities and their families in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Jim has over 35 years of experience in service to people with developmental disabilities. He served as Chief Financial Officer at the Golden Gate Regional Center for 25 years and as interim Executive Director of the Regional Center of the East Bay (RCEB) in 1997 and 1998. Jim assumed the position of Executive Director of RCEB in 2001 where he has developed a collaborative spirit in working with consumers, families and service providers. He is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley with a degree in Economics. He is an active leader in the field of developmental disabilities in California, serving in a variety of leadership roles.

**Barbara Firestone Ph.D.** is President and CEO of The Help Group, the largest, most comprehensive and innovative nonprofit in the U.S. serving children with autism spectrum disorders and other special needs. Widely recognized for her leadership and vision, Dr. Firestone was appointed Chair of the Statewide Coordinating Council and Chair of the North Los Angeles County Taskforce and served as Vice Chair of the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism. She recently established The Help Group-UCLA Autism Research Alliance dedicated to applied research and is the author of the highly acclaimed and award winning book, *Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge*.

**Dr. Doreen Granpeesheh** is the Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD); Founder and President of the Board of Autism Care and Treatment Today (ACT Today). Dr. Granpeesheh received her Ph.D. in Psychology from UCLA and is licensed by the Medical Board of California and the Texas, Virginia and Arizona State Boards of Psychologists. Dr. Granpeesheh holds a Certificate of Professional Qualification in Psychology from the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and has been providing behavioral therapy for children with autism since 1979. She has held numerous Scientific and Advisory Board positions including the US Autism and Asperger's Association, the Autism File journal, Autism 360/medigenesis and the 4-A Healing Foundation. Dr. Granpeesheh has also served on the Board of Directors of the Autism Society of America, the Autism Human Rights and Discrimination Initiative Steering Committee, on the Practice Board of the Association for Behavior Analysis International, as well as the Oversight Committee of the Department of Developmental Disabilities for the State of Arizona. Dr. Granpeesheh has had numerous scientific publications on issues concerning the diagnosis and treatment of Autism and in 2011, she received the American Academy of Clinical Psychiatrists prestigious Winokur Award for excellence in clinical research. Currently Dr. Granpeesheh oversees the behavioral treatment of over 1000 patients through CARD's 20 clinic sites across the globe.

**Emily Iland, M.A.** is a parent, advocate, researcher, educator, and leader in the autism field. An award-winning author, she is currently and instructor in the teacher training program at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). An article based on her original research, *Obstacles Faced by Latina Mothers of Children with Autism* is being published in Summer, 2012. Emily is the President of the Autism Society of Los Angeles. She is project manager of the ASLA-Los Angeles Police Department Autism Training Program, one of many programs she has helped create and implement.

**Jim Lantry** has over 30 years of experience working in or with various levels of government as a political aide, a political consultant and as a legislative advocate in California, across the nation, and internationally. Over the past ten years, Jim has been extensively involved with the developmentally disabled community particularly those with Autism and Autism Related Disorders. He is the owner and founder of Creative Legislative Solutions, a San Diego based public affairs consulting firm, and ATPIAN (Autism Treatment Providers Insurance Authorization Network) which works with Autism Behavioral Health Treatment professionals to obtain insurance company credentialing. Jim represents the DIR/Floortime Coalition of California and the Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders nationwide. He has represented military families in their struggles to obtain greater Autism

treatment funding and has lobbied several state legislatures to obtain or increase health insurance funding for children with Autism. Jim has served on a numerous non-profit boards and Commissions including Chair of Partnerships With Industry, a San Diego non-profit which provides job skills and employment to developmentally disabled adults. For the several years he has assisted in the Legislative Outreach of the Developmentally Disabled Provider Network, an ad hoc coalition of over 120 agencies in San Diego County who serve the developmentally disabled community. Jim also served as the Chair of President Ronald Reagan's Operation Self-Sufficiency effort in San Diego. Jim serves as the Co-Chair of the South Counties Autism Regional Taskforce and is a member of the Legislative Committee of the San Diego-Imperial County Regional Center.

