

L-R: Zari S. Watkins, Chief Operating Officer and LeRoy General, Jr., Chief Development Officer

## Introducing PPSNE's New Chief Operating Officer

*An interview with Zari S. Watkins, who is leading the clinical services team to provide the best possible care.*

**This past year saw exciting additions to the Executive Leadership Team - we are so happy to welcome both LeRoy General, Jr. as our Chief Development Officer and Zari S. Watkins, JD, MBA, as our Chief Operating Officer.** LeRoy, who joined PPSNE in October of last year, sat down with Zari, who joined in January 2021, to learn more about what brought her to Planned Parenthood and her vision for patient-centered care, today and into the future.

**LeRoy General (LG):** Hi Zari! I'm hoping you can share a bit of your 'origin story' with our supporters - what brought you to Planned Parenthood?

**Zari Watkins (ZW):** You know LeRoy, I honestly never expected to end up in health care! I grew up here in the northeast but ended up in Florida for law school. I always imagined myself in public service, so I began working for the City of Miami, which lead to opportunities in the hospital system serving Miami-Dade County and, eventually, joining the leadership team at Broward Health in Fort Lauderdale. I managed a really interesting, diverse list of operations - from our real estate portfolio to enterprise risk management and compliance.

In the last year, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I realized I wanted to take a more hands-on leadership role in expanding health care access and eliminating disparities impacting the communities that depend on Planned Parenthood. As a Black woman, and a health care leader, joining an organization where social justice is absolutely central to the mission was so important to me.

**LG: Speaking of this last year - and the pandemic - COVID-19 had a huge impact on PPSNE operations but also introduced new opportunities, including telehealth visits, to keep care accessible. How do you see these opportunities evolving in the future?**

**ZW:** I've been so impressed to hear about how successful telehealth has been at PPSNE - my team tells me the program was built and launched in only about a week! That's amazing.

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## Letter From Amanda Skinner: One Year Later, Still Strong.

*Looking ahead to better health and brighter futures.*

I've spent the last few weeks reflecting on our evolving reality during the COVID-19 pandemic – the challenges it's brought and the inspiration I've found along the way. As always, I am so inspired by the continued commitment of supporters like you.

**It's no exaggeration to say that your dedication and contributions have made everything we've done in the last year possible.**

COVID-19 vaccines signal a light at the end of the tunnel when we can safely emerge from quarantine and isolation to see the friends and family we've been missing. I am inspired to watch our communities in Connecticut and Rhode Island band together on mass-vaccination efforts to keep everyone safe and healthy. **It's a true testament to the power of health care to unlock our incredible potential.**

The country is beginning to reckon with some of its systemic divisions and brutal truths, while rebuilding as we emerge from this pandemic. At Planned Parenthood, we are not immune from this work. We are reckoning with our own past and confronting our own present. At PPSNE, we are committed to doing the work with open hearts and open minds to strive for equity, justice, and health care for all.

How does this impact our patients and our communities? **As always, we return to the promise of our mission – providing the health care services, education, and advocacy our communities need to take charge of their lives.**

COVID-19 has made long-existing health disparities painfully clear, and we must continue our dedicated work to provide patients access to essential sexual and reproductive health care. This includes addressing systemic racism and bias in our health care system by continuing to support our staff in delivering compassionate, culturally competent and humble care. It also means joining forces with our community partners and BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous and people of color)

organizations to declare racism a public health crisis, expand Medicaid coverage and access in both states, and finally end the "gag rule" to restore and modernize the Title X program. We take this work seriously – we cannot achieve health equity without racial equity.

Telehealth, virtual education programs, and digital organizing that harnesses the power of our supporters online have showed us how to expand our reach in new, exciting ways. **We must continue exploring new tools and innovative ideas to empower our patients, engage our communities, and inspire a new generation of Planned Parenthood leaders.**

Your support helps us remain committed and curious in our work, especially as we begin the process to build our next Strategic Plan – a roadmap that will guide us and shape our impact for years to come. Community input and insight is central to the process. We can't do it alone, and we can't do it without you, our partners and supporters.

