

Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission Hearing

October 9, 2018

Presenter Biographies

Dr. Robert Garcia, Mayor, City of Long Beach

Dr. Robert Garcia is an educator and the 28th Mayor of Long Beach. Mayor Garcia is focused on making the City of Long Beach a leader in economic development, sustainability, education, and technology.

At age five, Mayor Garcia immigrated to the United States from Lima, Peru and was raised in Southern California. The Mayor, a college and university educator, holds an M.A. from the University of Southern California and an Ed.D. in Higher Education from Cal State Long Beach, where he also earned his B.A. in Communications.

Mayor Garcia currently serves as a Board Member on the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) representing much of the South East County of Los Angeles.

Sunny Zia, President, Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees

Sunny Zia is serving her second term on the Long Beach Community College District Board, having been elected Trustee for Area 3 in April of 2014 and then re-elected in 2018. She is a first-generation immigrant who grew up in a hardworking family that raised her with the guiding principles of the American dream. From a young age they instilled in her the importance of education as the pathway to success.

She was the first female to graduate from her class of Civil Engineering with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Tehran. She later graduated with honors and received a Master of Science from the University of California, Irvine in Civil Engineering. She has nearly two decades of experience in Construction, Environmental, Water and Infrastructure projects. Sunny is a former small business owner and consultant to the private and public sectors. She has managed a wide range of programs, balanced budgets, and recovered funding for many agencies she has represented.

Currently, Sunny is a Senior Civil Engineer and Program Manager at the Port of Long Beach responsible for overseeing multi-million dollars in Capital Improvement projects. In her most recent role as the Port's Contract Compliance Manager, she led the oversight of over \$2.44 billion in contracting practices and ensured that contracting at the Port is fair, equitable and transparent. In this capacity, she led the effort in generating over \$12.2 million in annual savings.

Cristina Alvarado, MSW, Executive Director, Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles

Cristina Alvarado is the Executive Director of the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles. Prior to this, she was the head of the child care Resource & Referral agency in the Pasadena area. Cristina has a great deal of knowledge about the social services arena within Los Angeles County, with a career that spans over 30 years.

In her previous experience, she was the Chief Operating Officer for the YWCA of Greater Los Angeles, Human Services Manager for the City of Pasadena and Director of Grants and Allocations for United Way of Greater Los Angeles.

Cristina holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from UCLA, where she was recognized as Alumnus of the Year by the School of Public Policy in 1999. In 2012, she received the Marge Wyatt Advocacy Award for her policy work with the resource and referral agencies to continue to bring important resources to children, working families and their early care providers.

In her career, Cristina has worked with county, state and federal legislators to address issues related to social justice and inequities within our community. These include efforts to advance child care access, affordability and availability for families across Los Angeles County. Cristina continues to be active within her own community, where she is currently President of the Board of Education for San Gabriel Unified School District.

Erin Gabel, Deputy Director of External and Governmental Affairs Office, First 5 California

Erin Gabel is the Deputy Director of the External and Governmental Affairs Office, where she is responsible for the Commission's legislative and public affairs initiatives. Prior to joining the First 5 California team, Erin was the education consultant for California State Senate President pro Tempore, Darrell Steinberg, and advised the pro Tem and Senate on a wide range of education reform issues that included preschool and early learning, kindergarten through grade 12 public education, and higher education.

Before joining Senator Steinberg's policy team, Erin was the Director of Government Affairs Division at the California Department of Education. Erin was responsible for the Department's involvement in all state and federal budget and legislative processes. She served State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson as a policy advisor under different hats in the Department, Assembly, and the Senate over an eleven year tenure.

Prior to working at the state Capitol, Erin served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. Erin was one of the founding staff members of the Partnership for Children and Youth as their first Children Nutrition Project Director, and now serves on its Board of Directors. Erin is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and the proud mother of two young and active boys, August and Rhys.

Dr. Dean Tagawa, Executive Director, Early Childhood Education Division, LAUSD

Dean Tagawa is currently the Executive Director for the Early Childhood Education Division in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Over the past year, early education and transitional kindergarten programs in LA Unified have grown to almost 30,000 students. During that time, he has developed preschool inclusion programs and implemented a new curriculum with a focus on concept development and social emotional learning. He has been instrumental in building Nature Explore Outdoor Classrooms for the students, making instructional technology a reality in the Early Education Centers, and has focused on bringing 13 dual language programs into ETK, TK, and State preschool programs. Each of these efforts has resulted in recognition such that Early Education in LA Unified is now an integral part of the district's goal of 100% graduation.

