



THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA'S  
MULTI-AGENCY BLACK HISTORY COMMITTEE PRESENTS

# BLACK RESISTANCE



**Pre-program 11:45 a.m. to 12:00 Noon**

*Slideshow of historical photos &  
participating Agency Leaders*

**Program Begins at 12:00 Noon**

**Welcome**

Rhonda L. Daviston, Event Co-Chair

**Negro National Anthem**

Earth Tones-Farewell Performance

**Opening Remarks**

Governor Josh Shapiro

**Follow-up Remarks**

Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis

**PA Legislative Black Caucus Chairwoman Rep.**

Donna Bullock

**Performance**

Dwennimmen African Dance Community  
Kassa, West African Dance

**Presenter Representing the Church**

Reverend Carla Christopher  
“Revelation and Resilience; A History of  
Resistance in the Black Church”

**Performance**

Jordan Howard aka “Livefromthecity”  
“Too Fly to Protest”

**Presenter Representing the Media**

Mrs. Verna J Edmonds and Julian Elliott  
“The first African Americans in media in Central PA”

**Performance**

Dwennimmen African Dance Community  
Balanta, West African Dance

**Presenter Representing the Vote**

Chad Dion Lassiter  
“Black Resistance in the Age of Terror, Fear & Anxiety:  
A beloved Community Response”

**Poetry Reading**

Ramona French  
”Feel it”

**Presenter Representing Education**

Renardo Hicks  
“Black Resistance & Education”

**Closing Remarks**

Wesley Alexander, Celebration Event Co-Chair

*Thank you for joining us today!*



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

**PROCLAMATION**  
**BLACK HISTORY MONTH**  
February 2023

**WHEREAS, Black History Month grew out of the establishment, in 1926, of Negro History Week by Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History; and**

**WHEREAS, the national theme for this year's observance is "Black Resistance" and explores how African Americans have resisted historic and ongoing oppression, especially the racial terrorism of lynching, racial pogroms, and systemic devaluation of Black lives; and**

**WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is home to 1.6 million African Americans currently and, throughout history, many have played significant roles in Pennsylvania's economic, cultural, spiritual, and political development; and**

**WHEREAS, many Black historical firsts happened in Pennsylvania: in 1787, prominent religious leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones organized the Free African Society, the Philadelphia Colored Female Free Produce Society boycotted products produced by enslaved labor, and, in 1838, William Whipper founded The National Reformer, the first Black newspaper in the state; and**

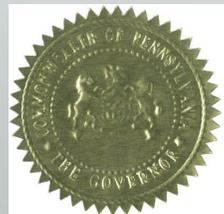
**WHEREAS, in the 1890s, W.E.B. DuBois, later a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, accepted a research position at the University of Pennsylvania and published "The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study" which detailed the social conditions and distribution of African Americans in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward and was the first scholarly race study of an urban place; and**

**WHEREAS, African Americans in Pennsylvania served as conductors on the Underground Railroad, fought in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and worked in the shipyards in Philadelphia, the coal and steel industries in Steelton and Pittsburgh, and the railroad industry in Erie and Harrisburg; and**

**WHEREAS, on January 17, 2023, Austin A. Davis was sworn in as the first Black Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania; and**

**WHEREAS, no matter your race, religion, or background, you have a place in Pennsylvania and the Commonwealth is proud to honor the history and contributions of African Americans in our state and throughout the nation.**

**THEREFORE, I, Josh Shapiro, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, do hereby proclaim February 2023 to be BLACK HISTORY MONTH in recognition of African Americans past and present in our Commonwealth. I encourage all Pennsylvanians to celebrate this important observance and to continue to work toward the goal of liberty and justice for all.**



GIVEN under my hand and the Seal of the Governor,  
at the City of Harrisburg, this twenty-sixth day of  
January two thousand twenty-three, the year of the  
Commonwealth the two hundred forty-seventh.

