

Opening Session



Sheena Foster

Sheena Foster is a New Orleans native and is Chair of the Commission for Women. She is the President and CEO of the Montgomery County based Crittenton Services of Greater Washington - whose mission is to equip teen girls to overcome obstacles, make positive choices, and achieve their goals through programs in schools throughout the Greater Washington area. Her passion lies at the intersection of climate innovation/resilience, sustainable infrastructure development, business development and building the capacity of women and families. She is a detail-oriented strategist and sustainability consultant with a knack for project management, entrepreneurial thinking, relationship management and equitable community development. With nearly 20 years in the non-profit and business industry, she holds a degree in Urban Sustainability, Master's in Public Administration and a seminarian earning a Master of Arts in Theology with a focus on mission development.

Sheena was a graduate Fellow of the United Nations Association, Fellow of the Clean Energy Leadership Institute (CELI) and Fellow of the NYC based Council of Urban Professionals. Sheena is well traveled (37) countries and has studied abroad in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana and El Salvador. Sheena is a member of Montgomery Women and serves on the board of directors of Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) Executive Board, Montgomery County Business and Professional Women (MCBPW), Women of the ELCA Executive Board (WELCA), ELCA Church Council's Executive Committee and the National Council of Churches (NCC) Joint Action and Advocacy for Peace Convening Table.

When she is not working or serving, you can find her jamming at a music festival, on a weekend road trip, exploring a national park, hosting fundraisers for political and charitable causes, playing the guzheng, shopping at local thrift store, experimenting with her manual camera, strolling through a farmers market, volunteering through board service, mentoring, gardening, cooking up a Louisiana staple (especially Gumbo), spinning from her extensive vinyl record collection, trekking in the mountains or relaxing by the ocean. She credits her faith, family, and friends for helping her continually evolve as a servant leader.

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Dr. Anne Khademian

Dr. Anne Khademian was named to serve as the Universities at Shady Grove's (USG) third executive director in October 2020, following a nationwide search and her appointment by Dr. Jay Perman, Chancellor of the University System of Maryland (USM). As executive director of USG – a regional higher education center of USM in Montgomery County, with programs from nine universities on one campus – Dr. Khademian also holds the title of Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for USM.

Before joining USG, Dr. Khademian served most recently as a Presidential Fellow and professor at Virginia Tech, where she enjoyed a distinguished 17-year career that included several years as director of the School of Public and International Affairs. A longtime resident of Montgomery County, Maryland, she served in her presidential fellowship at Virginia Tech's Research Center in Arlington, near Washington, D.C., supporting the collaborative implementation of "Beyond Boundaries" initiatives to drive organizational innovation and growth across campuses and stakeholder committees.

With nearly three decades of experience in higher education, Dr. Khademian is a nationally recognized scholar and author in the areas of inclusive leadership and organizational change. As director of the School of Public and International Affairs in Virginia Tech's College of Architecture and Urban Studies for seven years, she led the school through a period of significant growth and transformation, introducing new academic degrees and programs, expanding faculty and student enrollment, forging new global partnerships, and extending outreach into local communities.

Her research focuses on leadership and organizational culture, inclusive management, policy networks, and the work of organizations involved in homeland security and financial regulation. She is the author of three books – *Working with Culture: The Way the Job Gets Done in Public Programs* (CQ Press, 2002); *Checking on Banks: Autonomy and Accountability in Three Federal Agencies* (Brookings, 1996); and *The SEC and Capital Market Regulation: The Politics of Expertise* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992) – and has published numerous articles on public management and public policy.

Dr. Khademian is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration, an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established by Congress to help government leaders build more effective, efficient, and accountable institutions.

As a civic and business leader, Dr. Khademian serves as Chair of the Board of Directors for the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, and as a member of the Board of Directors for both the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation and Smart City Works. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the American Red Cross, National Capital Region for the Montgomery, Howard, and Frederick Counties Chapter, and is a graduate of the Leadership Montgomery CORE Class of 2023.

Her leadership and impact have been recognized through several honors, including Bethesda Magazine's 2023 "Women Who Inspire" Honoree and March of Dimes' "Heroines of Washington" Finalist (2023).