I'm excited for what's ahead, and I know you are too. **As always, I'm so grateful to be working in partnership with every one of you to achieve the change we want to see in the world. Thank you.**



*Amanda Skinner, President and CEO*

# Sex Ed is for Everyone

*Lifelong learning for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities.*

The term “sex ed” often conjures up the image of teenagers in high school – or maybe in our STARS peer education program – learning about reproductive biology or sexual health. But sex ed is more than that: it’s about building lifelong skills to understand our own sexuality and help us sustain healthy relationships with others.



With your support, over 10 years ago Planned Parenthood of Southern New England began a partnership with the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to provide critical skill-building workshops for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The program covers the basics of healthy relationships – everything from how to flirt and date to establishing consent and demystifying the ‘slang’ terms for body parts and sexual activities.

PPSNE educators teach alongside DDS self-advocate coordinators (adults with disabilities trained to advocate for themselves and their

rights) who share their own experiences and challenges. This co-teaching model helps center the community we serve, creating an interactive program designed to meet participants’ needs.

The need for this program is clear. **National research shows adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities often don’t receive comprehensive education about sexuality and healthy relationships.** This knowledge is power – it helps participants make safe, healthy decisions for their lives by building an understanding of what to do when boundaries are crossed.

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, this program shifted to the virtual space, where educators were (pleasantly) surprised to see how online learning helped expand access to this education.** Virtual sessions eliminated some traditional barriers, including the need for transportation, and allowed people who are sometimes intimidated by unfamiliar faces or large gatherings to stay involved and connected.

**Your investment in our mission makes these crucial educational services possible, providing the information and skills people need to take charge of their sexual health and their lives.**

This program is an incredible reminder that sex ed is truly for everyone, and that everyone needs the tools to make informed choices and find companionship.

Varian Salters, Self-Advocate Coordinator at DDS  
and co-teacher with PPSNE Educators:

***“I enjoy teaching the class, because I always learn something new, and that there are people like me in the same situation and that I’m not alone. It’s a right that you can have a relationship. If you feel awkward about someone doing something to you, you have the right to speak up and say no.”***

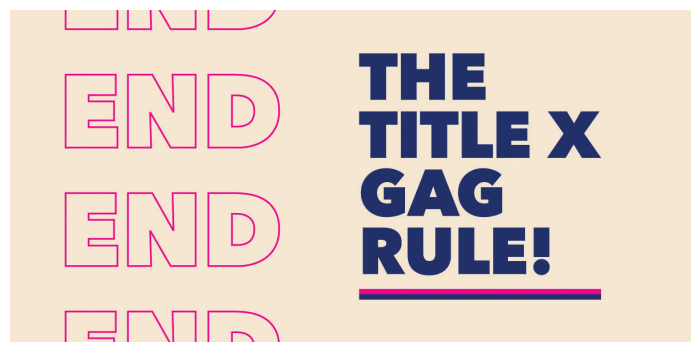


## Is the end of the “Gag Rule” in Sight?

*Restoring Title X’s essential role in providing access to sexual and reproductive health care.*

Earlier this spring, the Biden-Harris administration made a long-awaited announcement: the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would move to eliminate the Title X “gag rule.” Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the “gag rule” was one of the most significant threats to health care in the country – making it harder for more than 4 million people with low incomes to access essential sexual and reproductive health care services, including birth control and cancer screenings.

**Planned Parenthood was forced from the program when we refused to allow our providers to be “gagged.” Our patients deserve to know about all their options, including abortion.** According to a Guttmacher Institute report, the “gag rule” forced nearly *all* of Connecticut’s Title X providers – including PPSNE – from the program. Some states have no Title X providers left.



Due to centuries of systemic barriers to health care, including racism and economic inequity, Black, Latino/a/x, and Indigenous people, people with low incomes, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people who live in rural areas rely on programs like Title X to keep care affordable and accessible. These same communities have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, making existing health care disparities even worse. People need more health care, not less.

