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OF  
DISABILITY EXAMINERS

# The Advocate

## NATIONAL TRAINING CONFERENCE 2022



**July 31 - Aug 3 Burlington, VT**

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## President's Address



Greetings NADE Members,

It's hard to believe only two short months have passed since the last edition of the Advocate. So much has already transpired, yet there is more to be accomplished. Organ Donation Awareness was observed, National Award nominations were solicited, and National Disability Professionals Week (NDPW) was celebrated. I hope everyone was able to participate in at least one of these NADE events.

I am encouraged by the increase in membership and activities chapters are reporting. It feels like we've turned a corner together. This year's NDPW theme: Through It All NADE Stands Tall, signified more than the work performed by Disability Determination Services offices across the country, but also the endurance demonstrated through all the changes going on in both NADE and the DDS. Well done!

As you're all aware, the National Training Conference is July 31 through August 3. The theme for 2022 is just as relevant to the toils and tribulations of the last year as the NDPW theme was: Resilience, Resourcefulness and Reinvention. The organizers and volunteers have lined up an impressive agenda with for this three-day training in Burlington, Vermont. It's not too late to register! The full agenda can be viewed at [NADE.org](http://NADE.org). You'll also find the links to register and book a hotel.

It's also not too late to get involved at a national or regional level. NADE is recruiting candidates for Board positions. If you are interested in serving NADE at a higher level, please consider joining the board or a committee. NADE's local, regional, and national offices offer opportunities to build professional skills, such as organization, management, public speaking, and managing interpersonal relationships. Contact your Regional Director for more information.

Stay well, and keep standing tall!

*Marjorie E Garcia*

[president@nade.org](mailto:president@nade.org)

## REGION RESTRUCTURING PROPOSAL

I've communicated with the NADE membership about plans to pursue a change to the number of regions within NADE. The reason for this proposal is to help with NADE budget by funding fewer board members. I wrote an article in the NADE Advocate to help explain the need for this change. I've worked with an ad hoc committee to further this change. We sought out membership feedback for restructuring the NADE regions and the number of regions there should be. We did receive input primarily supportive of the change. The majority of respondents indicated moving to four regions would be appropriate.

Currently, the NADE by-laws include the seven regions. To change the number of regions, the membership will have to vote for this change. A motion will be voted upon at the general assembly meeting at the NADE National Training Conference in Burlington Vermont 7/31/22-8/3/22. The ad-hoc committee determined it would be best to have one vote on an amendment to the NADE bylaws and a separate vote to address the logistics of the change.

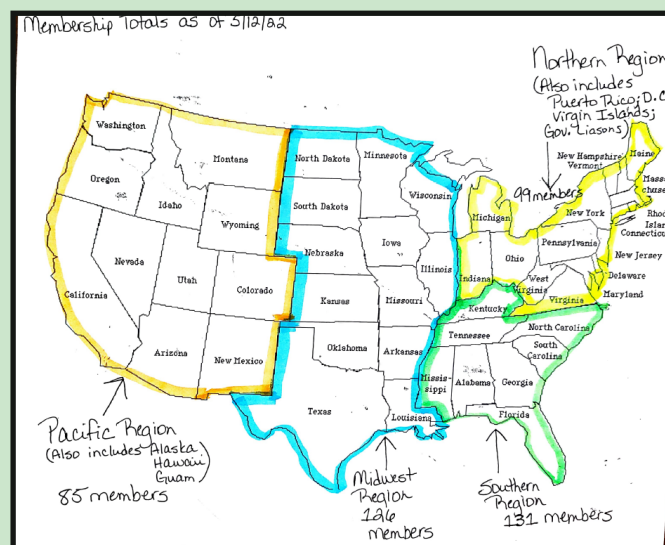
The proposed motion: To amend the Bylaws of National Association of Disability Examiners, Article IV, Section 4.2.C. Regional Trustees elected by the Members of their respective Regions as determined by their respective Regional Members prior to the Annual Meeting, the Regions are as follows: 1) North 2) South 3) Midwest 4) Pacific.

