

# Children's Law Update and Future Impacts on SC Children

## **SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

*by order of presentation*

### **Amanda Whittle, J.D., CWLS**

*S.C. Department of Children's Advocacy  
Columbia, SC  
(Course Planner)*

Amanda F. Whittle, J.D., CWLS, was appointed as South Carolina's State Child Advocate (SCA) and Director of the South Carolina Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA) by Governor Henry D. McMaster on June 3, 2019. Director Whittle earned a B.A. in Political Science from the University of South Carolina at Aiken; her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law; a Certificate of Graduate Studies in Psychiatric Rehabilitation through the University of South Carolina School of Medicine. She is admitted to the South Carolina Bar, United States District Court, and United States Supreme Court. She is certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) through the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) and is trained in Family Court Mediation through the South Carolina Bar. She is currently participating in the South Carolina Executive Institute. Prior to her appointment by Governor McMaster, she was in private practice with Johnson, Johnson, Whittle & Snelgrove, Attorneys, P.A. for ten years and employed with the S.C. Department of Social Services as a trial attorney for ten years and as an Assistant General Counsel for four years. She serves on the Suicide Prevention Coalition, Child Fatality Advisory Committee (Chair), Children's Justice Act Task Force, Medical Care Advisory Board, S.C. Bar Children's Law Committee (Chair), South Carolina Behavioral Health Coalition, Bench-Bar Committee, Joint Council on Children and Adolescents (Chair, 2020), Safe Babies Courts State Advisory Committee, Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Council (GJJAC), Master Plan Advisory Committee, Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, State Crisis Intervention Advisory Board, United States Ombudsman Association, 988 Advisory Board, KinCarolina Advisory Council, and Children's Trust Public Policy Advisory Committee. She is married to James Whittle, and they have three adult children and two daughters-in-law.

### **Rep. Jason T. Elliott**

*Jason Elliott, Attorney at Law, LLC  
Greenville, SC*

Representative Jason Elliott is a proud Greenville native who graduated with a degree in Political Science from Clemson University where he was elected and served as Clemson University's Student Body President from 1992-1993. He earned his Juris Doctorate from the University of South Carolina School of Law. After law school, Representative Elliott served as an Assistant Solicitor for the Tenth Judicial Circuit, prosecuting misdemeanors and felonies in Anderson and

Oconee Counties .Further serving residents of the Upstate, he worked for then-Congressman Jim DeMint from 1999-2003 as DeMint’s District Director. In 2004, Representative Elliott opened his own practice, Jason Elliott, Attorney at Law, LLC. and has represented hundreds of clients throughout Upstate South Carolina. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 2017 and represents District 22 (Greenville). He is currently assigned to the Judiciary Committee and the Greenville County Legislative Delegation Transportation Committee since 2011. Representative Elliott has been a member of the South Carolina Bar since 1996 and is a member of the Greenville Bar Association, previously serving as its newsletter editor. He has been a member of the Rotary Club of Greenville for more than twenty years (since 1999) and has served as its president. He is a past board member, past board chairman, and vice chairman of the Greenville Tech Charter High School.

**Natalece Washington, J.D., CWLS**  
*National Association of Counsel for Children*  
*Atlanta, GA*

Natalece Washington, JD, CWLS, joined Team NACC in January 2021 as Policy Counsel where she leads the state-level Counsel for Kids Campaign to ensure legal representation for all children experiencing foster care. Prior to joining NACC, Natalece had 10 years of child welfare experience exemplifying her commitment to improved outcomes for dependent children. Natalece most recently served as Policy Administrator with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services where she developed and enhanced child welfare policies to ensure their continued alignment with federal and state laws, organizational changes, and shifts in best practice. Prior to joining the Division, Natalece held the role of Director of Operations for Fulton County CASA, Inc. where she focused on strengthening volunteer advocacy by developing the First Steps Manual--a guide for newly appointed lay guardians ad litem, establishing an in-service training program, and heightening staff development requirements to include pre-appointment guardian ad litem training. Before joining Fulton CASA, Natalece provided legal representation and ongoing holistic advocacy for dependent children as a Senior Child Advocate Attorney at the DeKalb County Child Advocacy Center in DeKalb County, Georgia. Natalece has been certified by NACC as a Child Welfare Law Specialist since 2015.

