



## Conference Speakers

### Christian M. Capece

Federal Trade Commission, East Central Region. Assistant Regional Director

Before joining the Federal Trade Commission in November 2018, Christian Capece served as the Federal Public Defender for the Southern District of West Virginia. Prior to that, he served as an Assistant Federal Public Defender. After serving on active duty as a Marine Judge Advocate, he clerked in the Eastern District of New York. He earned his B.A. and M.Ed from The George Washington University and his law degree from Brooklyn Law School. Christian continues to serve in the Air National Guard.

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### Fil Maria de Banate

Federal Trade Commission, East Central Region, Attorney

Fil Maria de Banate's work focuses on the agency's consumer protection mission, including filing civil lawsuits in federal court to stop scams. He has handled matters including illegal robocalls, imposter scams, tech support scams, veterans charity scams, and student loan debt relief schemes. de Banate's litigation work has stopped scams and frauds and returned millions of dollars to consumers. He leads the FTC's Cleveland-based team spearheading the agency's Project Point of No Entry, a national initiative that aims to stop the flow of illegal robocalls into the country. He earned degrees in Finance and Economics at The Ohio State University and his law degree from the Cleveland State University College of Law. Before joining the FTC in 2012, Fil served as an attorney in the Consumer Protection Section of the Ohio Attorney General's Office.

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## **Judge Laura Gallagher**

Cuyahoga County Probate Court Judge

During her tenure as a probate judge, The Honorable Laura Gallagher has worked to serve the attorneys and clients who have come before the court. During her tenure the court made great strides in the use of technology and initiated an out-patient mental illness docket, a legal resource center for self represented clients and a guardian visitor program. Gallagher is the first woman elected to the Cuyahoga County Probate Court. Previously, she was an assistant county prosecutor in Cuyahoga and Medina counties and was a Juvenile/Probate Court magistrate in Medina County. She received her J.D. cum laude from the Case Western Reserve School of Law in 1986, and her B.A. from Miami University. She was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa in 1983.

Judge Gallagher is the immediate Past President of Ohio Association of Probate Judges and has served leadership roles on many committees, including the OAPJ Probate Modernization Committee, Ohio Judicial Conference Executive Committee, Probate Law and Procedure Committee, and the Supreme Court of Ohio Subcommittee on Adult Guardianship. The Ohio Association of Probate Judges recently awarded her its 2025 R.R. Denny Clunk Distinguished Probate Judge Award.

## **Jay Hadam**

Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department, Detective

Jay Hadam works for Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department, where he concurrently serves as a task force officer with the Northeast Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations. An Army veteran, Hadam is a member of the SWAT, dive, and dignitary protection teams. In his position with HSI, Hadam leads investigations from a victim-centered holistic approach.

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## **Dirk Halscheidt**

United States Postal Service Office of the Inspector General (USPS OIG), Special Agent

Dirk Halscheidt is assigned to the Cyber Crime Unit, where he leads the Organized Crime Investigative Unit and serves on the U.S. Secret Service Cyber and Money Laundering Task Force in Cleveland. Prior to joining USPS OIG, Halscheidt was a postal inspector with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and was assigned as the program manager at the National Cyber-Forensics Training Alliance in Pittsburgh for the National Headquarters Cyber Crime Program. He has served on the Cyber Crime Unit, the National Cyber Investigative Joint Task Force, and the Cleveland field office in the Financial Crimes Group. Before working at USPIS, he

was a special agent with IRS Criminal Investigation, where he was the Cyber Crimes Coordinator for the Cincinnati Field Office and was assigned to the FBI Cyber Crimes Task Force in Cleveland and the Northern Ohio Cryptocurrency Task Force. He has investigated complex financial crimes including bank fraud, wire fraud, mail fraud, identity theft, transnational crime and cybercrimes. Dirk graduated from Baldwin Wallace University with degrees in business administration, accounting, and criminal justice.

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### **Sheryl Harris**

Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs, Director

Sheryl Harris has spent most of her career fighting for consumers, first as a journalist and then as director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs. Her office convenes Scam Squad, a collaborative multi-agency task force that helps Cuyahoga County residents avoid, report and recover from scams. Scam Squad's model and projects, including Hang Up If cards, store-based gift card and bitcoin scam warnings and the Scamo bingo game, have been replicated by jurisdictions across the country. Harris is a recipient of the 2020 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award and the 2024 Federal Trade Commission Partner Award. Before joining the County in 2015, she wrote the consumer advocacy column, "Plain Dealing," for the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Early in her career, she was a reporter at the Akron Beacon Journal, where she worked on "A Question of Color," a series on race relations that won a Pulitzer Prize. She earned a B.A. in Journalism from The Ohio State University.

