

REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL – REGION 1

County Board of Health Representative

Recommended by the Georgia Department of Public Health

Dr. Antonio Rios, MD, FACP

Chief of Population Health & President of HP2
Northeast Georgia Health System, Inc. (Hall County)



Dr. Antonio Rios, MD, FACP is dedicated to serving the healthcare needs of the Northeast Georgia community. Dr. Rios received his medical degree from La Salle University in Mexico and completed his residency and fellowship at Emory University in Atlanta. He is a member and Fellow of the American College of Physicians, the American Medical Association, the Medical Association of Georgia, and the National Lipid Association. He is Board Certified in Internal Medicine and is bilingual in Spanish and English. He is also a Certified Physician Executive by the American Board of Medical Management. He has been with Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS) for over 20 years and is an immediate past Chief Physician Executive for Northeast Georgia Physicians Group (NGPG), a position he held for 13 years. Dr. Rios is currently the Chief of Population Health for NGHS and President of Health Partners 2.

Community Service Board Representative

Recommended by the Georgia Association of Community Service Boards

Cindy Levi

Chief Executive Officer
Georgia Mountains Community Services / Avita Community Partners
(serving Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White counties)



Cindy Levi has served as Chief Executive Officer of Avita Community Partners, the Community Service Board in northeast Georgia, for the past 12 years, bringing with her over 42 years of experience in the field of behavioral health (BH) and intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD). She currently serves on Georgia's Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission and participates in numerous behavioral health collaboratives across northeast Georgia. She is also the Chair of the Georgia Association of Community Service Board's IDD Committee. Cindy has been a trainer for the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program for 15 years, teaching youth that it's ok to ask for help when facing depression or extreme low points in their life and directing them to supportive resources.

Avita is a comprehensive service provider for those experiencing behavioral health and intellectual/developmental challenges. The organization is Georgia's provider of specialty mental health services for individuals utilizing American Sign Language as their primary means of communication and the first provider of crisis stabilization services for those with co-occurring behavioral health and intellectual/developmental challenges. Avita has received several awards for its services including the Provider of the Year Award from the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and has been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) since 1999.

Sheriff's Office Representative

Recommended by the Georgia Sheriffs' Association

Jimmy Davenport

Sheriff

Murray County



Sheriff Jimmy Davenport began his law enforcement career 21 years ago at a sheriff's office and has had the opportunity to work in every division that a sheriff's office provides. Currently, he serves as Murray County Sheriff. He is in his first term and is going through the re-election process. He is 2022 graduate of the FBI National Command Course Session 2 in Quantico, Virginia, a 2022 Nominee for the Georgia Public Stakeholders Award from the Department of Community Supervision, formerly a Federal Task Force Officer assigned to the FBI Safe Streets Task Force 2014-2017, a 2016 Nominee for the FBI Task Force Officer of the Quarter for the State of Georgia, a 2016-2017 Graduate of Leadership Murray, 2015

Detective of the Year for the Murray County Sheriff's Office, and a 2011 recipient of the Vocational Excellence Award from the Rotary Club.

In addition, he currently serves as a volunteer on the Boys and Girls Club Board, the Murray County Governmental Affairs Board, the CTAE Advisory Board for the school system, and the Highland Rivers Behavioral Health Board.

University System

Dr.Carolynn DeSandre, Ph.D., CNM, FNP-BC

Dean of the College of Health Sciences & Professions, Assistant Professor

University of North Georgia

(serving campuses in Fannin, Forsyth, Lumpkin and Hall counties)



Dr. Carolynn DeSandre is a certified nurse midwife, family nurse practitioner, and certified substance abuse practitioner. She has been practicing in the north Georgia area for the last 25 years and currently volunteers at Good Samaritan Health Center serving the medically underserved. Dr. DeSandre is currently serving as the Dean of the College of Health Sciences & Professions (CHSP) at the University of North Georgia, overseeing health profession programs at the Cumming, Dahlonega, Gainesville, and soon Blue Ridge campuses. Current programs housed in the CHSP include: nursing (baccalaureate, masters, and doctorate); physical therapy (doctorate); counseling (masters, including the only accredited addictions

track in the State of Georgia); and health informatics administration (associate and baccalaureate). Dr. DeSandre serves her nursing profession through participation on the Georgia Board of Nursing (GBON) Advanced Education Committee and through expert review of GBON legal complaints.

Provider

Recommended by the Opioid Treatment Providers of Georgia

Valynda Early

Administrator

Harbor Springs Counseling Services



Valynda Early is the mother of two grown children, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She was born in Atlanta, Georgia and has lived in Georgia her entire life, mainly in the Lithia Springs/Douglasville area. Sadly, many of Early's family members have struggled with addiction, and unfortunately, some of her family members have lost their lives in the struggle.