Despite operating without \$2.1 million in annual federal Title X funding for nearly two years, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England made the decision not to change our sliding scale fee structure – because we had your support. Our donors helped ensure that patients who relied on Title X funding wouldn’t have to face yet another barrier to care. Your generous contributions helped fill the gap, so patients did not have to pay more or forgo health care. **Without your generosity and support, we couldn’t continue providing this critical and lifesaving care regardless of patients’ ability to pay.**

The Biden-Harris administration has already begun the process of reversing the “gag rule,” updating the HHS regulations this fall, and making it possible for those providers forced out by the Trump-Pence administration to become eligible for Title X funding in spring of 2022. At that point, PPSNE can re-apply for funding – and with no guarantee that we’ll receive the same amount as in years past, which makes your continued support all the more crucial.

Before the “gag rule,” PPSNE served nearly 42,500 Title X patients – **thanks to you, these patients could continue to rely on us for their care, no matter what.**

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It's clear to me that our patients love telehealth and the flexibility of having virtual appointments, but there are still barriers to address – like the inequity of internet access.

I'm very excited to explore our clinical research program. There is so much opportunity to work with the community to create advancements for the future of their care. This is how we are building/rebuilding trust, while co-creating solutions that honor our patients' diverse identities and experiences.



**LG: Zari, what does working for Planned Parenthood mean to you?**

**ZW:** At Planned Parenthood we're seeing people who are experiencing some of the most vulnerable and significant moments of their lives. People who need essential care now, who are making decisions about how and when to become a parent, who are learning about their sexuality and how to take care of their bodies and relationships. I don't take this responsibility lightly!

What's so amazing about Planned Parenthood is the trust we hold with our patients and our communities. COVID-19 has highlighted a lot of the gaps in health care that have been there all along – and we often serve people who find themselves shut out of our health care system. As the leader of our clinical services team, it's my

job to foster a culture of trust with our providers, health center staff, clinical support staff, and research team so they can continue to build trust with our patients. That's how we can make sure people come to us (and come back!) for the care they need.

**LG: You mentioned systemic barriers to care. How are we addressing these barriers – and how can we help eliminate disparities that impact people's health?**

**ZW:** It's a big challenge but I know this team is up to it. First is recognizing that, for many of our patients, access to health care isn't the only struggle. Many need access to affordable housing, nutritious food, and support services within their community. Our patients often stand in the intersection of multiple identities – we must affirm and respect our patients' needs, whatever they are, to help them stay healthy.

Our guiding principle of "Care – no matter what" takes all these things into account, whether it's through health care services, educational programs, or community partnerships. They're all connected.

**LG: Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me. Before we go, I need to know – how does it feel to be in New Haven, the pizza capital of the world? I hear pizza in Florida isn't that great!**

**ZW:** Well ok – yes, Florida isn't really known for its pizza, but trust me: I'll travel for good food!

Everything is still pretty new to me, but I've tried Modern in New Haven and I'm obsessed. As I explore Rhode Island, I'm leaning on the Providence health center staff for their recommendations. I'm excited to enjoy some amazing seafood this summer.

**LG: Save me a slice! Thanks Zari, and welcome again to PPSNE.**

## Leaving a Legacy: Make a Lasting Impact

*Two amazing donors help support and sustain PPSNE's future.*

The Hepburn Potter Legacy Society was established to recognize, honor, and thank those donors who have included PPSNE in their wills or estate plans or those telling us of an intention to make a gift. **We are honored to highlight the impact of two Hepburn Potter Legacy Society donors.**



**Elizabeth Leete**, a lawyer from West Hartford who passed away in 2020, was a champion of reproductive freedom. She was never shy to broach uncomfortable subjects and

ensure that her children were well educated on all issues. Elizabeth noted how she "recognized the critical role that Planned Parenthood plays in our society by providing basic health care and family planning services to women. Health care is a right, not a privilege." Her recent bequest ensures PPSNE can continue our mission of protecting the fundamental right of all people to manage their sexual and reproductive health and providing access for everyone to the services, education, and information to realize that right.