The restructuring committee determined that there would need to be an implementation period. Assuming the membership votes to change the NADE by-laws, the new regions will meet at the conference to hold elections. Those elected to the new Regional Director positions will begin their term effective November 1, 2022. Regional Directors serve two-year terms and are staggered to have a rotation of newer and experienced members on the board. Since these regions will be new, two of the regions will have a 2- year term, while the other two have an initial 1-year term. Future terms will all be 2-year terms.

Please forward any questions or concerns to your regional director.

Jennifer Nottingham

NADE President-Elect





Waterfront Park, Burlington, VT

The Green Mountain Association of Disability Examiners (GMADE) is proud to present the NADE 2022 National Training Conference! Join us in beautiful Vermont for our first annual conference in three years! In recognition of all that we have been through as a workforce, an organization, and a Nation, our theme for this year's conference is ***Resilience, Resourcefulness and Reinvention***. We invite you to join us as we celebrate our triumphs over the past few years and look to the future of Disability Determination Services.

### **General Registration Information:**

Current Early Bird Registration is open through June 30th with prices increasing on July 1st. Please consider sending a check to avoid the credit card fee of \$5, and please choose the correct ticket type. If you pay by credit card and choose the check payment rate, we will be in touch for the additional \$5 processing fee.

### **Accommodations:**

Please reserve your room at the Doubletree by Hilton, South Burlington by calling **800-445-8667** and book under the group name: NADE National Training Conference 2022. Alternatively, you can visit: [NADE 2022 National Conference \(hilton.com\)](https://www.hilton.com/en/events/details/hilton-hotels-usa/na-de-national-training-conference-2022) Room rate from 7/31/22 through 8/02/22 is \$146 per night. Some rooms can be reserved at the conference rate for three days prior and three days subsequent to the conference on a first come, first served basis. Reservations for 7/30 and earlier as well as 8/3 and after can be made by calling the hotel directly at **802-865-6620**. Conference Rate rooms for 7/31-8/02 must be reserved prior to contacting the hotel to extend a visit.

**See the next page for some of our honored presenters. Go here for a full list of presenters:** [NADE 2022 National Training Conference - Powered by Eventzilla](https://www.eventzilla.com/conferences/na-de-national-training-conference-2022)





**Grace Kim**  
**Acting Assistant Deputy**  
**Commissioner, SSA**



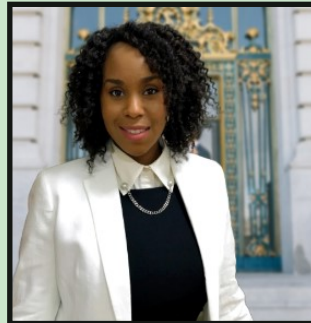
**John Owen**  
**Associate Commissioner,**  
**Office of Disability Deter-**  
**minations, SSA**



**Steve Rollins, Esq.**  
**Acting Associate**  
**Commissioner, Office of**  
**Disability Policy, SSA**



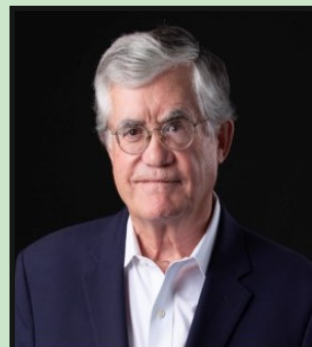
**Anatoly Schnaider**  
**Boston Regional**  
**Commissioner, SSA**



**Xusana Davis**  
**Executive Director of**  
**Racial Equity,**  
**State of Vermont**



**Sherrie Khadanga, MD**  
**Asst. Director of Cardiac**  
**Rehab, University of**  
**Vermont Medical Center**



**Hon. John T. Broderick, Jr.**  
**Senior Director of External**  
**Affairs, Dartmouth-**  
**Hitchcock Healh**



**David Henry Holben, PhD**  
**Director of the Office of**  
**Food Security, University of**  
**Mississippi**



**A. Evan Eyler, MD**  
**University of Vermont**  
**Medical Center**

AN EXCURSION IS PLANNED FOR MONDAY, AUGUST 1 FROM 7:15pm TO 8:45pm!

Queen City Ghostwalk is Vermont's favorite haunted tour.

Named 'Best Scary Stroll' by *Yankee Magazine*, they've been scaring up history for Vermonters and visitors for over 20 years.

