

MEET OUR SPEAKERS



JONATHAN KNOPF

Executive Director of Programs, HousingForward Virginia

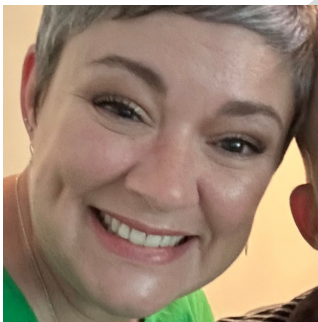
Jonathan is the Executive Director for Programs at HousingForward Virginia, where he leads housing research and education efforts across the Commonwealth. He regularly helps local officials, practitioners, and advocates find solutions to their housing challenges by telling stories anchored in data, crafting evidence-based policies, and designing effective communication strategies. Since 2016, Jonathan's work has led to the nation's first combined community land trust and land bank, Virginia's first regional housing trust fund, increased investments in manufactured home communities, and other innovative successes. He has also led or contributed to numerous state, regional, and local housing studies that sustain efforts to expand housing affordability and security for all Virginians. Jonathan holds a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University. He serves on the board of directors for VCDC and Housing Families First, and is a member of policy advisory committees for HOME of Virginia and the Virginia Housing Alliance.



MEL JONES

Research Scientist & Associate Director, Virginia Center for Housing Research

Mel Jones is a Research Scientist and Associate Director of the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech. Mel leads housing studies and housing research in Virginia and across the country. She specializes in quantitative analysis and data driven policy connecting housing to broad issues including economic and community development, individual economic opportunity, and well-being. Mel's expertise is demonstrated in her recent work: the New River Valley Regional + Local Housing Study, the Fairfax County Consolidated Plan, and the Loudoun County Unmet Housing Needs Strategic Plan. Mel earned a BS in Economics and a BA in International Service from American University as well as an MS in Applied Economics and a Master of Urban Affairs and Planning from Virginia Tech.



LYDIA CAMPBELL

Community-based Services Manager, Valley Community Services Board

Lydia Campbell is originally from Richmond, and graduated from Mary Baldwin College and made the Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro area her home. Throughout her career, she has served as a local probation officer, housing authority staff, and found her passion in homeless services and special needs housing, particularly with individuals experiencing serious mental illness or co-occurring disorders. Permanent Supportive Housing is her favorite model and she thinks Coordinated Entry is the best thing since Reese's cups. Lydia is embracing this new chapter of parenting her two kids in middle and high school called "chauffeuring" in a vehicle littered with coffee cups.



DR. CLINT MERRITT

Chief Clinical Officer of Population Health, Augusta Health

Clint Merritt is an internal medicine physician and currently serves as Vice President and Chief Clinical Officer for Population Health at Augusta Health. Dr. Merritt has spent most of his career as a hospitalist physician. In his current role, he leads health system efforts to improve access to care for underserved community members, reduce local health disparities and lead care coordination and clinical programming for the success of Augusta Health's accountable care organization. Central to his work is collaboration with many community partners and organizations, an aspect of his work that he enjoys very much.



JAY GRANT

Executive Director, LISC Hampton Roads

Jay Grant serves as Executive Director for LISC Hampton Roads. Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community development finance institution (CDFI). He and his office specialize in affordable housing production and preservation, wealth-building, small business assistance, commercial corridor revitalization, and community resilience in an effort to support a thriving region. Prior to LISC, Jay gained leadership experience at the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and HUD. At DHCD, Jay fostered long-term public-private partnerships to support development projects and strategies aimed at improving quality of life. Through his work at HUD, Jay spent nearly a decade managing multi-jurisdictional efforts related to housing, infrastructure, and neighborhood revitalization in his role as a senior community planning and development representative. Jay currently serves on the boards of Virginia Housing Alliance as well as The Public Health Foundation, Inc. He holds a B.S. in Marketing Management from Virginia Tech and a Master's degree in City & Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania.