JOSH SHAPIRO  
Governor



# Reverend Carla Christopher

Carla Christopher is an ordained congregational vitality and community engagement pastor holding dual standing in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the United Church of Christ (UCC). Carla is also a cultural competency and diversity trainer specializing in Racial Justice, Disability, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion, survivor empowerment, and trauma-informed care. She currently serves as Assistant to the Bishop of Lower Susquehanna aSynod in Charge of Justice Ministries where she coordinates mission and outreach in the areas of Racial Justice, LGBTQIA+ Affirmation, Immigration, Disability Inclusion, Creation Care and Housing Equity for the Central PA/MD/Delaware region. She also serves on the pastoral team for Heidelberg United Church of Christ in York, Pennsylvania.

A former Poet Laureate of York (2011 – 2013), the co-founder of York Equality Fest which became York County Pride, and an award winning and multiply-published writer, Carla has twice received the key to York City for her community-based education initiatives and continues to use writing and storytelling as activism. Carla currently serves on the Pennsylvania Commission for LGBTQ Affairs, the City of York Human Relations Commission, and is a member of the Statewide Policy Council for Lutheran Advocacy Ministries in Pennsylvania (LAMPa). She also writes regularly for ELCA World Hunger, Faith@Home, Sparkhouse, Sundays and Seasons, Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, and Disrupt Worship Project.

Carla studied psychology, education, and creative writing at Columbia University in the City of New York and spent years as an educator and case manager in domestic violence shelters, state prison systems, and school districts before receiving her Masters in Divinity from United Lutheran Seminary in 2019. As a caseworker and community educator, then Diversity and Inclusion consultant, Carla has been the force behind regional campaigns for Food and Water Watch, Put People First – PA, Y.W.C.A. of York County, United Way of York County, York County Cultural Alliance, Appell Center for the Performing Arts, York County Libraries, and several political campaigns. She has also traveled around the globe, from Rutgers and Penn State to major organizations and institutions in Kosovo, Albania, Flint, Chicago, Milwaukee, Baltimore, Sarasota, Los Angeles, Phoenix and Philadelphia etc., as a speaker and trainer.

The former York Dispatch *OUT and About* columnist, host of *Culture & Main*; *York's Weekly Cultural Showcase* on White Rose Community TV, and co-director of PoemSugar Press / Community Arts Ink which published over 50 books by authors from traditionally marginalized communities in 5 years, Carla's full-length books include; *Song* (Columbia University Press, 2000), *Baby, Read Me Something with Rhythm* (PoemSugar Press, 2011), *Made In York* (2015), *Addicted to Relapse* (2018) and the forthcoming *Slave Catechism*. She also released the EP *Of Water Born* with the ensemble Poetic Voices in 2015 and the full-length recorded collection *Poetry from the Ashes* with Soul Thief Collective in 2017.



# Mrs. Verna J. Edmonds

Verna received her formal education from the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Upon her 1960 graduation, she began studies at Robert Morris Jr. College where she received a degree in Secretarial Science. She became the Production Assistant in 1969 for KDKA TV's 'Together Show' for and about the African American Pittsburgh community. She also attended Penn State and Harrisburg Area Community College. In 1972, she graduated from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Michele Clark Program where she received the honor of being a Ford Fellow. While attending, Verna became the first African American General Assignment Reporter for WHP-TV and Radio, where she covered City, County, Legislature and School Board meetings. She hosted a weekly AM/FM radio program geared for the African American Community. After a successful career as a television news reporter/production assistant in Pittsburgh, and Harrisburg Verna started her public service as an Information Specialist in the press office of the Department of Labor and Industry.

Ms. Verna, as she was affectionately called by co-workers at the Public Utility Commission, started her career there as a speechwriter and later she moved to the Bureau of Consumer Services where she was instrumental in the development of the Commission's outreach education program. In this position Mrs. Edmonds instituted PUC brochures and information guides that were distributed to consumers throughout Pennsylvania; coordinated Be Winter Wise Utility Fairs in Pittsburgh, Erie, Meadville, Reading Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Allentown, York and Harrisburg. She provided seminars and workshops at senior center in the state's 67 counties and helped develop roundtable sessions that educated community-based organizations on Chapter 56, low-income utility programs and weatherization programs. She became first African American to work in the Office of Communications' and was media relations staff liaison for the Consumer Advisory Council.