Tours are led by author and historian Thea Lewis, creator of Queen City Ghostwalk, with stories enriched by years of research through her books which are published by Arcadia Publishing/The History Press.

Expect tales of mystery, madness, and mayhem with a dash of humor, on the tour that offers stories from her book, *Ghosts and Legends of Lake Champlain*.

20 TICKETS ARE AVAILABLE FOR THIS EXCURSION! IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN GOING, PLEASE "PURCHASE" A TICKET ON THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE. THERE IS NO CHARGE ON THE WEBSITE. COST WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (maximum \$25).

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THIS EXCURSION, PLEASE GO TO [NADE 2022 National Training Conference - Powered by Eventzilla](#) IN ORDER TO SIGN UP!

Tour duration: Approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. Please wear sensible shoes and dress for your comfort.

For more information, visit: [www.queencityghostwalk.com](http://www.queencityghostwalk.com)

#### GOT A QUESTION?

Contact the event organizer at [newlifeinvermont@gmail.com](mailto:newlifeinvermont@gmail.com) with your full name and order reference number.



**Molly Turnbull**

I would like to take this opportunity to submit my candidacy for the position of Secretary for the NADE Board.

I received my Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana and received my Master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Illinois in Springfield. I have worked as a state employee in Illinois since 2002, and started at the DDS as an adjudicator in 2008. I was promoted to a supervisor position in 2015, and have worked as a trainer since 2020.

I became a member of NADE in 2013. I have greatly enjoyed being involved with my local chapter in Illinois over the years. I have appreciated interacting with people that work in my building that typically I would not get to see. Everyone needs some positivity, so I enjoy bringing that to the employees here at our DDS through the fun social engagements and fundraisers for the community. I served as IADE Treasurer 2014-2016, President Elect 2016-2017, and President 2017-2018.

It has been a pleasure to serve as the NADE Secretary over this past year. I especially enjoyed participating in the Mid-Year Meeting in Baltimore with my fellow board members. I have served in other roles for NADE; including the committee for National Disability Professionals Week since 2016, and as head of the Elections committee for the last three years.

I reside in Springfield, Illinois, with my husband Jay and our 3 children; Jack (15), Andrew (14) and Clara (11). I have many hobbies that I try and squeeze into my spare time. I enjoy golf, reading, piano, travelling, running, biking, volunteering at my church, taking classes at the local YMCA (via zoom or in person), and spending time with friends and family (also via zoom or in person!).

It would be an honor to continue to serve as Secretary for NADE. Thank you so much for your consideration!



**Julie Kujath**

It is with great enthusiasm that I announce my candidacy for re-election to the position of NADE Treasurer. I have enjoyed my return back to this position, and would be honored to continue to serve the membership in this capacity. The NADE Board has faced many challenges in the past year and likely change will continue to come. I look forward to working with the NADE Board to help keep the association financials solid, while providing service to our members.

I have served in many capacities in my former state of Missouri and the Great Plains region. I have also served in multiple positions nationally with NADE and served on various committees for nominations, awards, NDPW, Donate Life, and many more! I continue to be active locally in the Nevada Chapter, currently serving as the Nevada Chapter Treasurer. Serving in all these capacities has given me an appreciation for the mission of NADE and deepened my appreciation for my career as a disability adjudicator!

I would like to thank the membership for this opportunity to run as candidate for NADE Treasurer, and appreciate your support.





## **Dr. Sharon Bland-Brady Retires**

Dr. Sharon Bland-Brady, former president of NADE and winner of the John Gordon Award, the NADE Excellence Award and a Recognition Award among many others, is retiring this month from the Detroit, Michigan DDS. Dr. Bland-Brady started as a Disability Adjudicator. She was promoted to Case Consultant and then District Manager for the Cooperative Disability Investigations Unit (CDIU) in Michigan. She earned her PhD in Organizational Psychology in 2015 while working full-time for DDS. She also produced a TV show called, "Women in Action with Sharon Brady!" She organized and starred in that production from 2008 to 2013, in her 'spare' time, while raising three children! "I worked from 6:30 AM to 3PM every day, so that left time for all my other projects!"