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### **Mark D. Hoy**

Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Criminal Intelligence Unit Supervisor

Mark D. Hoy proudly serves both the Criminal Intelligence Unit and Electronic Financial Investigation Unit of BCI. Mark has served in state government for over 22 years while maintaining an active commission as a peace officer. Prior to joining BCI in 2023, he was an Investigations Supervisor at the Ohio Department of Public Safety's Bureau of Motor Vehicles, where he conducted complex investigations including identity theft, motor vehicle dealer violations, frauds, employee misconduct, and computer networking violations. He graduated with a Bachelor of Criminal Justice degree from Tiffin University.

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**Jennifer Leach**

Federal Trade Commission, Division of Consumer and Business Education, Associate Director

Jennifer Leach is an advocate for plain language communication who has specialized in targeting messages to specific audiences. Under Leach's leadership, the Division of Consumer and Business Education creates free, actionable, plain language information that appears online, in print, and on video. These materials often target audiences including older adults, servicemembers, small businesses, LEP communities, or emerging readers. Before joining the FTC, Jennifer was part of AARP's Consumer Protection Team and was a founding member of the World Bank's Social Sectors Supervision Unit in La Paz, Bolivia, where she served for three years. At the World Bank, she also handled social development projects in other parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. Jennifer holds an M.A. from the University of Wyoming and a B.A. from Washington College, both in international relations.

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**Paul Matias**

Mayfield Village Police Department, Chief

Paul Matias is a dynamic and assertive law enforcement officer with over 20 years' experience in managing investigations and police force activities. He joined the Mayfield Village Police Department in 1999 and rose through the ranks to become chief in 2019. He is an active member of the Northeast Ohio law enforcement community. He is an advocate for his residents, consumer education and Scam Squad. He served 10 years in the U.S. Navy and earned a Bachelor of Criminal Justice and an M.S. in Criminal Justice and Homeland Security from Tiffin University.

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**Brian M. McDonough**

United States Department of Justice, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio.

Brian McDonough is currently assigned to the White Collar Crimes Unit in the DOJ's United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio, where he supervises investigations and prosecutes a variety of complex financial crimes including bank fraud, wire fraud, mail fraud, securities fraud, investment fraud, health care fraud, money laundering, identity theft, and public corruption. He serves as the Elder Justice coordinator for the Northern District of

Ohio and works with federal, state, and local law enforcement and community partners to combat elder fraud and abuse. Prior to joining the United States Attorney's Office in 2014, he served as an assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor for 13 years. His cases have been featured on AARP's The Perfect Scam Podcast, Dateline NBC, A&E's Crime 360, and many other shows. Brian graduated from the University of Notre Dame and earned his law degree from Cleveland State University Law School.

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## **Lori McGee**

National Elder Fraud Hotline, Manager and Project Director

Lori McGee has more than 20 years' experience working with federally sponsored programs to develop, implement, direct and improve services. As a contractor with the U.S. DOJ's Office for Victims of Crimes, she serves as the manager and project director for the DOJ-funded National Elder Fraud Hotline and also works with the International Terrorism Expense Reimbursement Program. McGee previously spent five years as a contractor with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration Disaster Technical Assistance Center (SAMHSA DTAC), where she supervised the delivery of training and technical assistance and led the crisis counseling assistance and training program activities. Before working at SAMHSA DTAC, she worked with providers and state education agencies to enhance evaluation services and use data to inform program developments. McGee has worked with older adults, at-risk youth populations, victims of crime, populations receiving behavioral health services, women and families in crisis, as well as the providers that serve these populations. McGee holds a B.A. in Psychology from Barnard College and an M.A. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Maryland, College Park.