**Pamela Ritter**, an environmentalist from Fairfield, believed in the future of PPSNE and provided a legacy that will help the organization for years to come. In Pam's own words, she "hoped

to see reproductive services and health care for all women—from all walks of life, all types of citizenship—along with education and access. She left a legacy to ensure women can live their lives as they see fit and to be in control of their lives."

We encourage you to let us know if you include PPSNE in your life or estate plans. For more information about how you can establish your legacy, please contact:

**Chief Development Officer LeRoy General, Jr. at [leroy.general@ppsne.org](mailto:leroy.general@ppsne.org) or 203.752.2854.**

## IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

Like Elizabeth, Pam, and other champions, you can become a member of the Hepburn Potter Legacy Society. Help sustain access to sexual and reproductive health care and education for generations to come.

» You can make a gift through your will with simple language.

» You can make PPSNE a beneficiary of a retirement plan (IRA or 401k) or life insurance policy by filling out a Beneficiary or Change of Beneficiary form.

» You can set up an annuity or trust that pays you income while leaving a meaningful gift to PPSNE.

## HOW TO INCLUDE PPSNE IN YOUR WILL

You can include the following language in your will or codicil:

***"I hereby give, devise, and bequeath \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (or description of specific asset or % of net estate) to Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, 345 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut 06511, for its general purposes."***

*This information is for general purposes only and is not intended as legal or financial advice. PPSNE recommends that if you are considering a life or estate gift, you consult with your financial or legal advisor. For more information, please contact us at 203.752.2854 or [leroy.general@ppsne.org](mailto:leroy.general@ppsne.org).*



## Annual Spring Luncheon

On April 7<sup>th</sup>, PPSNE hosted its annual Spring Luncheon, raising over \$725,000 and drawing support from more than 550 people! This event would not have been possible without you and your generosity – **THANK YOU!**



*We were honored to have activist and NYT bestselling author, Glennon Doyle, as this year's featured speaker.*



*PPSNE supporters gathered for small and safe viewing parties of the virtual spring luncheon!*



## Our Transgender Community Deserves Affirming Care

*Telehealth expands access to essential gender-affirming hormone therapy during the pandemic – and beyond.*

### WHAT IS GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE?

Gender-affirming care, also called gender-affirming hormone therapy, aims to align a person's physical characteristics with their gender identity and expression through medication. People who undergo gender-affirming care often identify as transgender – a term that includes the many ways someone's

gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Hormone therapy can reduce psychological and emotional distress, improve psychological and social functioning, improve sexual satisfaction, alleviate anxiety, and improve a person's self-image and their quality of life.**

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## Our Transgender Community Deserves Affirming Care

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### ACCESS TO CARE

Access to gender-affirming care is essential health care. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England is committed to serving all genders and providing affirming care to members of the transgender community.

Gender-affirming hormone therapy is central to our mission to provide health care that allows people to be in control of their bodies, to live authentically, and take charge of their lives.

Gender-affirming hormone therapy is just one of the services offered through telehealth virtual visits in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of telehealth, patients could continue to see their preferred providers and learned to self-administer treatment to keep this critical care accessible. Once hormone therapy has begun, it can be difficult and traumatic for a patient to pause or delay care – their health and well-being cannot wait.

**Our ability to launch a comprehensive telehealth program is thanks to the generosity of our supporters, who helped provide the resources and investment needed to launch this service quickly.**

Telehealth visits helped expand access to patients who live in rural communities, who lack access to reliable transportation, or who have experienced stigma and discrimination at other health care facilities.

**Nearly 400 patients received appointments for gender-affirming care at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England over the last year.**

In partnership with health care providers and community organizations in both states – including Anchor Health in Connecticut and Open Door Health in Rhode Island – your support helps strengthen the network of inclusive, affirming providers who serve the transgender community.

**MY CARE. MY WAY.**  
GENDER-AFFIRMING HORMONE THERAPY



### PPSNE Information

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