

2025 Virginia School Safety Executive Forum

Leading the Way in School Safety

SPEAKER BIOS | Tuesday | July 29, 2025

SARAH BAZEMORE

Sarah Bazemore is the Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Instructional Supports at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Sarah has over 20 years of experience in the field of education. Prior to joining the VDOE, Sarah was a school counselor, school counseling coordinator, behavior interventionist, special education teacher, and middle school math teacher. Additionally, she has served as an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and was the Virginia School Counselor of the Year in 2019. In her role at the VDOE, she works with school divisions and school-based mental health professionals throughout the state to promote best practices in the development of students' academic, career development, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. When not at work, she enjoys spending time with her husband and two daughters, playing soccer, and exploring the outdoors with her pup Marble.

THOMAS BULLOCK

Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) Director of Education and Training Thomas Bullock began his VRSA career as a law enforcement specialist in 2006. Previously, Bullock spent 14 years in law enforcement with his last position at the Henrico County Police Department. The law enforcement specialist position at VRSA appealed to Bullock for the ability to impact policing in a different way. In 2018, Bullock was promoted to VRSA Director of Education and Safety. VRSA is a shared fund providing protections to cities, counties, towns, schools and authorities.

THERESA CAMPBELL

Theresa Campbell is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and founder of Safer Schools Together (SST), an organization focused on promoting a climate and culture of safety in schools. Theresa established SST in 2008 to provide law enforcement agencies, school districts, and community partners with comprehensive violence prevention/intervention training. In 2018, she expanded her role to include CEO and founder of the International Center for Digital Threat Assessment® (ICDTA). Previously, Theresa served as the Executive Director of the International Center for Threat Assessment (ICTA). As a Subject Matter Expert in School-Based Behavioral and Digital Threat Assessment, violence prevention, and trauma response, Theresa regularly consults on high-profile cases throughout North America. She has worked extensively with the Federal Behavioral Sciences Unit on high profile and complex threat situations, continues to provide support and training to the National Youth Officer Training Division in Canada and has also provided curriculum for the National Association of School

Resource Officers (NASRO) Basic and Advanced SRO Courses. She is also a member of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP).

JAMES CHRISTIAN

James Christian is the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety Manager at the Department of Criminal Justice Services. James manages a team that is responsible for a multitude of programs to improve school safety, many of which are legislatively required. This includes training and certification for school resource officers, school security officers, school safety audits, behavioral threat assessment, suicide prevention and mental health, crisis management, and a variety of school safety initiatives. Prior to his employment with DCJS in 2016, he worked in several capacities in both education and law enforcement, to include serving as a school administrator, special education teacher, police officer, and army paratrooper. He has a B.S. in Criminal Justice, an MS.Ed. in Special Education, an Ed.S. in Educational Administration and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership.

SHELLIE EVERS

Shellie Evers currently serves as a supervisor at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Center of School and Campus Safety (VCSCS). The team she leads is responsible for technical assistance and promotion of VCSCS resources and training as well as the annual Executive Forum and School Safety Training Forum. She successfully managed over \$3.5million in federal funds and oversaw implementation of the 2018, 2020, and 2023 BJA STOP as well as 2021 COPS grant initiatives. These projects yielded new behavioral threat assessment, mental health, suicide prevention, and crisis management training, PSAs, and resources for Virginia schools. She is currently leading the statewide implementation of the Standard Response Protocol and Standard Reunification Method which 97% of Virginia school divisions are either in the process of adopting or planning to adopt. Before coming to DCJS in 2012, she spent 17 years in Hanover County Public Schools where her responsibilities included emergency planning and safety-related training. She has a bachelor's degree in business from Averett University and a master's degree in public administration from Norwich University.

MARK FERO

Mark Fero has held various positions in different organizations, including Director of Crime Reduction Initiatives at the Virginia Office of Attorney General and Chairman at the Richmond Police Foundation. Mark has also served as President of Fero Enterprises LLC and Compliance Supervisor at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. Additionally, Mark has been involved in various boards such as the Governor's National Advisory Board on Volunteerism and Community Service and the National Center for the Prevention of Community Violence. With a background in program and financial management, Mark has made significant contributions to various organizations and initiatives over the years.