JAY LANGSTON, PH.D.

Executive Director, Shenandoah Valley Partnership

Jay A. Langston, Ph.D., has over 38 years of experience in economic development, strengthening community engagement, and developing entrepreneurial initiatives. Jay joined the Shenandoah Valley Partnership in December 2018 where he is the Executive Director and is leading efforts to improve the economic prosperity in the Shenandoah Valley region. Prior to SVP, he served as the Managing Director of Business Retention and Expansion at the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP). Prior to working at VEDP, Jay was the Executive Director of Virginia's Gateway Region, he worked for Chesterfield County Economic Development, and the Georgia Department of Industry & Trade. Jay received a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Management from Georgia Institute of Technology, a Master's in Public Administration, and Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University. He has received accreditation from the Virginia Executive Institute and the National Center for Economic Gardening, and is a Virginia Economic Developers Association Cardinal, an award recognizing leadership, outstanding professional accomplishments and exceptional service to the organization.



JESSE RUTHERFORD

Chair, Board of Supervisors, Nelson County

Jesse Rutherford is born and raised in Nelson County where he currently serves as chairman of the Nelson County Board of Supervisors. Jesse graduated from Lynchburg College and immediately went into the manufactured and modular housing industry. In addition to his role as Board of Supervisors chairman, Jesse is currently a real estate broker, builder, property manager, and developer. In addition, Jesse was recently elected as chairman of the Virginia Manufactured Modular Housing Association.



JEN SURBER

Managing Member & Owner, Surber Development & Consulting, LLC

Jen Surber is the managing member and owner of Surber Development & Consulting, LLC. Through this role, Jen develops affordable multifamily housing in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Kentucky. Jen also provides consulting services for developers, facilitates the transfer of rural development properties, and specializes in the Federal Home Loan Bank Affordable Housing Program. Prior to Surber Development & Consulting, Jen amassed nearly a decade of experience developing funding streams for housing development and evaluating affordable housing projects for feasibility and development potential. In 2023, Jen began the development of Lily Gardens, a 50 unit new construction family development to be located in the City of Staunton; and Overlook Ridge, a 50-unit new construction to be built in Augusta County, as well as several other properties around the Commonwealth. In 2012, Jen was recognized by Virginia Community Capital as one of the 40 top housing professionals in the State of Virginia under the age of 40. Since that time, Jen has continued to add to her affordable housing portfolio and expand affordable housing in our region and beyond.



LANCE BARTON

Executive Director, Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro Habitat for Humanity

Lance Barton is the Executive Director of Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro Habitat for Humanity. He brings 20 years of non-profit experience in food and shelter and joined Habitat in 2016. During his tenure, Habitat built its capacity from 1 house a year to 6, and is now beginning infrastructure work on a 22 townhome development in Staunton. His work with Habitat for Humanity International's Innovation Committee brought recognition to Staunton for its use of off-site construction and its positive impact on rural areas. He lives in Staunton with his wife Elisa and their children Claire and Max.



TIM MURPHY

Policy Advisor, Housing and Livable Communities, AARP

Tim Murphy is the policy advisor for housing and livable communities at the AARP Public Policy Institute. In this role, Tim conducts research and policy analysis and develops resources for policymakers, planners, community members, and other stakeholders related to community livability and housing accessibility, affordability, and choice. His work also advances the AARP Livability Index, which measures livability across a range of indicators for communities throughout the United States. Before joining AARP, Tim was a principal planner for Arlington County, VA, where he managed and developed community plan updates, housing studies, land use policy updates and zoning ordinance amendments. Previously, Tim was a regional planner with Los Angeles County working on countywide long-range planning and policy focused on housing, environmental justice, and equitable development. Tim holds a master's degree in urban planning from the University of Southern California and a bachelor's degree in government from the College of William and Mary.