As a long-time employee of LAUSD, he has been an Instructional Director for Early Education, a Staff Relations Field Director, an Elementary Principal, a Primary Center Principal, an Early Education Center Principal, an Assistant Principal, an advisor in Instructional Support Services, a reading coach, and an elementary teacher. He has a BA from the California State University, Los Angeles, a Masters in Educational Administration, and recently completed his Doctorate in Educational Leadership. He is a native of Los Angeles and has served on various early education work groups including the Early Childhood Education Workforce Consortium, County of Los Angeles Childcare Planning Commission, and the Partnerships for Education, Articulation and Coordination through Higher Education (PEACH). Dr. Tagawa has also served on numerous work groups in Los

Angeles Unified School District to support high school scholarships, multicultural coalitions, and instructional technology initiatives.

Aside from his work in education, Dr. Tagawa served in the US Army for eight years with a Veterinary Unit. As the parent of autistic twins, he and his wife, Fanny, work a great deal to advocate for children with special needs. Because of her experience as a parent and volunteering with children with special needs, Fanny recently left her law practice to become an early childhood special education teacher. Together, the family enjoys playing golf, going to baseball games, seeing movies, hiking, camping, and trying different kinds of foods.

Dr. Claudia Sosa-Valderrama, Director, Head Start Program, Long Beach Unified School District

Claudia Sosa-Valderrama joined the Long Beach Unified School District as the Director of the Head Start and Early Head Start Program in April 2014. She provides leadership, supervision, and support to the Head Start, Early Head Start, and Educare programs.

In her role as Director, she regularly collaborates with other programs and departments in an effort to leverage resources and streamline systems towards improving services for children and families.

Prior to joining Long Beach Unified, Claudia was the Assistant Director for the Los Angeles County Office of Education, where she worked for 12 years. In that capacity, she led the Program Design and Effectiveness Unit, responsible for the comprehensive monitoring and professional development support for the county's Head Start and Early Head Start delegate agencies.

Claudia and her family immigrated to this country when she was three years old in search of a better life, where she lived and attended school in El Monte. Her hard work and pursuit of education led her to seek employment in the El Monte City School District where she worked as a Social Services Specialist, Education Development Supervisor, and School Psychologist.

She received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of La Verne, a Master of Arts in Education with an emphasis on School Psychology, as well as a Doctor of Psychology in Educational Psychology from Alliant International University. Claudia also completed the State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Administrative Credential Program from the University of California Irvine. Claudia holds a valid clear Administrative Services Credential, a Pupil Personnel Services Credential, and a Child Development Director Permit from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Verlinda Walker, Family Child Care Provider

For almost 20 years, Verlinda Walker has worked tirelessly as a family child care provider in Downtown Los Angeles. Her connection and passion for building a strong child care system is very near and dear to her as she is a single mother to two adult children. She knows what it is to struggle as a parent. She raised two children on her own - one with special needs and a second was gifted, both requiring very different kinds of support. Verlinda takes great pride in her work as a family child care provider as she serves some of our state's neediest children providing care for families on Skid Row. Many of the families she supports are undocumented and do not have the typical 9-5 jobs so family childcare settings are their only option. Verlinda is also a proud member of SEIU Local 99 where she feels proud to be united with other parents and family child care providers across the state to fight for a strong child care system for the children and families she serves and women just like her who do this important work.

Dr. Marlene Zepeda, Commissioner, First 5 Los Angeles

Dr. Marlene Zepeda is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Child and Family Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. A former preschool and elementary school teacher, Dr. Zepeda's current scholarship focuses on dual language learning in Spanish speaking preschool children. Dr. Zepeda has participated in a number of activities relevant to dual language learners. For the California State Department of Education, Dr. Zepeda led a group of national experts in the development of California's Early Learning Foundations for English Language Development for 3 and 4 year olds, the first effort of its kind in the nation and contributed to a series of research papers associated with California's Best Practices for Dual Language Learners.

She has authored a number of publications focused on teaching strategies for dual language learners. She is currently involved with two major research projects focused on understanding the language trajectory of Spanish dominant 3 year olds learning English and a study of the efficacy of preschool curriculum developed for use with Spanish speaking preschool children learning English: The Nuestro Niños School Readiness Study. Dr. Zepeda received her BA in Child Development from California State University, Los Angeles and her MA and Ph.D. degrees in Developmental Studies and Early Childhood Education from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Miriam Ramos-Pineda, Teacher, Educare Long Beach

Miriam Ramos is currently a lead teacher in a dual immersion classroom at Educare Los Angeles at Long Beach. Ms. Ramos has been in the education field since 2009, where she initially became a program leader and supported children in their educational journey. At the beginning of her career she was an instructional aide where she sought to become a more influential leader in her field. This led her to embrace the challenges of the lead teacher in a state of the art preschool. Ms. Ramos seeks to impact every area of early childhood education, and is always eager to give her best to the students, families, and the early childhood community.