A civic-minded person working in many Community, Civic and Religious Organizations, Mrs. Edmonds served on the board of the World Affairs Council of Harrisburg; past board member and is a Life Member of the NAACP Harrisburg Chapter; past president and charter member of Harrisburg Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; organizer and past president of the Greater Harrisburg Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc.; past board member of Pennsylvania Commission on Women Appointed by Governor Richard Thornburg.; past member of the Mid Atlantic Advisory Commission on Civil Rights; past board member of March of Dimes, past Public Relations chairman and Cross Culture chairman of the International Association of Ministers' Wives and Ministers' Widows; Worship Leader for the Pennsylvania State Ministers' Wives and Ministers' Widows; past president of the Harrisburg Interdenominational Association of Ministers' Wives and Ministers' Widows and organizer and president of the Southern Allegheny Interdenominational Association of Ministers' Wives and Ministers' Widows.

Verna has been married for 57 years to Rev. Dr. Calvin C. Edmonds, Pastor Emeritus of Mount Zion Baptist Church Altoona. They have two sons James and C. Christopher.



# Renardo L. Hicks, Chief Counsel, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission

On August 8, 2019, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission announced the appointment of Chief Counsel Renardo L. Hicks. Hicks comes to the Commission with more than 30 years of legal experience, including extensive service in the government sector, private practice and the telecommunications industry.

As Chief Counsel, Hicks leads the PUC's Law Bureau, which provides legal advice and counsel to the Commissioners and the Commission bureaus on regulatory issues involving all regulated public utilities and other legal matters. Attorneys from the Law Bureau also represent the Commission in cases heard by state and federal courts and help formulate PUC input to federal agencies, the courts and the legislature.

Hicks comes to the PUC with a deep background in public protection. At the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General where he was Executive Deputy Attorney General and Director of the Public Protection Division, Hicks guided legal matters related to consumer protection, civil rights, antitrust, and charitable trusts and estates.

He has also represented the interests of consumers in rate cases and complaints heard by the PUC, as an Assistant Consumer Advocate, and is a past member and chair of the PUC's Consumer Advisory Council, which advises the Commissioners on matters relating to the protection of consumer interests.

Additionally, Hicks also brings to the PUC his experience as Regional Vice President and Regulatory Counsel for XO Communications, with legal and regulatory responsibilities covering Pennsylvania and several other states – along with private practice experience addressing state and federal issues involving public utilities, governmental entities, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations.

Hicks has taught law courses as a member of the faculty at Widener University School of Law, Temple University School of Law and the University of Louisville School of Law and served as an Instructor for the National Institute of Trial Advocacy and the Pennsylvania Bar Institute.

Hicks received his bachelor's degree from Hamilton College, his law degree from Northeastern University School of Law and a master's degree in clinical legal education from Temple University School of Law. He also has honorary Doctorate degrees from Allen University, Central Pennsylvania College, Morris Brown College and Turner Theological Seminary.



# Chad Dion Lassiter

Chad Dion Lassiter is a National Expert in the field of American Race Relations. Mr. Lassiter has worked on race, peace, and poverty-related issues in The United States of America, Africa, Canada, Haiti, Israel, and Norway, and is called upon frequently by media outlets to provide commentary on race relations and potential solutions.

