

SPEAKERS

THE HONORABLE NICKIE J. ANTONIO

Senate Minority Leader | The Ohio Senate

Senator Nickie J. Antonio (D-Lakewood) serves as Minority Leader in the Ohio Senate, representing District 23. First elected to the Senate in 2018 after serving eight years in the Ohio House, she previously worked as a teacher, adjunct professor, nonprofit leader, and Lakewood City Councilmember. Antonio is known for her bipartisan leadership and advocacy on health care, workers' rights, education, LGBTQ+ equality, and criminal justice reform. She was the first openly LGBTQ+ person elected to both the Ohio House and Senate.



BRITTANY BOULTON

Vice President | Groundwork Ohio

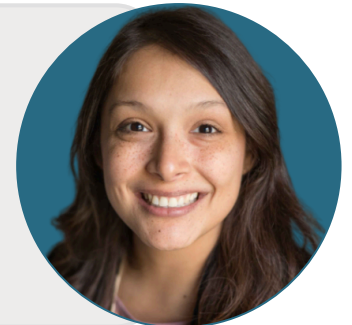
As Vice President of Groundwork Ohio, Brittany Boulton drives advocacy and engagement efforts to make Ohio the best place to be a young child. With more than 15 years of leadership in housing, health, and early childhood policy, she has led statewide coalitions, advanced maternal and infant health initiatives, and mentored rising leaders. A first-generation college graduate, Brittany lives in Columbus with her husband and three young children, and she enjoys running, gardening, and Girl Scouts.



GUADALUPE BRIGHT

Member | Family Action Committee and Family Action Network

Guadalupe Bright is a parent advocate, member of Groundwork Ohio's Family Action Network and Family Action Committee, and newly elected parent representative on the Ohio Head Start Association Board. Governor DeWine recently appointed her as a parent representative on the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. As a mother raising two boys with autism, she is passionate about early intervention, disability rights, and early childhood education.



VANESSA BUTLER

Senior Director of Community Relations | Groundwork Ohio

Vanessa Butler is Senior Director of Community Relations at Groundwork Ohio, where she advances key partnerships through strategic engagement. She previously served at The Center for Healthy Families and has held roles as a policy associate at Groundwork Ohio, civil fellow with Ohio State's Student Legal Services, and deputy auditor in the Franklin County Auditor's Office. Vanessa holds a J.D. from Capital University Law School and a B.A. from Denison University.



THE HONORABLE GARY CLICK

Member | Ohio House of Representatives

Rep. Gary Click (R-Vickery) is serving his third term in the Ohio House, representing the 88th District, which includes Sandusky and Seneca counties. A longtime pastor and former law enforcement and hospice chaplain, he spent more than 30 years in ministry before becoming Pastor Emeritus of Fremont Baptist Temple in 2025. Click chairs the House Community Revitalization Committee and is known for his advocacy on education, substance abuse recovery, and community issues.



RACHEL GIANNINI

Childhood Specialist & Early Childhood Advocate

Rachel Giannini is a childhood specialist, an early childhood advocate, and a video blog host. She currently splits her time as a public speaker, early childhood commentator, curriculum designer, and the star of Spy School on Hellosaurus. Rachel's writing, expertise, and videos have appeared in Vox, The New York Times, Too Small To Fail, HuffPost, Child Care Exchange, and Chicago Parent. In addition, Rachel has an MFA in Museum Education from the University of Illinois and is a volunteer hospital magician for Open Heart Magic.



LYNANNE GUTIERREZ

President & CEO | Groundwork Ohio

As President & CEO of Groundwork Ohio, Lynanne Gutierrez leads statewide efforts to advance early learning and healthy development from prenatal to age five. She has strengthened the organization's advocacy, expanded partnerships, and pioneered projects addressing racial and rural equity. Appointed to Ohio's Early Childhood Advisory Council, she is recognized statewide as an early childhood expert. Lynanne lives in Columbus with her husband and three children and enjoys reading and quilting.



MALISSA HARRIS

Policy Associate | Groundwork Ohio

Malissa Harris is a Policy Associate at Groundwork Ohio, where she supports the organization's policy work and Family Action Network. She has a background in early childhood education and previously worked at Little Miracles EDC and United Way of Central Ohio. Malissa is passionate about helping families access high-quality early learning and empowering parents to advocate for their children. She holds degrees from the University of Cincinnati and The Ohio State University.



THE HONORABLE MEREDITH R. LAWSON-ROWE

Member | Ohio House of Representatives

Meredith R. Lawson-Rowe (D-Reynoldsburg) is serving her first term in the Ohio House, representing the 5th District in Franklin County. She previously made history as one of the first Black women elected to Reynoldsburg City Council and later served as Council President. Lawson-Rowe is known for her leadership on affordable housing and community engagement and for sponsoring Avery's Law in the Ohio legislature. She is a longtime Reynoldsburg resident, wife, mother, and grandmother.



THE HONORABLE ADAM MATHEWS

Member | Ohio House of Representatives

Representative Adam Mathews (R-Lebanon) is serving his second term in the Ohio House of Representatives, representing the 56th District in Warren County. An engineer and intellectual property attorney, he previously served as Vice Mayor of Lebanon and continues to represent inventors, entrepreneurs, and small businesses. Mathews is active in several community and nonprofit organizations throughout Southwest Ohio. He lives in Lebanon with his wife, Amanda, and their five children.



GARRET THOMPSON

Member | Family Action Committee and Family Action Network

Garret Thompson is a parent advocate from Troy, Ohio, a 2026 Groundwork Ohio Early Childhood Fellow, and a leader within the Family Action Network - serving on the Family Action Committee. As a single father, he brings a powerful perspective to advocacy for children and families. Garret works as a department coordinator and supervisor at Clopay and is active in several state and national parent leadership organizations. He is passionate about supporting involved fathers and ensuring all children have access to opportunities to thrive.



KARA B. WENTE

Director | Ohio Department of Children & Youth

Kara Wente has dedicated her career to improving outcomes for children and families in Ohio. Appointed by Governor Mike DeWine in 2023 to lead the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, she previously served as Director of the Governor's Children's Initiative and Chief Operating Officer for Future Ready Columbus. With more than 20 years in state service, Wente has led major policy and systems improvements supporting vulnerable children and families across Ohio.

