

STOP 2: BRIDGING THE BENEFITS CLIFF

Dr. Marie Cannon, President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Action Organization of Western New York (CAO of WNY)

Dr. Marie Cannon is President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Action Organization of Western New York (CAO of WNY). Dr. Cannon began her career of service with the Head Start Program at CAO of WNY from 1999 to 2001. From there, she became the Executive Director of Holy Cross Head Start, and she later became CEO of the Child Resource Center, fighting poverty and helping people overcome the barriers to economic self-sufficiency. Dr. Cannon became a leader who uplifted all she worked with; as she often said, “There’s nothing about us without us.” In 2024, she became the first woman to lead CAO, where she continues her unwavering, lifelong dedication to serving her community.

Between stints at CAO, Dr. Cannon served as Commissioner of the Erie County Department of Social Services, leading a 1,600-employee department that served 27,000 people each month. There, she developed and implemented a \$10 million housing and rental assistance program and a \$15 million childcare assistance program. Her other accomplishments included procurement of \$385,000 in foundation support for the development of a comprehensive housing plan, development of Virtual Learning Centers, implementation of a racial equity training initiative, establishment of a Disproportionate Minority Representation Committee, and facilitation of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute’s Workforce Excellence Partnership.

Dr. Cannon’s commitment to service also includes time as a member of Governor Kathy Hochul’s Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, as the 1st Vice President of the New York Public Welfare Association, as member of the Greater Buffalo Equity Roundtable, and as Co-Lead of the Erie County Child and Housing Task Forces in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dottie Gallagher, President & CEO, Buffalo Niagara Partnership

Dottie Gallagher is President & CEO of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, the area’s regional chamber of commerce and privately funded economic development organization. Partnership members employ more than a quarter of a million people in the Buffalo Niagara region.

Prior to joining the Partnership in 2013, Dottie was president & CEO of Visit Buffalo Niagara, the region’s tourism promotion bureau. Before this, she spent nearly 15 years with The Buffalo News and served as a member of their executive management team.

She serves on several community and economic development boards in the region and serves as the Buffalo convener of the NYSMART-I corridor Tech Hub.

Dottie received her undergraduate degree from Towson University, her MBA from the University at Buffalo, and a Doctor of Commercial Science degree from Niagara University.

Lisa Chimera, Deputy County Executive

Lisa M. Chimera was appointed to the position of Deputy County Executive by County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz in October 2022 following three years of service as the elected Legislator in Erie County's Third Legislative District.

As Deputy County Executive, Chimera has focused her attention on several Mental Health initiatives. These include developing the Erie Path Smartphone App, bringing together local school districts and non-profits to create the Supporting Mental Health by Advocating for Resources Together (SMART) Collaborative, and fighting to address persistent challenges in the behavioral health crisis response system as a member of the leadership team for the Crisis to Care Collaborative (CTC). She also co-chairs Live Well Erie (LWE), a broad-based, data-driven initiative involving numerous partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors who collaborate to achieve greater health outcomes and improved quality of life for residents.

During her time as Legislator, Chimera chaired both the Health and Human Services Committee and the Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) Committee. She also served on the Finance & Management and Energy & Environment Committees. Among her legislative achievements, Chimera spearheaded initiatives such as instituting Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in the Erie County Holding Center and creating the "bookmobile" outreach van with the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. She was also instrumental in the formation of the Erie County Emergency Childcare Task Force.

Chimera previously served as a councilmember on the Tonawanda Town Board for 14 years and was the first female Democrat elected in the Town's history. She served on numerous committees and was instrumental in governmental reform that saved taxpayers money while preserving important services, including the preservation of public libraries and the enhancement of town parks.

In her professional career, Chimera worked for the Kenmore-Tonawanda School District, teaching at Hoover Middle School for 34 years. Chimera was a Curriculum Learning Specialist, teaching Special Education in grades 6-8 until her retirement in 2021. She played a foundational role in the establishment of the co-teaching model and assisted in the training of all teachers and administrators.

Chimera completed her studies at Buffalo State University, earning both a Bachelor's of Science degree in Elementary Education and Special Education, as well as a Master's of Science in Reading.

Sheri Scavone, CEO, WNY Women's Foundation

Sheri Scavone is the CEO of the WNY Women's Foundation. In her role, Ms. Scavone uses Foundation research data to educate, convene, advocate and forge collaborations with key community stakeholders to address gender inequities and other issues preventing women from achieving economic self-sufficiency. She leads the Foundation to create opportunities for all women to learn, earn, lead, and thrive. As an extension of her passion to elevate women and a quest for continuous learning, Sheri earned certification as an Executive Coach and formed ElevateU Partners, LLC.

Sheri has over 45 years of experience leading and growing public and nonprofit organizations to achieve strategic goals through collaboration, communication and connections. Ms. Scavone is a tireless advocate advancing policy and driving change towards greater acceptance and tolerance - particularly for women, families experiencing poverty, those living with mental illness and LGBTQ and marginalized youth.

Ms. Scavone is a licensed physical therapist, earned an MS Executive Leader degree in Health Systems Administration and has an advanced post-graduate certificate in Palliative Care. She also is a Certified Executive Coach through the University at Buffalo's Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership. Ms. Scavone is a Health Foundation of Western and Central NY Health Leader Fellow and a University at Buffalo Advanced Trauma-Informed Champion.

Sheri gives back to her community by sharing her time and resources on the Boards of Broadview Federal Credit Union and Niagara Lutheran Health Services. She is a Governor's appointee to the NYS Child Care Availability Task Force and Co-Chair's Senator Gillibrand's Child Care Innovation Committee. Ms. Scavone also serves on the University at Buffalo (UB) School of Social Work Dean's Advisory Council, UB Early Childhood Research Center Advisory Board and the Charity Navigator Advisory Council and provides thought leadership on numerous local, NYS and national coalitions and organizations.

Ms. Scavone is passionate about harnessing the incredible resources of women to strengthen our communities!