**Jay S. Lytton** recently completed a two-year postgraduate program in Madrid, Spain, through the Spanish Ministry of Education's North American Language and Culture Assistants Program. He taught English to elementary school students, K-6, in an impoverished urban community. Following graduation from Village Glen School at The HELP Group in 2006, Jay continued his education at UC Davis, where he received a B.S. in Human Development in 2010. During his tenure at UC Davis, he founded and directed the Autism Awareness Association at UC Davis, the first college campus organization in the U.S. with a mission to promote awareness and education of Autism Spectrum Disorders to its student community. Jay developed a partnership between the UC Davis MIND Institute and the Autism Awareness Association to provide additional outreach on ASD to the UC Davis community. While attending UC Davis, Jay was instrumental in developing a campus-wide taskforce, in collaboration with multiple departments of the UCD administration, to assist students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In addition, Jay was an active participant in several research studies conducted by faculty at the UC Davis MIND Institute. In Spring, 2009, Jay received prestigious awards from the university for his involvement in autism advocacy, including the UC Davis Margarita Robinson Leadership Award for Juniors and the UC Davis Community Service Resource Center Gold Award. Jay is currently involved in advocacy efforts throughout the California Autism community. He is a member of the Alliance of California Autism Organizations and serves on the Advisory Board for Pasadena Child Development Associates, Inc, an organization that provides a range of services for children with special needs and their families. Jay is also a member of the North Los Angeles Autism Regional Taskforce of the California Senate Select Committee on Autism and Related Disorders. Jay is entering the field of Business Administration and is planning to apply to MBA programs in Fall, 2012.

**Patrick J. Maher, M.D.** Developmental Pediatrician at North Bay Regional Center. President-elect of the Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA) Physicians Group. Pediatric residency at Martin Luther King, Jr. Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA. Fellowships in Neonatology at Mt. Zion Hospital/UCSF in San Francisco, CA, and in Developmental Pediatrics at Children's Hospital, Boston under T. Berry Brazleton, M.D. Member of the Oversight Committee and Advisory Committee co-chair for the following Department of Developmental Services documents: Autism Spectrum Disorders: Best Practice Guidelines for Screening, Evaluation and Assessment; The Best Practice Guidelines for Organizational Collaboration; and Autism Spectrum Disorders: Best Practice Guidelines for Effective Intervention. Creator of the Collaborative Autism Diagnostic (CAD) Clinic which is a multi-disciplinary collaborative clinic composed of clinicians from NBRC and Sonoma and Solano Counties Offices of Education.

Founder and Director of the Autism Community Team (ACT) which is a partnership of families, support groups, service providers and public agencies focusing on improving the services provided for persons with ASD and their families in Napa, Sonoma, and Solano counties. Co-Chairperson of the North Bay Autism Regional Taskforce (NBART) under Senator Lois Wolk, member of the Senate Select Committee on Autism and Related Disorders. Project manager of Project Connect a Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) 3 year grant (2011-2014) with an aim to promote the development of an inter-organizational system of coordinated, culturally appropriate infant-family and early childhood mental health services that support young children's social-emotional health and well-being in Solano, Napa, and Sonoma counties.

**Rocio de Mateo Smith** has worked in the field of developmental disabilities for over 30 years. As director of an early intervention program for infants with disabilities and their families in Fremont, CA, she realized the importance of policy and legislation in making it possible for children with disabilities and their families and to receive the supports and services they needed. She served as the vendor representative on the Regional Center of the East Bay Board, and worked as the coordinator for the Alameda County Developmental Disabilities Council for 7 years. For the past 18 years she has been the Executive Director of Area Board 5 on Developmental Disabilities. She is a member of the steering committee for Congreso Familiar, a conference for Spanish speaking families with children with disabilities, and among other affiliations, has served as Commissioner First Five, Alameda County; and Community Representative, State Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention. She is a Member of the Advisory Board for: United Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy League, Down Syndrome League, Stepping Stones, CP Center, Respite Inn, and Family Resource Network. She is also a Charter member and past chair of Infant Development Association of California. Born and raised in Mexico City, Rocio attended the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, receiving a Bachelors degree in Mathematics. She also holds a BA in Psychology from Cal State University Hayward and an MSW from UC Berkeley. She has lived in the Bay Area since 1968.