Dr. Khademian holds a B.A. in Political Science and a Master of Public Administration from Michigan State University, and a Ph.D. in Political Science and Government from Washington University in St. Louis. A former collegiate athlete, she was a standout cross country and track competitor at Michigan State and was inducted into the university's Athletic Hall of Fame in 2016..

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Betty Romero

Commissioner Betty Romero, Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Commission for Women, is a longtime advocate for women and girls and a recognized leader in longevity and social innovation. She is the Founder of the Future Proof Longevity Impact Lab and previously served as Director of the Maryland Multisector Plan on Aging and Age-Friendly Initiatives, where she led groundbreaking strategic planning efforts to prepare communities for the realities of a 100-year life.

With a dynamic career spanning the financial, government, and tech sectors, Betty brings extensive expertise in strategic planning, systems transformation, and capacity building. Her decades of work at the intersection of policy, equity, and innovation have established her as a driving force behind age-friendly initiatives and economic inclusion for older adults, family caregivers, and women throughout the lifespan.

Betty currently chairs the Care Economy Committee at the Office of the Comptroller's Women's Economic Empowerment Council, where she advocates for policies that recognize care as vital economic infrastructure. She also serves on various boards and commissions aimed at promoting gender parity, workforce inclusion, and multigenerational policy solutions.

A multicultural and multilingual consensus builder, Betty advises government leaders, moderates national panels, and speaks to global audiences. She inspires bold thinking about designing communities and economies that work for all ages. Along with her husband, she has proudly raised three strong, independent daughters in Montgomery County, MD.

Betty is a bilingual global citizen who, with her husband, raised three strong and independent women in Bethesda, MD. The gap in her employment history supported a spouse's career in international development, allowing her family to travel all over the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

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Janet LaValle

Janet LaValle is a Board Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA), practicing for over 29 years. Although her career has been multi-faceted, she currently works for Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center, in Fort Meade, Maryland as a staff CRNA. In addition to this experience, she functions as a Clinical Instructor for Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. Janet is an active member of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetist. She has served honorably as a Lieutenant

Commander in the United States Navy.

Janet's interest in community health initiatives encompasses Director of Health and Wellness at her church for over ten years as well as activities in cooperation with the African American Health Program. Her community interest extends to active membership in the National Council of Negro Women as Executive Board member. Janet is active in her Sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc., Xi Sigma Omega chapter which embrace numerous projects of civic and community involvement. Janet has served on the Montgomery County PTA for two years and as school liaison for the NAACP.

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Patricia Prather

Patricia Prather is the founder of Serenity Dream Center, Inc a non-profit that assists young ladies transitioning from homelessness. She is a community Advocate, Certified Peer Specialist and a Narcan trainer.

Patricia's passion is to strategically create camaraderie between diverse stakeholders for the purpose of one common goal is beyond amazing. One of her greatest passions is working as a motivational advocate for the youth for over 20 years. As a resourceful bridge builder, she has an ardent love for community outreach, especially to those experiencing grief, homelessness, and the recovery community.

Her STYLES girls mentoring program was recognized by Governor Wes Moore and the Baltimore Ravens for their outstanding gift of kindness in the community. Patricia was recognized by her former employer Coalition for the Homeless, for her outstanding work and commitment to reducing the number of lives lost to addiction. She was one of the two African American finalists to be honored by the March of Dimes Heroines of Washington DC. In January 2025, Patricia was honored with the Martin Luther King, Jr. "Peace Makers Award" by Health and Human Services.

Patricia studied Psychology at Liberty University, Youth Development at Montgomery College; Non-Profit Management at Duke University.

She is a new and evolving author, penning her first autobiography entitled, "Healing the Little Girl Within" and a journal for women facing the challenges of Breast Cancer "I WIN."

Opening Session



Nina Nassiri

Nina Nassiri is a senior at Northwest High School in Montgomery County. A passionate advocate for equality and community service, she interns with the Montgomery County Commission for Women and serves as the president of Northwest High School's Key Club, a community service organization dedicated to addressing inequality. Nina's dedication to leaving a positive impact on her community cannot be understated, and she hopes to become an even better advocate and community member as she grows.