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## **Natasha M. Pietrocola**

Cuyahoga County Division of Senior and Adult Services, Director

Natasha Pietrocola has spent over 20 years in social services addressing diverse issues in the field of aging including community based long-term care, elder abuse, and social advocacy. Pietrocola has been an advocate in raising community awareness about the challenges of serving elder abuse victims. She currently serves as a board member with the Consortium Against Adult Abuse and with the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective services. In her current position, she has executive oversight of all the programs within DSAS, an agency with a \$28 million operating budget and 175 employees. DSAS includes the Adult Protective Services program which manages

all the reports and investigations of allegations of abuse, neglect, self-neglect and/or exploitation of impaired, elderly residents 60 years and older who reside in the community, as well as vulnerable adults 18 to 59 years of age. She is responsible for the agency's Centralized Intake Unit / Connection Center, Options for Independent Living Program, Home Support Division, and the information Services Program which is an Aging and Disability Resource Center. Pietrocola is the facilitator of the Cuyahoga County Adult Protective Collaborative (I- Team). She holds an MBA from Cleveland State University; as well as a Master of Education in Community Counseling and a B.A. in psychology from the University of Toledo.

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### **Sylvia M. Pla-Raith**

Cuyahoga County Division of Senior and Adult Services, Deputy Administrator of Community Programs

Sylvia Pla-Raith has vast expertise in advocating for the interests of older adults. In her role as the deputy administrator of community programs for DSAS, she is the administrator of all reports and investigations involving allegations of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation of impaired, older residents aged 60 who reside in the community-based dwellings in Cuyahoga County. Sylvia actively serves on several collaboratives that focus on elder justice through education, outreach, advocacy, policy and coalition building. She has an M.A. from John Carroll University and a B.S. in psychology from The Ohio State University.

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### **David J. Peters, Jr.**

Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, Civil Division, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney

David Peters is the primary attorney assigned to represent Adult Protective Services for the Prosecutor's Civil Division. In this role, he represents Adult Protective Services in all matters before the Cuyahoga County Probate Court. Before working for the Prosecutor's Office, Peters was a judicial staff attorney for six years. For three of those years, he served as a staff attorney and an ElderCaring Coordinator for Judge Dixie Park at the Stark County Probate Court. He holds a Master of Laws degree from the West Virginia University College of Law, a law degree from the University of Akron School of Law, and a B.A. in psychology and criminology from The Ohio State University.

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## **Harris Senturia**

Federal Trade Commission's East Central Region, Attorney

Harris Senturia has worked for the FTC since 2006, focusing on consumer protection law enforcement. In his career at the agency, he has addressed business, consumer, and law enforcement audiences about identifying and responding to various types of scams. Before joining the FTC, he was a partner in the commercial litigation group of a large law firm. He earned his undergraduate degree from Rice University in Houston, Texas, and his law degree from Columbia University in New York.

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## **Tiffany Smedley, CFE**

Federal Trade Commission, East Central Regional, Investigator

Tiffany Smedley is a Certified Fraud Examiner and has been an investigator with the FTC since 2019. Tiffany has been involved in numerous investigations that support the FTC's mission of protecting and educating consumers on deceptive and unfair business practices. Before joining the FTC, Tiffany worked for more than a decade as a paralegal in the white-collar fraud unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio. She earned her bachelor's degree in public administration from Miami University in 2007.

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## **Antoinette Smith**

Benjamin Rose, Housing and Financial Wellness, Associate Executive Director

Antoinette Smith is the Associate Executive Director of Housing and Financial Wellness at Benjamin Rose where she oversees all Housing and Financial Wellness programs and reporting. Antoinette has more than two decades' experience of direct service for clients who present with multiple needs related to finances, housing, and health. Her work requires managing teams and projects, as well as collaboration with numerous departments and external community partners. Antoinette became a HUD Certified counselor and earned a bachelor's degree in paralegal education and non-profit administration from Cleveland State University.

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**Ian Ortega**

United States Postal Inspection Service, Cleveland Field Office, Postal Inspector

Ian has been with the Inspection Service since 2015 and is currently assigned to the Financial Crimes Team. He is responsible for investigating complex fraud cases containing a mail nexus and currently serves as the Cleveland Field Office's Public Information Officer. Before joining the Inspection Service, he worked as an internal auditor in the Asset Management - Risk Review Group for KeyBank. He earned his undergraduate degree (B.S.B.A.) from Bowling Green State University, and his Master of Accounting & Financial Management from DeVry University, Keller Graduate School of Management.

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