Dr. Bland-Brady has also been a powerful leader in her community as a member of the State of Michigan's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. She counts this as one of the major accomplishments of her career. Her work has been recognized with the SSA Commissioner Award, the SSA Regional Commissioner Award, a Youth Connection Career Award from the Department of National Resources and the SSA Commissioner's Team Award for Diversity and Inclusion. She's been an active member of her church, and organized lots of fundraisers for local churches over the years.

Before she came to DDS, Dr. Bland-Brady worked with emotionally disturbed children for 12 years, then a foster care supervisor. She came to DDS in May, 1995. She became a NADE member just six months later, and it was the start of a great relationship!

"NADE conferences are like family reunions all over the United States," she said. "I've only missed one or two in 27 years. I attended every state and regional conference, back when we had them. I enjoy doing things for others, that's why I joined. One of my proudest accomplishments was serving as NADE's president."

"Another accomplishment I'm proud of is the establishment of a CDI Unit in Michigan. In 2012, our state didn't have a Social Security Fraud Investigation team. I interviewed CDI agents and managers all over the country and worked with the State of Michigan and Social Security to get the resources we needed. In 2015, Michigan CDIU was established, and I became their manager. 'Get it done, and get it done right' is my motto! I was able to make that vision a reality thanks to my connections through NADE."

Dr. Bland-Brady plans to move to Ohio after she retires to care for her mother. She also plans to open a private practice, and may work as an adjunct professor. She plans to continue with NADE as a retiree member, and we're so glad!

## Fraudbusters

Reports from The Office of the Inspector General , June 2022

**NEW YORK** – New York Attorney General Letitia James today announced the guilty plea of Anthony Ragusa, 52, formerly of Huntington, NY, for fraudulently collecting more than \$200,000 in disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA). The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) charged that from 2013 to 2020, Ragusa falsely represented to the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) that he was unable to work and perform daily activities as a result of injuries caused by a 2013 fall. While collecting disability benefits and purportedly disabled, Ragusa was still the president and owner of WhiteStar Limousine — where he continued to earn income — and an avid weightlifter, as shown in numerous social media photos and videos of him lifting heavy weights on the internet.

According to OAG's filings and statements made by prosecutors, Ragusa applied for disability benefits in 2013. On his application, Ragusa represented that his injuries from a fall as an electrician were so severe that he had difficulty bending over to put on shoes, walking for more than 15 minutes, and sitting for more than 30 minutes. Ragusa also stated that the pain from his injuries prevented him from working in any capacity.

Extensive video and photographic evidence from Ragusa's wife's Instagram account showed that, beginning in 2017, Ragusa began a physical transformation into a bodybuilder. On the Instagram account, Ragusa could be seen lifting heavy weights and training for bodybuilding competitions, often at Bev Francis gym, known as "The Mecca" for bodybuilders. Additionally, OAG investigators reviewed documents from the state Department of Transportation and minutes from a town hearing in 2012 to show that, at the time of his fall, Ragusa was the president and owner of the WhiteStar Limousine company in New Hyde Park, NY.



**CALIFORNIA** – A federal grand jury returned a four-count indictment Thursday against Marcus Asay, 66, of Fresno, charging him with making false tax returns, and concealing a matter with an intent to fraudulently secure Social Security disability benefits, U.S. Attorney Phillip A. Talbert announced.

According to court documents, from 2016-2018, Asay reported very little taxable income although he knew that his taxable income was more than \$50,000. As the chairman of American Labor Alliance (ALA), Asay caused the organization to pay for hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of personal expenses, including over \$50,000 to dating and escort websites and \$120,000 in rent for Asay's personal residences.

Asay also received Social Security disability benefits beginning in 2010. The benefits are available for individuals who cannot perform full-time work due to a qualifying disability. In approximately 2015, Asay began working full time as the chairman of ALA. From 2016-2019, Asay worked full time and was not entitled to receive benefits, but he concealed this fact from the Social Security Administration. During this time, the Social Security Administration paid Asay and a dependent over \$90,000.