**Martha Matthews** is the Directing Attorney of the Children's Rights Project at Public Counsel, a public interest law firm in Los Angeles, California. Previously, from 2005 to 2011 she was a supervising and appellate attorney at Children's Law Center of Los Angeles. From 2000 to 2004, Ms. Matthews was a staff attorney at the ACLU of Southern California; her work focused on civil rights and discrimination issues affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, especially issues affecting youth. From 1991 to 1995 and 1998 to 2000, Ms. Matthews was a staff attorney at the National Center for Youth Law, specializing in litigation and other advocacy to improve foster care, welfare, and other government programs affecting low-income families, children and youth. Ms. Matthews has also held teaching positions at several law schools. In 2004-2005, she was Clinical Professor and Director of the Domestic Violence Clinic at USC Law School. In 1996 -1998 Ms. Matthews developed and directed the Family Advocacy Program at Stanford Law School. In 1995-1996, Ms. Matthews was a visiting professor at the University of California Los Angeles law school. Ms. Matthews is a 1987 graduate of Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California at Berkeley. After graduation from law school, Ms. Matthews served as a law clerk for Judge Thelton E. Henderson in the Northern District of California, Judge [now Justice] Stephen Breyer in the First Circuit, and Supreme Court Justice

Harry Blackmun. Ms. Matthews currently resides in Los Angeles with her spouse Yolanda Vera and their children.

**Eileen Richey** is the Executive Director of the Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA). The association represents the independent, nonprofit agencies providing advocacy, clinical assessment, and coordination of services to California's 250,000 children and adults with developmental disabilities. Richey was a consultant for ARCA and has worked as a consultant for Davis-Deshaies and William Mercer in a variety of states. She was the Assistant Director and the Deputy Director of the California Department of Developmental Services. Richey has also been the Executive Director of Area Board X in Los Angeles County, the Executive Director of CAUSE in Michigan and the Business Development Director for the Western Region for National MENTOR.

**Robert Riddick** is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. He is the Executive Director of Central Valley Regional Center serving Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, and Tulare Counties. Regional centers provide case management services and advocate on behalf of California's developmentally disabled citizens. Autism is one of the qualifying conditions for regional center services, the others being cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities and similar conditions, and seizures. Mr. Riddick has served as the Co-Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Autism and Related Disorders: Central Valley Autism Regional Taskforce (CART). Mr. Riddick has been affiliated with the California regional center system for nearly 40 years and has seen the regional centers evolve into a vital part of the human services system in California.

**Rick Rollens**, Autism Parent Advocate; Co-Founder, The MIND Institute; President, Rollens Consulting; Legislative Advisor, Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA). Eighteen years ago, when his son Russell was diagnosed with autism, Rick began an unprecedented father's battle to find a cure for his son's disability. He was a co-founder of Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT) and established an annual "Autism Treatment Awareness Week," proclaimed by the Governor and Legislature each year. FEAT established the "Rick Rollens Research Award," yearly presented to an outstanding person in the field of autism and autism research. Rick was one of the co-founders of the MIND Institute, having secured, in 1998, the passage of state legislation creating what has become one of the world's largest private or public entities dedicated to research and treatment of neurodevelopmental disorders in children. He is also a co-founder of Alliance of California Autism Organizations (ACAO). He is the former Secretary of the California State Senate and served on the staff of Congressman Jerome Waldie. He is on the board of the MIND Institute, Autism Education Network, Autism Coalition for Research and Education, and Unlocking Autism and is a former board member of Cure Autism Now (CAN) and Autism Society of America. He was appointed in 2006 by the California Speaker of the State Assembly to serve on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism and recently was appointed by California's Superintendent of Public Instruction to the State Department of Education's Autism Advisory Committee. Rick currently serves on the California Department of Managed Health Care's Autism Task Force.