ERICA SIMS

CEO, Maggie Walker Community Land Trust

Erica Sims has worked in the non-profit management, affordable housing development, and community organizing fields for over 18 years. Her focus has been social and economic justice through housing and economic development. Ms. Sims has held private sector, nonprofit, and government roles and has overseen the development of over 2,500 units of affordable housing and 50,000 square feet of commercial development space in new construction and renovation projects. Prior to joining The Maggie Walker Community Land Trust in 2017, she was the Deputy Executive Director of Mutual Housing Association of New York, a non-profit affordable housing developer, owner, and manager with a portfolio over 1,500 units of affordable housing. She received a Bachelor's in Economics and a Bachelor's in Urban Planning from the University of Michigan and a Masters of Business Administration from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



MARIAH WILLIAMS

Strategic Housing Manager, Virginia Housing

Mariah has spent more than 6 years working at the intersection of business and social impact, leading and managing community investment initiatives in the private and nonprofit sectors. She is a skilled strategic and cultural connector who is passionate about activating people, spaces, and ideas. Mariah has successfully led grant-making initiatives to support capacity building, project implementation, and outreach efforts that have influenced strategic and equitable community investment in historically marginalized and underserved communities. In her current role at Virginia Housing, Mariah serves as a Strategic Housing Manager where she leads a team of officers working to deliver resources to Virginia's housing delivery network that support affordable and workforce housing development, project planning, and capacity building. Mariah received her B.A in Sociology from the University of Richmond and her Master of Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University.



OLIVIA RAINES

Housing Program Manager, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission

Olivia Raines is the Housing Program Manager for the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission. Through her role, Olivia manages all housing related grants and programs at the CSPDC, including the PDC Housing Development Grant, the Regional Housing Study, and the First Time Homebuyers Program. Olivia enjoys working with her local governments and regional housing partners to identify opportunities for housing and connecting them with the resources needed to turn ideas into action. Prior to joining the CSPDC, Olivia served as a program coordinator for an affordable housing non-profit, working with residents experiencing housing instability. This role cultivated a passion for housing advocacy which has carried her into her current role working on housing on a regional level. Olivia is an alum of the University of Virginia, and earned her Master's in City and Regional Planning with a concentration in Housing from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



SUNSHINE MATHON

Executive Director, Piedmont Housing Alliance

Sunshine Mathon is the Executive Director of Piedmont Housing Alliance in Charlottesville, Virginia. Committed to supporting deeply equitable and sustainable affordable communities, he has led the development of over 1,200 healthy, efficient homes in Texas and Virginia. As a nationally-recognized leader at the intersection of climate resilience and equitable affordable housing development, Sunshine has consulted with a wide variety of local and national housing intermediaries. With a broad range of professional experiences, from architectural design to mentoring children to catalyzing organizational inquiry into antiracist practices, Sunshine strives for collaborative work at three connected, equity-focused scales: relationship-building through one-on-one connections; cultivating place-based community development that centers residents' lived-expertise; and guiding policy-shift through a racial equity lens. Sunshine holds a Masters in Architecture from the University of Texas at Austin and B.S. in Physics from Bates College in Maine.



AMIRI RICHARDSON-KEYS

Art Director and Educator, Co-Owner, The A.R.T.S. Community Center

Meet Amiri Richardson-Keys. Richmond, Virginia native. Husband. Father. Son. Brother. Mentor. Entrepreneur. Artist. Educator. Therapeutic Art Facilitator. With his wife, he co-founded The A.R.T.S. (Artist Revealed Through Services) Preschool and Community Center in Chesterfield, Virginia. The A.R.T.S. provides people of all ages a platform to develop a passion for the arts, social interactions, and academics. Amiri credits his love for the arts and building a circular community to the dynamic black women and creative role models instrumental in his upbringing. Amiri is a V.C.U. School of Arts graduate and is pursuing a Master's degree in Art Therapy from The George Washington University. When he is not creating art or facilitating creative classes, you will find him spending quality time modeling his role as a husband, father, and grandfather, enjoying the blessings of life.