If convicted of filing a false tax return, Asay faces a maximum statutory penalty of three years in prison and a fine of up to \$100,000 for each count. If convicted of concealing and failing to disclose a matter related to Social Security Benefits,

# What Happens When You Submit a Case for Investigation of Fraud?

By Amber Barnes, Arizona

The Phoenix Cooperative Disability Investigation Unit (CDI) is one of several units across the country that help investigate fraud in SSA's disability programs. Each unit looks a little different but has the same goal: to obtain evidence of material fact sufficient to resolve questions of fraud and similar fault in SSA's disability programs. This is what a typical medical malingering or medical improvement case path looks like in the Phoenix CDI office.

Phoenix CDI consists of one Team Leader (TL) who is an employee with the SSA Office of the Inspector General (SSA OIG), three Task Force Officers (TFO) and one Investigative Analyst (IA) who are employees of the Arizona Attorney General's Office (AGO), one Special Agent from the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), one Program Specialist (PS) from SSA, and one Disability Examiner (DE) from the Arizona DDS.

When an allegation is received in the office, the TL assigns the program specialist or the disability examiner, to review the case. The team member assigned to lead the review depends on the type of allegation. The PS will review work concealment, living arrangement, or income and resources allegations. The DE will review allegations involving medical improvement or medical malingering cases. The PS and the DE both look at the entire SSA record of the subject. They will run queries, review medical records and past determinations, and look for wage earnings in various locations. The PS or the DE then write a summary of the case with the pertinent facts. The summary provides their review of the allegation, information found in the SSA folder and queries, what CDI needs to investigate, , and how the investigation should proceed. Next, the allegation is forwarded to the IA.

The IA runs background checks, driver's license checks, benefits checks (such as SNAP) and other reports that may help in specific cases. The IA also looks for the subject on social media and documents any public posts. The IA compiles the summary from the PS or DE with the information the IA finds into a report.

If the information the PS, DE, and IA gather shows the allegation is a viable concern, meaning there is more likely than not some type of fraud being committed, the TL converts the allegation into an investigation. The investigation is then assigned to a Task Force Officer (TFO). The TFO receives the investigation and reviews the file. The TFO comes up with an investigative plan detailing what evidence they need to gather. Investigations can follow several paths, depending on what evidence is needed.

If an allegation states that the subject is more capable of functional activities than reported, the TFO will gather evidence related to functioning. For example, a TFO may observe the subject on several different occasions. The TFO will look at things like the subject's ambulation, ability to drive, ability to shop, and ability to go out in public alone-anything the DE noted as significant to the medical disability case. The TFO may also try to interview witnesses and gather statements about the subject's functioning. The TFO can interview the subject if needed. The TFO can ask the subject to describe their daily activities, what they do in a day, and areas they require assistance in. The TFO can then compare those statements to what was seen during prior observations of the subject. When the TFO has gathered all the evidence and observations they can, they send their reports to the DE.

The DE creates one unified report on any medical case. The report consists of the information gathered by the PS, DE, IA, and TFO. This report is sanitized of any PII of witnesses, and any PII of the subject not needed at SSA/DDS, such as driver's license numbers, license plates, or addresses where the subject was seen. Once the report is complete, it is submitted to the OIG supervisor for final approval.

When the final report, called a Summary Report of Investigation (ROI), is approved, it is added to the medical evidence section of the subject (claimant/beneficiary)'s SSA folder. CDI will now request that DDS make a determination. The Summary ROI is considered part of the permanent SSA folder and must be considered during the entire adjudication process. When DDS makes a determination, CDI reports to SSA OIG the outcome, and CDI is able to close the case on their end.

And that, in a nutshell, is what CDI in Phoenix does with a medical case. While this is a general outline, each case and each CDI Unit is unique, so each investigation is unique. There are also other types of investigations! Stay tuned for an article about the path a Criminally Prosecuted Case takes through CDI.

**Do you suspect someone of committing fraud, waste, or abuse against Social Security? You can contact the OIG's fraud hotline at 1-800-269-0271 or submit a report online at <https://oig.ssa.gov/>.**

**If you receive a suspicious call from someone alleging to be from our agency, hang up, and then report details of the call to the OIG at <https://oig.ssa.gov/>.**

**To learn more about reporting fraud, visit OIG's [Reporting Other Issues](#) page. You will find information about Misuse of SSNs, Elder Abuse, Direct Express Account Fraud, and more. Also, watch their video "[How to Report Social Security Fraud](#)" for more details about the fraud referral process.**

## Chapter Activities

**MADE** - Since March, St. Louis MADE has been trying to find new and inventive ways to encourage involvement. Organ Donation Information was displayed for staff in April. This included flyers and rubber bracelets encouraging staff to learn more about organ donation. American flags were displayed to celebrate Memorial Day. These flags were left over from a funeral procession that MADE displayed in support for a local fallen Marine. In celebration of NDPW we designed a tree where staff can post happy/positive thoughts that they would like to share. Some have posted thank you's, proverbs or just funny sayings. It has been a HUGE success so far.



