



2026 Women's Leadership Forum Panel Bios

Emily M. Dickens, J.D.

Chief Administrative Officer, SHRM

Emily M. Dickens, J.D., is a 2025 Top Lobbyist honoree recognized by the National Institute for Lobbying & Ethics for her leadership in shaping workplace and workforce policy. She serves as Chief Administrative Officer for SHRM—the world's largest HR trade association and the fourth largest trade association globally. As a member of SHRM's executive leadership team, she drives organizational effectiveness and impact across governance, global policy, legal, real estate, and philanthropy, while serving as a trusted advisor to the CEO and Board of Directors.

A sought-after thought leader on workplace trends, HR leadership, and business policy, Dickens is frequently featured in top media outlets including CNN, CBS News, NBC News, AP News, The Wall Street Journal, CNBC, Bloomberg Law, Crain's, Marketplace, WTOP, and Yahoo Finance. She has testified before Congress and the EEOC on topics such as artificial intelligence, gender bias, and paid leave, bringing SHRM's expertise directly to policymakers.

Dickens amplifies SHRM's voice on key global, national, and local platforms by holding influential roles as Governance Committee Member of the United States Council for International Business (USCIB), Vice Chair of The Bryce Harlow Foundation, and Board Member of SkillUp Coalition and the National Foundation for Women Legislators.

Before joining SHRM in 2018, Dickens built a distinguished career in higher education and nonprofit leadership. Her prior roles include General Counsel and Head of Policy for the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Vice President of Public Policy for the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, and Assistant Vice President for Federal Affairs at the University of North Carolina System. She also held administrative and external affairs positions at Duke University and Fayetteville State University.

A three-time graduate of North Carolina Central University (B.A., M.A., and J.D.), Dickens is the Immediate Past Chair of the NCCU Board of Trustees. She is Co-Chair of the HR Committee for the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) Board of Directors and a life member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, where she has served as Chairman of the International HBCU Task Force and on the Education Advancement Foundation Board of Directors.

Kate Brennan

General Manager, Daniel O'Connell's Irish Restaurant and Bar

Kate Brennan is the General Manager of Daniel O'Connell's Irish Restaurant and Bar, a family-owned business known for authentic Irish hospitality and a strong sense of community. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree with a major in Marketing from University College Cork.

After graduating, I lived and worked in Sydney, Australia, gaining international experience with both the Consulate of Ireland and an advertising agency. I later moved to the United States to manager Daniel O'Connell's, combining my previous work experiences in both Ireland and Australia with a personal connection to my family business. As General Manager, I oversee operations, staff leadership, and strategic growth while honoring the restaurant's Irish heritage and welcoming atmosphere

Jacquelyn Didio

Co-Founder & CEO, The Madelyn James Pediatric Cancer Foundation

Jacquelyn H. Didio is a nonprofit leader, strategist, bereaved mother, partner, and twin mom whose work sits at the intersection of lived experience and systems change. These identities are not separate from how she leads—they shape how she understands people, power, and impact. With more than 17 years of nonprofit experience, Jacquelyn brings both deep professional practice and personal insight to her work, including her tenure as Executive Director of The Child & Family Network Centers from January 2020 through November 2021, where she led the organization through the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, she participated in citywide vaccine planning efforts, served on vaccination committees, and joined leadership calls with the Early Education Commission, advocating for children, families, and frontline staff during an unprecedented crisis.

In late 2021, Jacquelyn stepped away from this role when one of her twin daughters was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive cancer and became severely immunocompromised. Her family relocated to Philadelphia for treatment, and after a long and courageous battle, her daughter passed away in August 2022 at just 14 months old. In her honor, Jacquelyn co-founded the Madelyn James Pediatric Cancer Foundation, creating a nationally recognized model focused on access and equity in pediatric cancer so families can stay together during treatment. Since 2023, she has worked alongside nonprofit leaders and organizations to build stronger systems, raise sustainable funding, and lead with clarity during moments of growth or complexity—helping organizations move from reactive to resilient. At the core of her work is a simple belief: when leaders are supported and systems are built with intention, organizations can create lasting, equitable impact.

Pamela O. Gilchrist, Ph.D.

Director of K-12 Initiatives, Virginia Tech Greater DC Region

Pamela O. Gilchrist is the Director of K-12 Initiatives for Virginia Tech Greater DC Region. With a commitment to advancing STEM and computing education, she plays a pivotal role in the National Capital region by collaborating with school districts, nonprofits, industry leaders, and funders to explore and implement best practices and innovative solutions in both formal and informal educational settings.

Pamela is at the helm of the K-12 Innovation Lab, where her leadership bridges the gap between schools, communities, higher education, and industry. Her mission is to inspire and equip the next generation of problem solvers to thrive in the future workforce.

Her expertise has been showcased through numerous workshops and invited talks across the United States, as well as in international venues such as Portugal, Canada, China, and Africa. Furthermore, Pamela has contributed her expertise in a senior capacity to several grants and contracts funded by public agencies and private foundations.

Pamela has authored numerous publications. Her research interests focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs, teacher professional development, curriculum development, workforce development, the adoption of innovations, and the formation of multidisciplinary partnerships. She is an inaugural member of The Chamber Alex's class of 40 Over 40 leaders and Virginia Tech 2025 Business Leader of Year launch team for her contributions and investments in strengthening the tech talent pipeline, K-12 STEM education and cross sector partnerships in the Northern Virginia area.

Pamela holds a Ph.D. in educational research and policy analysis from North Carolina State University, a Master of Science in instructional technology and a Bachelor of Science in middle grades education from East Carolina University.

Tina P. Laguna

Assistant Chief of Police, Alexandria Police Department
Law Enforcement Executive | Instructor | Community Advocate

Assistant Chief Tina Laguna is a distinguished law enforcement executive with over 30 years of public safety experience, currently serving with the Alexandria Police Department (VA). She began her career as a dispatcher with the Manassas City Police Department, an experience that inspired her to have a broader voice for the community. She was later sworn in as a police officer and from that foundation, rose through the ranks as a detective, sergeant, lieutenant, and captain, ultimately making history in Manassas as the first woman and person of color to be promoted to Assistant Chief of Police. Throughout her career, she has led diverse portfolios, including Patrol, Investigative Services, and Internal Affairs, while overseeing high-level budgeting and strategic planning.

Since joining the Alexandria Police Department in 2023, Chief Laguna has served as the Community Support Bureau Commander where she successfully guided the agency to its 12th CALEA accreditation and spearheaded the creation of new promotional processes and an internal first-line supervisor training program. Chief Laguna currently oversees the Criminal Investigations Division, recruitment, hiring, training, labor relations, and technology units. A passionate advocate for the next generation of leaders, she is a sought-after instructor and public speaker dedicated to strengthening the bonds between law enforcement and the community.

A lifelong learner, Assistant Chief Laguna holds a Master of Public Administration from George Mason University, a graduate certificate in Management and Leadership from Liberty University and is a graduate of the Professional Executive Leadership School (PELS) and the FBI National Academy, Session 242. She is a DCJS-certified instructor and a Certified Law Enforcement Command Executive through the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police & Foundation. Chief Laguna is active in several professional organizations, including the IACP, NAWLEE, NOBLE, and the VACP.

Assistant Chief Laguna is bilingual in English and Spanish. She is happily married to her best friend, Juan, and has two stepchildren.