

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

André de Gruy is the State Public Defender for Mississippi. He founded the Mississippi Office of Capital Defense Counsel in July 2001, and has continuously served as director of that program, now a division of the Office of State Public Defender. He previously worked as an intern, staff attorney and director of the Mississippi Capital Defense Resource Center Inc. and as an assistant public defender in Hinds County. He is a 1990 graduate of Mississippi College School of Law. He served on the Mississippi Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force and now serves on the Oversight Task Force. He served on the Mississippi Public Defender Association Board of Directors for over 15 years including as President and chair of both the Training and Public Policy Committees. He is a “Life” member of MPDA. He is also a member of the National Association for Public Defense, National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the Mississippi Association for Justice. André has served on the Mississippi Public Defender Task Force and currently serves as a lawyer/advisor to the Mississippi Psychology Association’s Forensics Working Group and serves on Catholic Charities’ Poverty in Mississippi Task Force. He is married to Judge Elizabeth de Gruy, they have five children and one grandchild.

Brenda Locke is a retired public defender who spent nearly 15 years in Jackson County representing minors charged with delinquent acts in youth court and adults charged with felony crimes in circuit court. She is currently employed as Juvenile Resource Attorney in the Mississippi Office of State Public Defender. Brenda serves on the Advisory Committee of the Southern Juvenile Defender Center and on the Advisory Committee for the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Task Force. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Paralegal Studies from the University of Southern Mississippi and her Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. Brenda is a longtime member of MPDA and previously served on the board of directors. Brenda is also a Certified JTIP Trainer.

Kelly G. Williams is a native Mississippian and was born and raised in the Jackson Metro area. She received a B.A. in English from Belhaven College in 2003 and a J.D. from Mississippi College School of Law in 2006. She is licensed to practice law in all state and federal courts in Mississippi, as well as in the Fifth Circuit and the United States Supreme Court. Before forming The Law Office of Kelly G. Williams, PLLC, Kelly was with a Jackson law firm.

Kelly is a member of the Mississippi Bar Association, the American Bar Association, the Capital Area Bar Association, the Madison County Bar Association, and the National Association of Counsel for Children.

Kelly is an Adjunct Professor at Mississippi College School of Law and teaches Children in the Legal System. She has practiced in a variety of areas of the law, but has a special interest in Child Welfare Law. To date, she is Mississippi’s first and only Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) certified by the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) to represent children, parents, and agencies in Child Welfare Proceedings. This title of distinction requires, among other things, an applicant to pass a rigorous certification exam. The NACC Certification Program is the only program approved and accredited by the American Bar Association to certify attorneys as Child Welfare Law Specialists. This certification also lends itself to representation as related to juvenile offenders; subjects of custody, visitation and adoption proceedings; and as participants in civil

damages litigation. Kelly has extensive experience in representing children and has served as a Special Judge and Designee in Youth Court for five years, and currently serves as a Parent Representation Attorney in Hinds County Youth Court.

Carlyn Hicks, Director of Parent Representation, Senior Staff Attorney and Clinical Adjunct Professor at Mission First Legal Aid Office at Mississippi College School of Law, has spearheaded efforts to make Parent Representation in Child Welfare cases a reality for Mississippi families. As clinical adjunct professor of the Child Welfare and Family Justice Clinic, she provides supervision, instruction, and training to third year law students interested in learning hands-on experience and gaining skill development in family defense.

Carlyn is actively involved in the leadership of the Mississippi Bar Association in varying capacities, including the Young Lawyers Division Board of Directors and chairman of the Mississippi Bar's Child Welfare and Child Advocacy Committee. Additionally, Carlyn is a member of the Parent Representation Task Force, where she works with statewide and national stakeholders to enhance and expand parent representation across the state. Carlyn is called upon regionally and nationwide to present on topics related to quality family representation and policy reform in child welfare.

A dedicated child welfare and family defense advocate, Carlyn is an equally devoted wife and mother. She and her husband, Derrick, are the proud parents of a daughter, Leigh Marie.

Joyce Hill Williams is a Special Assistant Attorney General with the Mississippi Attorney General's Office, representing the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) and the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) where she has worked since 2008. As a Special Assistant Attorney General she represents MDCPS and MDHS in matters involving termination of parental rights so that foster children are freed for adoption as well as establishing conservatorship for vulnerable persons throughout the state. In addition, she does contract review for MDCPS and MDHS and provides both agencies with representation in personnel matters. Mrs. Williams also serves as an Administrative Hearing Officer for both MDCPS and MDHS. In addition to practicing law, she is also an adjunct instructor at Antonelli College where she has taught various legal courses since 2008. Mrs. Williams is a native of Jackson, Mississippi and received a Bachelor of Arts in English in 2003 from Tougaloo College. She received her law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 2006. Mrs. Williams is married to Feldman Williams and together they have a one year old son.

Sara Roberts received her B.B.A. (2000) and J.D. (2004) from the University of Mississippi. Mrs. Roberts is a Special Assistant Attorney General and represents the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. In this position, she handles termination of parental rights, child custody, and vulnerable adult cases. In addition, Mrs. Roberts represents the State in bankruptcy matters and cases before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Mrs. Roberts enjoys an active role in her community. Currently, she is a member of the Mississippi Bar's Child Welfare and Child Advocacy Committee and the Junior League of Jackson. She previously served on the Board of Directors for the Bethlehem Center, a local non-profit organization. She attends Galloway Memorial United Methodist Church.

Mrs. Roberts spent her childhood in Jackson and Lexington, Mississippi. Mrs. Roberts is married to Patrick Roberts. They have one daughter.

Beau Rudder is the Director of Training at the Mississippi Office of State Public Defender. From 2003 to 2012 he was an assistant public defender in Pascagoula, Mississippi, where he represented indigent clients charged with felonies ranging from non-violent drug offenses to capital murder. A native of Middletown, Ohio, Beau earned his BA from the University of Mississippi in 1999 and his JD from the University of Toledo School of Law in 2002. He is a board member and past president of the Mississippi Public Defenders Association and he is Secretary of the National Alliance of Indigent Defense Educators. He is also the recipient of the 2013 Gideon's Promise Stephen B. Bright Public Defender Award. Beau lives in Madison, Mississippi with his wife Jacqueline and their two sons Abraham and Émile.

Diana Rugh Johnson holds a MS in Biochemistry from Clemson University and a JD from the Georgia State University College of Law. She serves as a Judge Pro Tempore in the Juvenile Court of DeKalb County and was one of the first attorneys in Georgia to be certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist. Diana is on the Steering Committee of the ABA National Alliance for Parent Representation and the Board of Directors of the Georgia Association of Counsel for Children. Her private practice focuses on Guardian Ad Litem work, adoptions, SSI, disability, and appeals. Diana teaches other child welfare attorneys in Georgia and across the United States on a variety of topics including trial skills, effective case planning, understanding drug tests, and due diligence in medically-complicated cases.