**George G. Stevens, III** has served the North Los Angeles County Regional Center for thirty-three years, as Counselor, Supervising Counselor, Branch Manager and Associate Director

before becoming the Executive Director, a position he has held since 1998. In addition to his work at the North Los Angeles County Regional Center, he was the Director of Consumer Services at Tri-Counties Regional Center, and was also a Clinical Social Worker at Burbank Family Services. He is a licensed Clinical Social Worker and received a BA in Political Science from UCLA, an MSW in Clinical Work and Resource Development from the UCLA School of Social Welfare and an MBA in Management/Finance from the UCLA Anderson Graduate School of Medicine. He has served as Chair of the Southern California Conference of Regional Center Directors; Vice President of the Association of Regional Center Agencies; Chair of the Association of Regional Center Agencies' Contract Administration Committee, Information Systems Committee, and Employment and Legislative Committee.

**Anna Wang** is a proud mother of 3 precious children. She received a Bachelor degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from U.C. Berkeley and a Master degree from Loyola Marymount University. Nineteen years ago, her son, Lawrence Wang, was diagnosed with autism at age 3. In order to help Lawrence, she went back to college to study behavioral psychology and language development. In 1996, she became one of the founding members and Vice President of Friends of Children with Special Needs (FCSN), an organization whose mission is to help children with special needs and their families find love, hope, respect, and support through integrated community involvement. FCSN has grown to over 800 mostly Asian families in the Bay Area, serving over 600 special needs individuals of all ages, and offering 44 programs across 2 counties. Anna was recognized "Legendary Foreign Born Chinese American Women" by Overseas Chinese Media. Anna's passion is to explore special children's hidden talents, build parent networks, establish collaborative among community partners, public agencies, and educational institutions to support and advocate for individuals with special needs and their families. In the past 10 years, she has received numerous awards, including Mother of the Year, Excellence in Education, Hometown Hero, Development Disability Council Volunteerism Award, Profile of Excellence, API Outstanding Leader Award and "Excellence in Community Service" awarded at California State Assembly.

**Barbara Yoshioka Wheeler, Ph.D.** is the Associate Director of the University Center for Excellence Developmental Disabilities Research, Education, and Services at the University of Southern California (USC UCEDD). She has a thirty year history with USC UCEDD, focusing on a range of issues responding to the needs of underserved populations. Dr. Wheeler is also an Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the USC Keck School of Medicine. She served on the President's Committee on Mental Retardation for five years during the Clinton administration. In special education, she was the transition consultant for the Chanda Smith Consent Decree (LAUSD) and participated in the Disproportionality Task Force of LAUSD for 5 years. She directed a 3-year OSEP-funded project to develop a national training curriculum to train Special Education Advocates with the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates. She was the recipient of a Department of Justice Grant to develop training for law enforcement to interview victims and witnesses with significant disabilities and has trained over 15,000 police officers in LAPD with her curriculum. She led the effort to develop the *Consumer's Guide to the Lanterman Act* and she evaluated the impact of WIC 4681.4 (Rate Increase) on Staff Turnover for Direct-Support Workers for the Department of Developmental Services. Much of her career has focused on studying and addressing racial disparities across many systems of service, her recent work has focused on building capacity in minority community-based organizations to fill

gaps in services for under-represented groups and organizing multi-cultural advocacy networks. She is completing two NIMH Grants with Clara Lajonchere, Ph.D., Vice President for Clinical Programs of Autism Speaks, which focuses on engaging Hispanic families in biomedical research on Autism Spectrum Disorders, through academic/community partnerships.