For 16 years, she worked at Ridgeview Institute, a psychiatric hospital specializing in the treatment of addiction and behavioral health. Specifically, she worked as a PBX Operator/Access Center phone screener. Early recalls helping people from all socio-economic backgrounds in need of the services offered at the hospital.

In 2019, Early began working at Harbor Springs Counseling Services, a Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) Clinic, where she started as the front desk receptionist and assistant administrator and was promoted to administrator in 2022.

As administrator, she oversees the day-to-day management of the clinic. In January 2023, Early became an addiction paraprofessional and obtained her counselor in training certification. She is presently pursuing a Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) certification.

Daily, Early sees barriers to treatment, such as transportation, housing, and the inability to pay for treatment. She and her team are responsible for finding resources to help patients find lifesaving and life-changing assistance. She recognizes that funding can make a big difference in whether someone seeks treatment or not and is eager to use her passion to make a difference in the lives of the community she serves.

Lived Experience

Recommended by the Georgia Council for Recovery

Brittany Galvanauskas

Executive Director

LivingProof Recovery (Floyd County)



Brittney Galvanauskas, a person in sustained recovery from opioid use disorder for nearly six years, serves as the Executive Director of LivingProof Recovery, a recovery community organization in Rome, Georgia. Her dedication to recovery and advocacy, leadership qualities and personal accountability and reliability have been evident through four years with LivingProof. She holds certifications as a peer specialist in both Addictive Diseases and Mental Health (CPS-AD, MH). She has received advocacy training through the Georgia Council for Recovery and Mobilize Recovery, leading to successful engagement at both local and state levels. Her advocacy efforts include initiatives for Floyd County,

LivingProof Recovery, individual peers, and broader statewide recovery efforts. She is a dedicated advocate for harm reduction services, drawing from her personal experience with an opioid overdose in 2017 and

the unfortunate loss of family members to opioid overdoses in 2021 and 2023. Her profound understanding of the importance of preserving lives as a gateway to recovery, and a belief in a multiple pathway approach to recovery, drive her advocacy efforts.

Judiciary

Recommended by the Georgia Council of Accountability Court Judges

Brenda Weaver

Judge

Appalachian Judicial Circuit Superior Courts
(serving Fannin, Gilmer and Pickens counties)



Judge Brenda Weaver serves as Chief Superior Court Judge of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit. She served as an Associate Juvenile Court Judge for the Appalachian Judicial Circuit from 1991 until her appointment as Chief Juvenile Court Judge in April 1995. She served as Chief Juvenile Court Judge until her appointment to the Superior Court in 1996.

She serves as the Presiding Judge in the Appalachian Judicial Circuit Adult Drug Court and Veterans Court and previously served as the Presiding Judge of the Mental Health Court. She previously served as the President of the Council of Superior Court Judges.

She previously served as Chair of the Executive Committee for the Council of Accountability Court Judges and previously served as Vice Chair and Chair of the Council of Accountability Court Judges. She currently Chairs the Standards and Certification Committee of the Council of Accountability Court Judges. In 2019, Judge Weaver received the “Star” award for Judges and her Felony Drug Court was selected as a Model Court by the Council of Accountability Court Judges. In 2021, her Veterans Court was selected as a Model Court by the Council of Accountability Court Judges.

She is a member of the Uniform Rules Committee, Legislative Committee and the Pattern Charge Committee of the Council of Superior Court Judges. She was appointed by the Supreme Court to serve as a member of the Superior Court Clerks’ Cooperative Authority Board of Directors, and previously served as Chairperson of the Judicial Qualifications Commission.

Judge Weaver and her staff organized the Appalachian Judicial Circuit Family Law Information Center which provides assistance to low-income individuals in actions involving divorce, child custody and other family law related issues. The circuit was awarded a grant for the center by the Judicial Council and this center serves as a model for other rural judicial circuits in Georgia. The State Bar of Georgia selected this program to receive the William B. Spann, Jr. Pro Bono Award for 2014.

Locally, she serves as an advisory Board member for the Appalachian Children Center, the Good Samaritan Health and Wellness Center, the Hope House, the Appalachian Children's Emergency Shelter, Joy House, Georgia Mountain Hospice and Kids Kottage. She has served as a board member of the Pickens County Certified Literate Community Program since 1999. She is an honorary member of the Rotary Club and a member of the Optimist Club. She was selected by the Pickens County Chamber of Commerce as the 2015 Citizen of the Year.

In addition, she received the STAR award at the Council of Accountability Court Judges Conference in 2019., was appointed by Speaker David Ralston to the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission in 2019 and received the Public Stakeholder Award by the Georgia Department of Community Supervision on October 17, 2023.