

119TH NEW CONGRESS FORUM

PANEL



Sixto Cancel

Founder & CEO, Think of Us

Sixto Cancel is the Founder and CEO of Think of Us. Think of Us (TOU) is an Action Tank driving systematic change in child welfare. Through focused projects and sweeping initiatives, TOU drives structural changes in child welfare policy and practice. Sixto was named as Forbes Top 30 Under 30 Social Entrepreneurs and is on the 2021 Forbes Under30 Lister Board. Sixto has been recognized by the White House as a “White House Champion of Change,” a “Millennial Maker” by BET, and named “Top 24 Changemakers in Government under 24” by the Campaign for a Presidential Youth Council and Sparkaction. Sixto has served as a Young Fellow at Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative since 2010 where he has played a key role in the initiative’s work of extending foster care permanency for older youth. Sixto is a Clinton Global Initiative University Alum, a FastForward Alum, an Ashoka Fellow, a Board Member of Adventr – an interactive SMART video tech company – and most recently on the Advisory Board for Box, Inc. Sixto and the team at Think of Us are working to ensure that every person has the conditions they need to heal, develop, and thrive.



Kristi Craig

Senior Director of Public Policy, Casey Family Programs

Kristi is Senior Director on the Public Policy team for Casey Family Programs. In this role, she supports the foundation’s efforts to inform and educate federal and state policymakers about the need for practice and funding strategies that support efforts to improve outcomes among children and families. She also supports the foundation’s efforts to improve child welfare public policy in states across the country. Kristi brings more than 35 years of combined state and federal public policy experience to her job. Prior to joining Casey Family Programs in 2014, she served as the federal liaison to three separate governors from 2005-2014. Before that she spent over ten years working for three different Members of Congress in legislative and management roles, with a specific emphasis on appropriations, health, and education.



Zach Laris, MPH

Founder & Executive Director, Bolder Horizon

Zach is a social entrepreneur passionate about the potential for public policy to promote thriving children and families. He brings nearly 15 years of bipartisan public policy and advocacy experience to his work at the intersection of health, human services, and economic policy impacting children and families in or at risk of entering the child welfare system. He currently runs Bolder Horizon, a non-profit startup that creates educational materials for policymakers and their staff and supports their productive partnership with leading policy experts. He also produces and writes Child Welfare Wonk, an online publication for child welfare policy professionals, and founded and runs a policy and advocacy consulting practice related to child and family health and wellbeing. Prior to launching his entrepreneurial ventures, Zach spent nearly 12 years at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), most recently as Director of Federal Advocacy & Child Welfare Policy. Zach holds a Master of Public Health in Health Policy from The George Washington University and a dual BA in Political Science and International Studies from American University.



Dawn Wilson, MSW

Director, National Training Institute, Center for Adoption Support and Education

Dawn Wilson, MSW, Director, C.A.S.E. Training Institute, has more than 30 years of experience in the child welfare, mental health and prevention fields, with expertise in program development and implementation. As Director of the federally funded National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative, Ms. Wilson oversees the development, pilot implementation, evaluation and national launch of two state-of-the-art web-based trainings for child welfare professionals and mental health clinicians to effectively address the mental health and complex challenges of children, adolescents and their families moving to permanency through adoption or guardianship. Previously Ms. Wilson served as a Child Welfare Program Manager with Catawba County Social Services in North Carolina overseeing prevention, family reunification, independent living, and post-permanency services. She worked collaboratively with The Duke Endowment on the Child Well-Being Project to develop, implement and evaluate an evidence-informed post-permanency service, Success Coach, to provide case management and in-home therapeutic services to improve outcomes for adoptive, guardianship and reunified families following foster care. The Success Coach Service garnered national attention as a promising practice and was the recipient of the 2013 Youth Thrive Award from The Center for the Study of Social Policy; the Transforming Local Government 2014 Alliance for Innovation Award; and the Harvard Kennedy School Ashe Center 2015 Innovations in American Government Award. Prior to her work in child welfare, Ms. Wilson worked in the prevention and intervention fields focusing on domestic violence, sexual abuse, and teen pregnancy. Ms. Wilson received her B.A. Degree in Psychology from Appalachian State University in North Carolina and her Master of Social Work degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Kate McLean

Executive Director, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute

As Executive Director, Kate leads the organization in increasing CCAI's visibility and impact among members of the adoption, foster care, and greater child welfare community; strengthening and diversifying the organization's funding sources; and maintaining the strong relationship that exists between CCAI and Members of Congress. Kate is committed to continue supporting the caucus and CCAI community to identify and remove barriers for vulnerable children and families.

In her previous role as CCAI's Director of Programs, Kate managed the organization's outreach, development, and programming in the implementation of CCAI's core programs and annual projects including the Foster Youth Internship Program®, Angels in Adoption®, and National Adoption Day. Kate was first a CCAI Programs Intern and then Policy and Programs Associate before becoming Director of Programs and most recently Managing Director.

Originally from New York, Kate has been a District of Columbia resident for over ten years. Kate enjoys volunteering with CASA for Children of DC and has been a Court Appointed Special Advocate since 2019. Kate holds a bachelor's degree in international affairs with a concentration in conflict resolution from The George Washington University. In 2023, Kate received an Executive Certificate in Nonprofit Leadership from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University with an emphasis on strategic fundraising and financial stewardship.



Philip Goldman

Founder and President, Maestral International

Philip is the Founder and President of Maestral International. Maestral has worked in over 100 countries since its establishment in 2008 to promote sound child welfare and protection policies, programs, and services. While Maestral addresses all dimensions of child adversity, a key component of its work has focused on strengthening systems to prevent and address child separation from family. Philip has been a member of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Advisory Council since 2009. Philip has had three decades of experience in supporting the design and implementation of comprehensive human development programs for the World Bank, USAID, UNICEF, and many other international development agencies.

Philip was a member of the 2018 Lancet Commission on the Institutionalisation and Deinstitutionalisation of Children and is currently a member of the Global Reference Group for Children Affected by Adversity. Philip has extensive current and past board and philanthropic experience, including Mayo Clinic, the Global Alliance for Children, the Opus College of Business at the University of St. Thomas, the Better Way Foundation, Court Appointed Special Advocates (D.C.), and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance.



Ryan Hanlon

President & CEO, National Council for Adoption

Ryan Hanlon, MSW, PhD is the President and CEO of National Council For Adoption (NCFA), an organization dedicated to using research, education, partnerships, and advocacy to serve all those impacted by adoption. Prior to NCFA, he served as the Executive Director of an adoption agency that provided domestic and intercountry adoption services. Ryan has experience serving as a foster care caseworker as well as with child protective services. In the field of adoption, Ryan has been a speaker at national and international conferences, and has worked on accreditation issues, state licensing matters, legislative initiatives, and multiple research reports. Ryan lives in Northern Virginia with his wife and four children, one of whom joined their family via adoption.



Toria Parsons

Policy Director, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute

Toria Parsons is the Policy Director of Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. In this role, she implements CCAI's government relations and congressional educational strategy to facilitate and expand CCAI's impact among federal policymakers and the child welfare communities. She is responsible for researching, coordinating, and executing elements of the Congressional Resource Program and 20/20 Vision Program delegation activities. She supports and engages in congressional outreach to advocate for each child's basic right to a permanent family.

As a trained social worker, Toria spent five years working with families adopting children from the countries of India, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Poland. From pre-adoption to post-placement and post-adoption, Toria worked with over 150 families during her tenure at the international adoption agency. Toria received both a Bachelor of Social Work and a Master of Social Work from The University of Alabama.