

Former Dane County Executive

Kathleen Falk served as the chief elected official for Dane County from 1997-2011. Known for her leadership and ability in bringing people together over important and often contentious issues, Ms. Falk has focused on initiatives to reduce sprawl and improve water quality; to serve the needs of kids, families and the elderly so they can succeed; and to be “smart on crime” by using effective drug treatment strategies with repeat, non-violent offenders. She was the first woman County Executive in Dane County and the longest serving. Prior to serving as Dane County Executive she served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Wisconsin Department of Justice for 14 years.

Barbara Beckert is Director of the Milwaukee Office of Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), the protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities in Wisconsin. DRW engages in a variety of advocacy strategies, including one-on-one individual advocacy, legal support, systems change and training. Ms. Beckert co-chaired the Milwaukee County Mental Health Community Advisory Board, which addressed safety, quality of care, and community linkages at the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex. She also co-chairs Make It Work Milwaukee!, a cross disability and aging coalition of approximately 40 organizations, which takes an active role in Milwaukee county and state budget advocacy.

Shel Gross has been Director of Public Policy for Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) since 2000. Mr. Gross was Project Manager for Wisconsin’s Garrett Smith youth suicide prevention grant from 2006-2010 and also serves as Project Manager for a State Prevention/Early Intervention grant focusing on youth suicide prevention. He chairs the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health and its Legislative and Policy Committee and is on the steering committee for Wisconsin United for Mental Health, a statewide anti-stigma initiative. He holds a Masters Degree in Public Policy from the LaFollette Institute for Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin and has over 35 years of experience in the mental health field. Prior to joining MHA he worked for 10 years in the Wisconsin Medicaid program.

Walter Laux, Director, Adult Community Services Branch, Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division, is responsible for the management of a provider network and service delivery system that includes Wiser Choice and SAIL (Service Access to Independent Living), which together represent virtually the entire array of publicly funded behavioral health treatment resources in Milwaukee County. Mr. Laux’s leadership has been instrumental in organizing community stakeholders to address critical issues of substance abuse treatment sustainability as well as the development of a 1915(i) waiver to improve the mental health system, both within a context of seeking an integrated substance abuse/mental health system that can better serve individuals with co-occurring disorders while maximizing efficiencies.

Jennifer Lowenberg is the Advocacy and Training Specialist for NAMI Wisconsin. Ms. Lowenberg has served as a clinician, a consultant, a trainer and an advocate in her 30-year career in the mental health field. She began her career as an Occupational Therapist with the Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) in Madison. Following her clinical work at PACT, she worked for the state Bureau of Community Mental Health as a clinical consultant. For the past eight years she has provided system and individual advocacy on behalf of Wisconsin consumers and their families through NAMI Wisconsin. Her emphasis throughout her career has been to ensure that consumers receive the best services available and that the consumer and family voice be a vital part of positive change and system improvement.

Mary Neubauer has worked in the mental health field for the past 26 years. Ms. Neubauer is an advocate, Certified Peer Specialist and social worker. Five years ago she created the Peer Specialist Program for Autumn West, the mental health component of CommunityAdvocates. The population she works with includes individuals that are homeless with mental illness and substance use disorders. She has served on committees and work groups at the local and state level. She is currently the co-chair of the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force, Consumer Representative on the Wisconsin Council for Mental Health, and the Wisconsin Recovery Implementation Task for the Bureau of Prevention, Treatment and Recovery. She co-founded the Wisconsin Association for Children of Alcoholics in 1986.

David R. Riemer, Director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, has long been active in reshaping Wisconsin and U.S. policies on welfare, poverty, healthcare and education. Mr. Riemer served from 2004-07 as Director of the Wisconsin Health Project, working to lower the number of Wisconsin's uninsured and control health care costs. He worked for Senator Edward Kennedy's Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research, developed health policy options for the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, and prepared a report on Wisconsin's uninsured for the state Department of Health and Social Services.

Marilyn Walczak is cofounder of Justice 2000, and Community Justice Project Coordinator for the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute. Ms. Walczak has over 33 years of experience working with local justice systems, and creating innovative and high-impact programs. She has done program development and has management experience in providing successful treatment intervention and pretrial services for criminal offenders. She served on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies (NAPSA) for six years. Additionally, Marilyn served NAPSA as the Service Coordinator for six years providing support to the Board for Directors and membership. She currently serves on a variety of criminal justice and community planning groups dedicated to criminal justice reform.