ROB HEFNER

Rob Hefner has over 20 years of law enforcement experience. He has worked for the Culpeper County Sheriff's Office and Salem Police Department. He is currently working at the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office as a D.A.R.E. Officer/ Youth Services Officer. Officer Hefner is also the State D.A.R.E. Program Director and Training Coordinator for Virginia. He has trained over 300 officers in the D.A.R.E. Program during his tenure. Officer Hefner has an extensive background as a School Resource and Crime Prevention Officer as well. Among his accolades, Officer Hefner was selected as the 2017 Virginia D.A.R.E. Officer of the Year and he safely conducted the first D.A.R.E training in the country after the pandemic.

JOHN JONES

John Jones is the long serving Executive Director of the Virginia Sheriffs' Association, having served in that capacity since 1977. John is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University in Administration of Justice and Public Safety and a former adjunct faculty member of Germanna Community College. Early after graduation, he served as the criminal justice planner with the Rappahannock-Rapidan Planning District Commission for the regional around Culpeper Virginia as the Criminal Justice Planner. John started his public safety career at a very young age of 16 as an emergency dispatcher for the South Hill, VA police department before 911 systems existed and was responsible for dispatching law enforcement and emergency services to rural south side Virginia. He currently manages one of the most influential criminal justice organizations in Virginia with 121 sheriff and 10,500 deputy sheriff and staff members. His primary responsibilities include managing the legislative priorities for Virginia's sheriffs and deputy sheriffs, with hundreds of bills and budget amendments passed due to his efforts. His other duties as executive director include delivery of two annual professional/training conferences to sheriffs and deputy sheriffs featuring the latest in trends and recent legislation. He was appointed by the Virginia Senate Privileges and Elections Committee to serve on a Virginia General Assembly study to recommend ways to improve the flow of legislation. Many of those recommendations are currently in use today as a part of the House and Senate rules. He maintains a professional relationship with the National Sheriffs' Association, having served as chairman of the National Sheriffs' Association, Committee of State Sheriffs Associations. He is a former board of directors member of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, representing the National Sheriffs Association. John makes his home on Virginia's Eastern Shore and downtown Richmond, Virginia.

J.T. KESSLER

J.T. Kessler serves as Director of Legislative Services for the Virginia School Boards Association, a role he has had since 2019. Prior to joining the VSBA, J.T. was employed as Political Director with the North Carolina Nurses Association. J.T. also served 9 years as a public-school educator in North Carolina teaching Civics and Economics to high schoolers in Johnston and Wilson counties. He has years of experience in political engagement, government relations and grassroots advocacy recruiting volunteers to participate in the legislative process. J.T. holds a BS in Secondary Education and a Masters Degree in Public Administration.

STEVEN MCDONALD

Steven joined Safer Schools Together (SST) as Director of Training and Development in 2019 after earning a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science. He collaborates closely with SST's CEO, Theresa Campbell, to design and implement training programs such as Behavioral and Digital Threat Assessment® (BDTA) and Digital Threat Assessment® (DTA). Steven has trained professionals across North America, including those from DHS, FBI, law enforcement agencies, K-12 schools, and higher education institutions. His expertise lies in creating safer school environments by equipping teams with the knowledge and tools to conduct accurate threat assessments. He previously worked as a Senior Threat Analyst specializing in social media data analysis for Safety/Threat Assessment teams, contributing significantly to school safety cases in Canada and the USA. Steven's background in language analytics, artificial intelligence, and social media trends allows him to effectively collect data and evaluate threats. He presents workshops on social media awareness, online safety, and strategies for managing threat-related behaviors in today's digital age, making him a valuable asset in promoting safety in North American communities.

DONNA MICHAELIS

Donna Michaelis is the director of the Division of Public Safety Training and Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (PST-VCSCS) at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Beginning her career at a local law enforcement agency in 1985, she moved to state government in 1998 and assumed the responsibility of the legislated DCJS VCSCS when first established in 2000. In her role, she provides training, resources, and technical assistance to all schools, colleges, universities, and law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth on issues related to school and campus safety and specialized law enforcement topics. Mrs. Michaelis is a graduate of the College of William and Mary.