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Marc Elrich

Marc Elrich was elected as Montgomery County Executive on November 6, 2018, and re-elected to a second term in 2022. Before becoming County Executive, he served for 12 years (2006–2018) as an at-large member of the Montgomery County Council and nearly two decades (1987–2006) on the Takoma Park City Council. Prior to his serving on the County Council, Elrich spent 17 years as a public school teacher at Rolling Terrace Elementary School in Takoma Park, one of Montgomery County's poorest schools.

Throughout his career in public service, Marc Elrich has advanced a bold vision for equity, sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. Under his leadership, Montgomery County has made significant progress on climate action, affordable housing, public safety reform, early childhood education, and economic development.

Born in Washington, D.C., Marc Elrich moved to Montgomery County at a young age and attended McKenney Hills Elementary, Montgomery Hills Junior High, and Einstein High School. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland and later completed a Master of Arts in Teaching at Johns Hopkins University.

Elrich's career in public life began with tenant and neighborhood organizing in the early 1980s. He became deeply involved in community activism and land-use advocacy, fighting for equitable development and environmental protections. In the 1990s, he helped lead opposition to harmful development plans in downtown Silver Spring and was instrumental in preserving Ten Mile Creek, Montgomery County's last best stream and a critical backup water source.

As a Councilmember in Takoma Park, he authored sanctuary legislation, strengthened rent stabilization laws, passed a law recognizing domestic partnerships, and supported immigrant rights and day laborer protections. He also introduced resolutions opposing both Iraq wars. Elrich has long believed in local government's responsibility to deliver real solutions rooted in equity, sustainability and public engagement. As County Executive, Marc Elrich has focused on delivering tangible, community-centered progress across a wide range of priorities.

Marc and his wife raised their family in Takoma Park, where he still lives today. They have two foster sons who have Down syndrome, John and Dougie, and they have been central to Marc's understanding and advocacy for inclusion and disability support. John still lives with Marc and remains a source of inspiration in his ongoing work. Marc's daughter, Jamie, and her family live around the corner, in the house he built.

Marc Elrich's career has always been guided by a deep commitment to social justice, equity, and public service. From attending the March on Washington as a 14-year-old to civil rights protests during college to organizing for housing justice to shaping County policy at the highest level, he has remained focused on building a more just and inclusive Montgomery County.

He believes in listening to residents, governing with transparency, and delivering results that improve lives. His work continues to reflect the same values that brought him into public service more than four decades ago.

Opening Session



Natali Fani-González

Natali Fani-González brings deep local government experience and a strong background on economic opportunity for all to the Montgomery County Council. Until August of 2021, Natali was the Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board, the local agency that regulates real estate development, plans transportation infrastructure, and manages the park system.

During her seven years on the Planning Board, Natali was a key player in supporting the growth of the County's life sciences sector through master plans in the Great Seneca Science Corridor, White Flint, and Bethesda. With a particular focus on addressing the needs of small, local, and immigrant-owned businesses, she also helped steer the County Growth and Infrastructure Policy, Veirs Mills Corridor Master Plan, Montgomery Hills/Forest Glen Sector Plan, the MARC Rail Community Sector Plan, and the Bicycle Master Plan, among many others.

Prior to her service on the Planning Board and starting her own business, Natali worked for the regional immigrant group CASA, where she successfully fought for the Maryland DREAM act, banking services for the unbanked and other local and state policies to uplift low-income communities.

Natali arrived in the United States as a teenager with her mother without being able to speak English. Nevertheless, she committed herself to her education while working weekends cleaning houses with her mother. She won a full scholarship to Goucher College, where she was awarded degrees in political science and international relations. She served on the Goucher College Board of Trustees after she graduated. She knows from experience the

struggles good, hard-working people face trying to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Washingtonian Magazine honored Natali as one of the “40 Under 40” Changemakers in the Washington DC Region and then named her as a “Woman to Watch.” She is a 2021 Recipient of a State Citation by Governor Larry Hogan for community efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic helping vulnerable communities. The DC metro area’s largest Spanish language newspaper, El Tiempo Latino, recognized Natali as one of the 100 most influential individuals for the DC Hispanic community. Natali lives in Wheaton with her husband, a former United States Marine, and their children