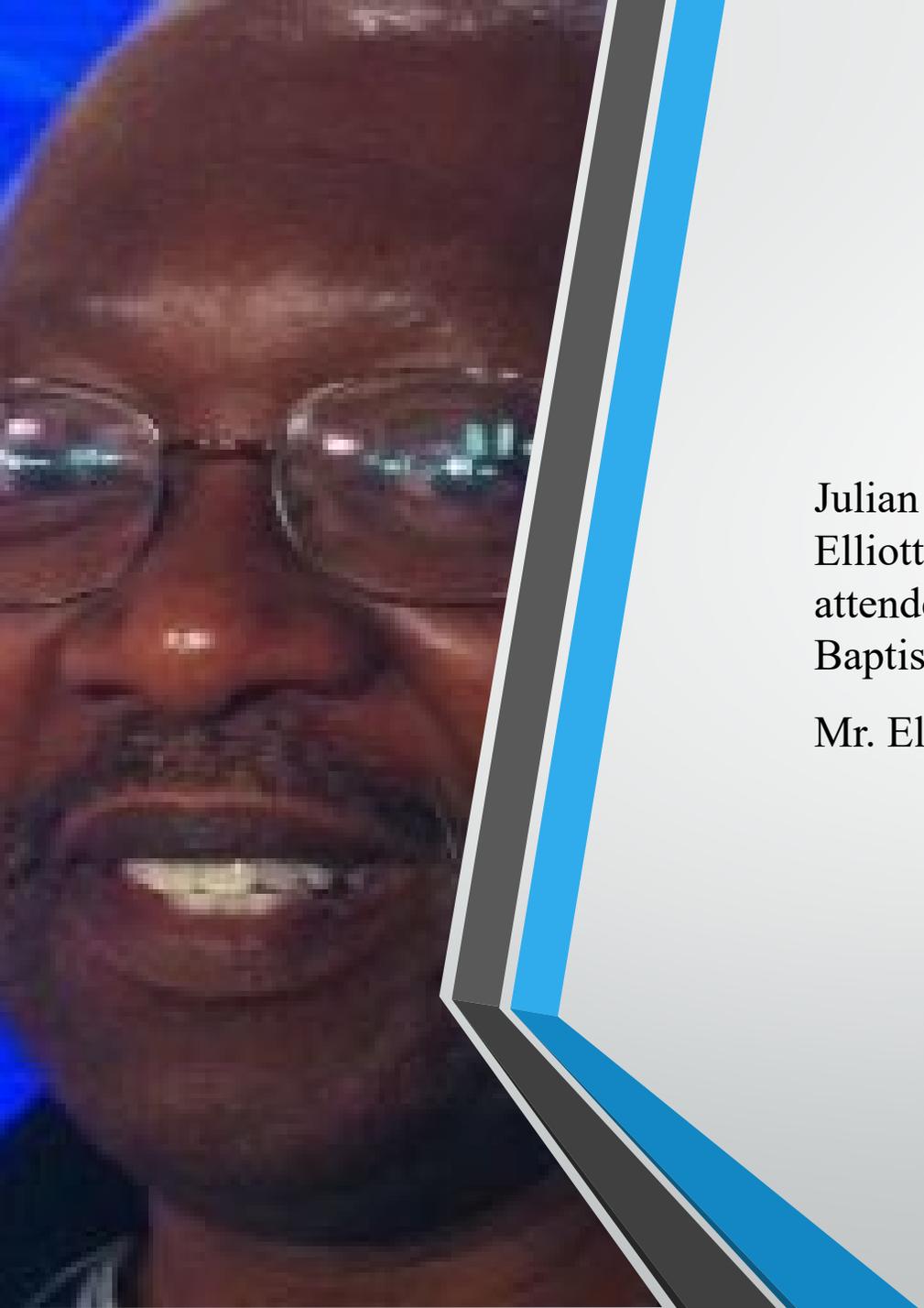
He is the current Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, where over his four years in this position, he has continued to push the Commonwealth forward in the spaces of DEI Training, Unconscious Bias Training, Anti-Racism Training and has developed and launched a ‘No Hate in Our State Townhall’ to address the surge of White Nationalism in Pennsylvania, a ‘Social Justice Lecture Series’ providing an outlet for the communities in the State to discuss imperative issues and serves as a Racial Reduction Response team for those communities impacted by hatred. He oversees a staff of 87 with three Regional Offices that comprise the 67 Counties in Pennsylvania and manages an annual budget of \$11 million dollars.