JACKSON MILLER

Jackson Miller was appointed by Governor Glenn Youngkin as the Director of the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) in April 2022. This role is the epitome of a life spent serving in Virginia in the area of criminal justice and public safety. Mr. Miller served as a police officer from 1991 to 2007, spending seven of those years with the Arlington County Police Department and the remaining years with the Prince William County Police Department. He became a police officer in order to protect the streets of the Commonwealth from predators and took that responsibility very seriously. While working as a police officer for Prince William County, he was elected President of the Prince William County Police Association. He took on this leadership position in order to help ensure that officers who had sworn to protect our citizens and were doing so were receiving fair and appropriate treatment. In 2004 he was elected to the Manassas City Council and in 2006 elected to the Virginia House of Delegates for the 50th District. As a member of the House of Delegates, Mr. Miller worked closely with DCJS on various legislative initiatives. As a member of the Courts of Justice Committee, he worked to pass legislation that would help keep citizens safe by deterring crime and applying appropriate punishments. Mr. Miller also served as the Chairman of the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program. In 2011, he was elected by his colleagues into House leadership as the Majority Whip. He served in this position until 2018 when he left office. Since leaving office, Mr. Miller has continued to stay involved in his community by serving on the George

Mason Campus Advisory Committee, the Novant Prince William Hospital Board, and the Historic Manassas Inc. Board. He also served as a Captain in the United States Army Reserves from 1989 to 1999. Mr. Miller is a lifelong resident of Virginia and attended Virginia Commonwealth University, graduating in 1989 with a B.S. in Urban Planning.

LORI MUELLER

Dr. Mueller is an experienced educational leader and superintendent who has been nationally recognized for her work in school communication. She leads the Donovan Group's efforts nationwide. For six years, Dr. Mueller served as district administrator of the School District of Baraboo in central Wisconsin. In that time, she led significant continuous school improvement through district strategic planning processes. She also led efforts to engage community members in successfully passing the two largest capital referendums in her district's history, totaling \$63.65 million. In addition to her experience as a superintendent, Dr. Mueller has served as a teacher and a director of curriculum and instruction. She has presented at regional, state and national conferences on topics related to grading for communicating student learning, developing assessment literacy, gifted and talented services, implementing a Response to Intervention framework, continuous school improvement, strategic planning, crisis response and engaging the community in advance of a facilities referendum. Dr. Mueller holds an Ed.D. from Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin. She also received a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a bachelor's degree in French and health education from UW-Whitewater.

DANA SCHRAD

Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police since January 1996, where she oversees the development of training programs for police executives and advocates on policing and criminal justice issues on behalf of the association. She also is the Executive Director for the Virginia Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators. Dana previously served as Chair of the Virginia Board of Juvenile Justice and serves on the Roadway Safety Committee for the International Association of Chiefs of Police. She has served on numerous Virginia administrative and legislative special study workgroups and committees. Dana is a 1980 graduate of the University of Nebraska School of Journalism and a 1988 graduate of the T. C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond. Dana was Staff Attorney for the Virginia State Crime Commission from 1989 until 1996, where she was in charge of a variety of criminal justice and law enforcement studies and ran a Drug Trafficking Study task force for two years. Prior to entering law school, she worked at a CBS television affiliate for ten years, where she was a police beat reporter, Executive Producer and Assignment Editor.

JOSEPH WHARFF

Joseph Wharff is the Director of the Office of Behavioral Health and Student Safety at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), created to support Governor Glenn Youngkin's Right Help Right Now initiative through training and resources to educators, parents, and

students impacted by the unprecedented rise in mental health and behavioral challenges facing Virginia students since the pandemic. The VDOE Office of Behavioral Health and Wellness assists schools with teams of professionals focused on three key areas: Behavioral Health and Instructional Support, focusing on issues regarding behavioral and mental health including school counseling, school discipline, the causes and impact of chronic absenteeism, and the effects on children and teens who rely on social media; School Health and Wellness, centering on issues such as opioid and drug use abatement and emphasizing the dangers of fentanyl and its spreading use amongst children and teens; and Student Services, dedicated to removing many of the wrap-around barriers to success facing children today, including working with military families and students in foster care, as well as equipping students for post-secondary access and success. Joseph is the former Director, Associate Director, and School Counseling Specialist in the Office of Student Services at the VDOE. He has led or collaborated with multiple state agency partners with work on attendance and chronic absenteeism, mental health, drug prevention, and various other areas that support instruction. He also supervises work supporting Medicaid in schools and the recent opportunity for schools to provide Medicaid services through Free Care. He leads a team of innovative, forward-thinking specialists with a common goal of improving school climate and the learning environment, increasing the safety and well-being of students and staff, promoting the healthy behavioral and physical development of students, and advancing student learning through partnerships with families and the community.