**Sonjia White** has been a licensed California attorney who received her Juris Doctorate from UC Davis in 1994 and her Bachelor of Science Degree in Accounting from the University of La Verne in 1988. Ms. White has been employed with the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office for the last 16 years. Over those 16 years, she has held various positions, including working as a misdemeanor trial attorney, juvenile trial attorney, felony trial attorney, and Deputy In Charge of the Beverly Hills Branch. In her current position as a Juvenile Resource Attorney at Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center, Ms. White represents children charged with crimes but who also suffer with learning and/or developmental disabilities. As such, she advocates for the children in the school systems, regional centers, and courtroom. Additionally, Ms. White has served as the Secretary of the Board of Directors for Special Needs Network, Inc. since its inception in 2005. She has also served on the California Senate Select Committee's South Los Angeles Autism Regional Taskforce (SLAART).

### **Taskforce Staff:**

**Louis A. Vismara, M.D** is an interventional cardiologist and a parent of four children. Since his son, Mark, was diagnosed with autism he has dedicated himself to issues of child development, learning differences, diversity, and access to health care for under-served populations. Lou was a co-founder of the M.I.N.D. Institute, as well as a founding member of the Prop 10, First 5 California State Commission. Presently he is a member of multiple advisory organizations including the UCD School of Education and the recipient of various recognitions including the Autism Speaks Outstanding Advocate, 2012 Award. In the year 2000, Dr. Vismara changed careers, retiring from his medical career, to work as a full-time senior policy consultant for the California Senate. Lou has worked on numerous health-related initiatives and was instrumental in the formation of the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism. As a senior member of Sen. Darrell Steinberg's staff, Lou has worked on numerous healthcare policy issues, including California's landmark autism insurance mandate bill that was enacted in 2011; he also serves as the chief consultant to the Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related Disorders. Lou, who was born in Italy and immigrated with his family to San Diego as a child, is the recipient of BA degree from Stanford University; MD from Baylor College of Medicine. Prior to starting a cardiovascular group practice at Mercy General Hospital, Lou was a Cardiology Fellow and Faculty Member at the UCD Healthcare System.

**Concepción Tadeo** has been with the California State Senate for over ten years, and served as a consultant to the Senate Health Committee for the last five before joining the Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related disorders in January, 2012. She came to the senate with 17 years of experience providing community health education in the greater Los Angeles area, specializing in the development of outreach and education programs for community health organizations and training staff in underserved areas and with special populations. Among her accomplishments are establishing multi-generational health education programs in San Pedro, developing an outreach program for (then) newly-arrived Central American refugees in the Pico-

Union district and creating an award winning Promotores program for the multicultural Latino population in Echo Park/Silverlake, all programs that have successfully continued. Concepción attended UC Berkeley, majoring in American Studies, as an undergraduate. She has made a home in Sacramento with her husband of 20 years, her mother and a 7-year-old daughter.

**Bob Giovati** is a consultant to the California State Senate and the parent of an adult child with Fragile-X Syndrome. He began working for the legislature in 2005 as Legislative Director and then Chief of Staff to Senator Dennis Hollingsworth, who went on to become Senate Republican Leader. After Hollingsworth's term ended in 2010, Bob was employed in a supervisory position within the California State Assembly. He recently returned to the senate, and currently works in collaboration with Dr. Louis Vismara and the Senate Select Committee on Autism and Related Disorders. Prior to his time with the legislature, Bob served a legislative advocate on behalf of small business owners. In earlier years, he was a Member Services Director for a large non-profit trade association, providing advice and service to companies throughout California. He has a proven track record in training and management, having conducted group seminars and workshops for business professionals up and down the Golden State. In addition, Bob has an extensive background in radio broadcasting, having hosted live political talk shows over many years in cities such as Seattle, Sacramento, and Reno. His educational pursuits include studies at Pacific Coast Bible College, Messenger College, and Louisiana State University, primarily in the areas of business, theology, and pastoral ministry. He is particularly interested in how "faith in operation" intersects with the disabled community, and how faith-based groups can do a more effective job reaching out to people with special needs. He is a freelance writer whose commentaries on policy issues and non-profit organizations have appeared in such publications as California Political Review and the Sacramento Bee.