He has also developed programs under his appointment, such as a ‘Global Social Justice Initiative’, ‘Black and Jewish Beloved Community Dialogue’, and the ‘College Race Dialogue Initiative.’ Mr. Lassiter received his Master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Social Work, where he was the A. Phillip Randolph Award winner in 2001 and was the recipient of the prestigious University of Pennsylvania’s Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Involvement Award in 2008.

Mr. Lassiter is a co-founder and current president of the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy & Practice’s Black Men at Penn, the first Ivy League Black male group of social workers. Since 2003 this transcendent group has sought to recruit Black males into the profession, as well as, provide Anti-Racism and violence prevention training to urban and suburban schools around the country and diversity and inclusion training for corporate entities and penal systems.

Mr. Lassiter has been recognized by the Philadelphia Tribune as “The Most Influential African American Leader from 2010-2022”, as “Who’s Who among African-Americans” 17th edition in 2004 with such notables as Colin Powell and Michael Jordan.

On November 18th, 2019, Mr. Lassiter was inducted into the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy and Practice Alumni Hall of Fame. On October 26, 2021, Mr. Lassiter was chosen as National Association of Social Workers, Pennsylvania Chapter Social Worker of the Year for 2021. Mr. Lassiter has also been recognized by City & State’s 2022 Pennsylvania Fifty Over 50; City & State’s 2022 Pennsylvania Impact 50 and City and State’s Pennsylvania Power of Diversity: Black 100 in 2022 and 2023. He is mentored by the teachings of Dr. W.E.B. Dubois, Ida B. Wells and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



# Julian Elliott

Julian Elliott was born on December 17, 1948 to Julian A and Sarah M Elliott in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Mr. Elliot grew up in Steelton, PA and attended Steelton-Highspire School District, and became a member of First Baptist Church (Steelton) as a teenager.

Mr. Elliott was employed with WHP TV from 1970 to 2015.

# The EarthTones

The EarthTones are a singing group made up of Commonwealth employees from multiple agencies. Our repertoire consists of a variety of song selections that include standard/traditional music, contemporary, Christmas, hymns and spiritual music. We sing throughout the Commonwealth and our peak season is Christmas. Some past engagements have occurred at the Auto Museum, train stations, parties – birthday, Christmas, retirement, acknowledgement of service/recognition, Governor Mansion, Capitol, sporting events, Black History Month, SECA, and the Farm Show.

## **Members:**

- TERESA ALLEN – Human Services
- NORMA SWAIN – Zion Lutheran Church Organist
- NITA BENTZ – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- WENDY LLOYD – Department of Environmental Protection
- DOUG LONG – Liquor Control Board
- SHANE MILLER – Department of Education
- TERRIANN PRESTON-SIMPSON – Department of Education
- RACHEL REYNA – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- DAVE LAMBERT – Department of Environmental Protection
- LENNIE LEWIS – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- JENNY KOVACH – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- TONY SHAW – Department of Environmental Protection
- ARLEEN SHULMAN – Department of Environmental Protection



# Jordan Howard aka “Livefromthecity”

Jordan Howard, aka "Livefromthecity", is an American performer, songwriter, and producer from Pittsburgh, PA. He sites PartyNextDoor as the influence for his name, after hearing his song "Belong To The City", but the name gained a different meaning as his career advanced. His other musical influences include JAY-Z, Drake, and Kid Cudi .

He got his professional start to his career in 2014 with 1Hood Media as a teaching artist and producer working closely with Jasiri X and his 1Hood collective while releasing a slew of projects for free on his SoundCloud page, which has amassed over 200,000 streams worldwide. In 2019, he joined fellow @1hoodmedia alumni Jordan Montgomery's @dwbrecords and released his debut mixtape, "Lightwork" while also producing Montgomery's debut album "Dark Horse" in its entirety. Later on that year, he would handle production and songwriting on the label's compilation album, "Support Black Business".