**Jennifer Rainville**  
*S.C. Appleseed Legal Justice Center*  
*Columbia, SC*

Jennifer Rainville is the Education Policy Attorney at South Carolina Appleseed where she fights to end systemic barriers in education for all children in South Carolina. She works on Education Law issues such as school enrollment, school discipline, and special education matters.

Prior to working at South Carolina Appleseed, Jennifer was the Lead Education Discipline Law Attorney and Probate and Heirs’ Property Unit Head at South Carolina Legal Services. Jennifer has spent her entire legal career fighting for low-income South Carolinians. She holds a law degree from Western Michigan University Cooley Law School and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Western Michigan University.

Jennifer is the current Chair of the South Carolina Bar Education Law Committee. Jennifer is a graduate of the 2020-2021 class of the South Carolina Bar Leadership Academy.

**Amanda C. Hess**

*Disability Rights South Carolina  
Columbia, SC*

Amanda Hess is a senior attorney with Disability Rights South Carolina (DRSC). DRSC is the protection and advocacy system for South Carolina and is dedicated to protecting the rights of people with disabilities in the state. More information about DRSC can be found on its website at <https://www.disabilityrightssc.org/>. Amanda is a summa cum laude graduate of Syracuse University and a magna cum laude graduate of Syracuse University College of Law. Since 2007, Amanda has worked for DRSC representing people with disabilities regarding their legal rights. She has worked on disability discrimination matters in areas including special education, assistive technology, effective communication, housing, accessibility, and matters involving barriers to work. Amanda is a member of the Education Law Committee of the South Carolina Bar.

**Anna Maria Conner**

*Disability Rights South Carolina  
Columbia, SC*

Anna Maria Conner is a Senior Attorney at Disability Rights South Carolina (DRSC), the federal and state mandated protection and advocacy system for South Carolina. She is a member of SC Access for Justice, the Civil Rights Section of the SC Bar, the Elder Law Committee of the SC Bar, and the Florence County Bar Association. She has also served on the Board of South Carolina Legal Services. Ms. Conner has litigated in federal and state court (in class actions and individual cases), worked on amicus briefs, represented clients in Medicaid appeals, supervised DRSC's monitoring program, and investigated allegations of abuse and neglect at facilities throughout South Carolina. She has also appeared before the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. Prior to her work at DRSC, Ms. Conner was corporate counsel for Advantica Restaurant Group and was in private practice in labor, employment and environmental law defense, administrative law, litigation, appellate practice, and affirmative litigation. She has provided training through the National Institute for Trial Advocacy, helped plan continuing legal education seminars on behalf of DRSC and the Civil Rights Section of the SC Bar and has given presentations on various topics, including preventing abuse and neglect, the rights of people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Medicaid law and appeals, alternatives to guardianships/conservatorships, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She received her B.A. degree from Furman University and her J.D. degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law.

**Tonnya K. Kohn**

*Judicial Branch, Court Administration  
Columbia, SC*

Tonnya Kohn was appointed State Court Administrator by Supreme Court of South Carolina Chief Justice Donald W. Beatty in July 2017. Prior to beginning her tenure in South Carolina Court Administration as a staff attorney in 2014, she was in private practice, clerked at the Columbia law firm of Johnson, Toal & Battiste P.A., and clerked for the Honorable Clifton Newman of the South Carolina Circuit Court. Before attending law school, she was an editor at daily newspapers in Nashville, Tenn., Norfolk, Va., Lexington, Ky., and Columbia, SC, and twice a judge for the Pulitzer Prize in Journalism.

Tonnya Kohn is a Board of Directors Member of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) and the South Carolina Women Lawyers Association. She is also an Executive Committee Member of the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness, and the Blueprint for Racial Justice, both of which are national task forces of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and COSCA; Co-chair of the CCJ/COSCA Security and Emergency Preparedness Committee; and Chair of COSCA's Conference of Language Access Coordinators Committee.

She is a member of the Lexington County Bar Association, Richland County Bar Association, South Carolina Bar Association, and the South Carolina Black Lawyers Association. Tonnya Kohn received her Bachelor's Degree from Vanderbilt University, Master's Degree from Murray State University, Juris Doctor from the University of South Carolina School of Law, and completed Northwestern University's Advanced Media Management Executive Program.