**OrADE** - We celebrated National Disability Professionals' Week with both virtual activities and activities in person. We had a daily raffle of gift cards paid for by the chapter. On the second day, we hosted a BBQ in the office parking lot that included a chili cook-off contest. We raised money for the Oregon Humane Society during the whole week. We also held a trivia contest via email for people that could only participate from home. Overall it was an excellent success and much needed morale booster!







Did you know that  
NADE supports Disability Examiners, Support  
Staff and Medical Consultants regardless of  
your membership status?

Would you like to return the favor?

NADE is a non-profit 501(c)3 supported by  
AmazonSmile!

AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. AmazonSmile is available at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) on your web browser and can be activated in the Amazon Shopping app for iOS and Android phones.

Use this link to set your preference to NADE

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/52-0888687>

You don't have to be a member of NADE to donate with AmazonSmile, but there are many reasons to join our professional organization:

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Networking

Join NADE today at

<https://www.nade.org/join-nade/>

## NADE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### Executive Board

Name	Office	Email	State
Marjorie Garcia	President	<a href="mailto:Marjorie.e.Garcia@ssa.gov">Marjorie.e.Garcia@ssa.gov</a>	OR
Jennifer Nottingham	President Elect	<a href="mailto:Jennifer.nottingham@ssa.gov">Jennifer.nottingham@ssa.gov</a>	NV
Sara Winn	Past President	<a href="mailto:Sara.b.Winn@ssa.gov">Sara.b.Winn@ssa.gov</a>	LA
Molly Turnbull	Secretary	<a href="mailto:Molly.Turnbull@ssa.gov">Molly.Turnbull@ssa.gov</a>	IL
Julie Kujath	Treasurer	<a href="mailto:Julie.Kujath@ssa.gov">Julie.Kujath@ssa.gov</a>	NV

### Regional Directors

Name	Region	Email	State
Kristina Burbank	NE	<a href="mailto:Kristina.Burbank@ssa.gov">Kristina.Burbank@ssa.gov</a>	VT
Nicole Mayberry	Mid Atlantic	<a href="mailto:Nicole.Mayberry@ssa.gov">Nicole.Mayberry@ssa.gov</a>	WV
Melissa Williamson	SE	<a href="mailto:Melissa.Williamson@ssa.gov">Melissa.Williamson@ssa.gov</a>	AL
Duane Jackson	SW	<a href="mailto:Duane.Jackson@ssa.gov">Duane.Jackson@ssa.gov</a>	AR
Amber Barnes	Pacific	<a href="mailto:Amber.Barnes@ssa.gov">Amber.Barnes@ssa.gov</a>	AZ
Michelle Wade	Great Lakes	<a href="mailto:Michelle.Wade@ssa.gov">Michelle.Wade@ssa.gov</a>	MI
Trish Chaplin	Great Plains	<a href="mailto:Patricia.Chaplin@ssa.gov">Patricia.Chaplin@ssa.gov</a>	MO

### Council of Chapter Presidents

Name	Email	State
Jennifer Pounds	<a href="mailto:Jennifer.Pounds@ssa.gov">Jennifer.Pounds@ssa.gov</a>	NC

### Appointed Directors

Name	Position	Email
Jennifer Nottingham	Legislative Director	<a href="mailto:Jennifer.Nottingham@ssa.gov">Jennifer.Nottingham@ssa.gov</a>
Melissa Williamson	Membership Director	<a href="mailto:Membership.Director@nade.org">Membership.Director@nade.org</a>
Korin Gary	Communications Director	<a href="mailto:Korin.M.Gary@ssa.gov">Korin.M.Gary@ssa.gov</a>