When the world shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic Live released his Bandcamp-exclusive mixtape “Gatman Beyond” but took his time away from performing to become a better producer. This would lead to production credits on labelmate JM The Poet’s debut album “Deja Vu” on the songs All I Know”, “Diamonds” and “Straight To The League”. He also teamed up with Jordan Montgomery once again for his sophomore LP “Thank You 4 Ur Purchase But We R Not for \$ale” on the songs “Run It Back”, “Not 4 Sale” and “Wild West”. Both projects would go on to amass over 10,000 Spotify streams and counting worldwide. His production efforts would not stop there, he went on to fully produce Driving While Black’s collaborative EP “Back In Business” co-produce and co-write many songs for Brittney Chantele’s album “Speaking With Swords”. Both projects would also go on to become a Spotify streaming success. He is currently working on his debut studio album, “Larger Than Life” which is due late 2023.



# Lark Daniel / Dwennimmen African Dance Community

Lark Daniel has been a lifelong student of dance who was first inspired to move to music at the age of 7 years old. She believes that if you can walk, you can dance. Lark was first introduced to African dance 24 years ago, and through her love of African dance and commitment to preserving African dance and culture, the Dwennimmen African Dance Community was born.

Dwennimmen African Dance Community has had the honor to perform at many events, including the Pennsylvania State Capital Diversity Day event, The Dauphin County Cultural Fest, as well as the Imani festival in Carlisle, the multicultural State Black History month program, the It Makes a Village annual fundraiser event, along with many others.

Lark started dancing jazz, ballet, tap and gymnastics at the age of 7. As a young adult she began to study African dance under the direction of Rafiyqa Muhammad, the founder of Neema Dance Company and Ngozi Inc, for 10 years. She then joined her company and began performing. Lark then continued her study of African dance for 15 years under the direction of Sonya Mann-McFarlane, the founder of Lancaster-based Imaniedutainers. There she was given the opportunity to teach classes and choreograph dance pieces for the Imaniedutainers annual concerts. Lark began teaching in her local community six years ago, and from there she founded Dwennimmen African Dance Community. Throughout the years Lark has been able to continue her studies of African dance from professional African dance instructors such as Jihan Von Hendricks, founder of Keur Khaleyi African Dance Co, and Cachet Ivey of Kulu Mele, along with various Master Instructors such as Youssouf Koumbassa from Guinea Conakry and Tenefig Dioubate and Esther Grant-Walker.

Dancers: Cierra, Alaisha, Ramona (Soloist) and Lark

Drummers: Leigh, Bruce, Pete, Sa'vyn, Rich and special guest lead drummer Carl Allen



# 2023 Multi-Agency Black History Month Celebration Planning Committee

## **PA Public Utility Commission**

Rhonda L. Daviston, Esq., Co-Chair  
Damon Anderson  
Tom Charles  
Cyndi Page  
Aaron Margolis

## **PA Dept. of Education**

Kathleen Hale  
Ellen Shenk  
Sonya Harris Saunders

## **PA Dept. of Environmental Protection**

John Brakeall

## **PA Dept. of Aging**

Anita Holmes

## **PA Parole Board**

Morgan C. Davis, Esq.

## **PA Governor's Office of Administration**

Wesley Alexander, Co-Chair  
Dellanor Young  
Beverly Oliver

## **PA Dept. of Labor & Industry**

Jacob Otero

## **PA Dept. of Revenue**

Bryan Barbin

## **PA Dept. of Banking and Securities**

Yvette Davenport

## **PA State Civil Service Commission**

Jeffrey T. Wallace

## **PA Dept. of State**

Kori House

## **PA Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services**

Olga Rodriguez  
Jean Preval

## **PA Dept. of Transportation**

Shirley R. Davenport

## **PA Dept. of Agriculture**

Pamela Hall

## **PA Dept. of Health**

Tynesha Robinson

## **PA Historical & Museum Commission**

Janeé Corbin

## **PA Legislative Black Caucus**

April Ashe