

Governor Phil Murphy

First Lady Tammy Murphy Announces Governor's Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair of the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority Board

08/15/2024

Barbara George Johnson, J.D. to serve as Chair and Department of Health Commissioner Kaitlan Baston to Serve as Vice Chair

TRENTON – First Lady Tammy Murphy today announced Governor Phil Murphy has appointed Barbara George Johnson, J.D. and New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Kaitlan Baston to serve as the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, to the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority (MIHIA) Board. The two currently serve as members of the MIHIA Board and will be elevated to their leadership roles effective immediately.

"Beyond her decades-long career and service to the people of our state, Barbara George Johnson has played a crucial role on the ground with the Trenton community for years working to ensure that our Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center is rooted in what the community wants and needs," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "Commissioner Baston has spent her career protecting the health of mothers and babies, promoting healthy families, and improving the quality of healthcare for all New Jerseyans. Their collective experiences, both professionally and personally, have prepared them well for these positions and I am eager to continue the work with them, alongside MIHIA President and CEO Lisa Asare, and the entire MIHIA Board to make New Jersey the safest, most equitable state in the nation to deliver and raise a baby."

"On the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority Board, both Ms. George Johnson and Commissioner Baston are playing instrumental roles in the early stages of building the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center in our state's capital," **said Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority President and CEO Lisa Asare**. "Having witnessed firsthand their dedication to this work and the mothers, babies, and families of this community and our state, I know NJ will benefit by having them serve in these key posts within the Authority Board. I look forward to continuing to work with them in their new capacities."

"I am deeply honored to be appointed Chair of the Maternal Infant Health Innovation Authority Board. I have been fortunate to work on addressing health disparities and creating solutions that benefit the most vulnerable residents in our state, and I am committed to continuing this vital work," **said Barbara George Johnson, J.D.** "This role offers an invaluable opportunity to improve maternal and infant health outcomes. I look forward to collaborating with the MIHIA Board, a team of dedicated professionals and stakeholders, to implement innovative solutions to ensure that every mother and infant receives the highest standard of care. Together, we will strive to make a significant and lasting impact on the health and well-being of families throughout our state."

"I am honored to serve as Vice Chair as we continue the important work of the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority to help improve outcomes for parents and children and reduce inequities in our state," **said New Jersey Health Commissioner Kaitlan Baston, M.D.** "Together, we are working to achieve a collective vision of making New Jersey the safest, in the nation to deliver and raise a baby. I look forward to supporting the impactful,

groundbreaking work ahead.”

In 2019, First Lady Tammy Murphy launched Nurture NJ, a statewide initiative committed to addressing New Jersey’s maternal and infant health crisis. In January 2021, the First Lady unveiled the Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan, which included key recommendations to establish the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center (MIHIC).

In July 2023, Governor Murphy signed S3864, also known as the “New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center Act”, which created the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority. MIHIA is tasked with overseeing the MIHIC based in Trenton and will be the government entity that continues the vital work of Nurture NJ for years to come.

In December 2023, Governor Murphy appointed a 15-member Authority Board to oversee and maintain the functions of MIHIA. The 15-member board is responsible for employing an appointed President and Chief Executive Officer who hires accompanying staff. The Board will also adopt recommendations for actions created by the New Jersey Maternal Care Quality Collaborative (NJMCQC), over which MIHIA will be the primary agency responsible for coordinating efforts and strategies to reduce maternal mortality, morbidity, and racial and ethnic disparities in the state.

The MIHIA Board held its inaugural public meeting in March 2024, at which it was announced that Lisa Asare was appointed by the Governor as the President and Chief Executive Officer of MIHIA, and officially making her a member of his cabinet and the first in the nation cabinet-level role working on supporting maternal and infant health.

Barbara George Johnson, J.D. serves in dual roles at Kean University as the Vice President of External Affairs and Urban Policy and Research and the Executive Director of the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research. Since 2022, the Watson Institute has led an extensive and on-going community engagement project in Trenton to build trust and support from Trenton residents and organizational stakeholders, as well as understand the services needed to improve maternal and infant health outcomes for Trenton’s new and expectant mothers and children.

Johnson has more than 30 years of experience as a public policy professional in New Jersey with an extensive background in health care, public health and public policy. Johnson spearheaded the development of the Newark Kids Initiative for the Newark Health Department, which focused on healthcare and social services for children impacted by domestic violence. She also served on the CDC-funded Newark Prevention Marketing Initiative and other task forces on HIV/AIDS. She has also served as a public health advisor for the Maternal Child Health Division of the New York City Department of Health and later as the director for the Family Life Institute of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan New Jersey. Johnson previously served as the legislative director for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey and Senior Lobbyist on healthcare issues for the firm MBI-GluckShaw.

Barbara George Johnson earned a Bachelor of Arts in biology and technology from Cornell University, a Master of Public Health from Columbia University, and a law degree from Rutgers-Newark Law School.

Dr. Kaitlan Baston is the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health.

Commissioner Baston previously served as the Division Head of Addiction Medicine and Medical Director of the Center for Healing at Cooper University Health Care. She founded the center, which includes integrated pain, addiction, and behavioral health care; an inpatient addiction consult service; outpatient specialty clinics; a wrap-around perinatal substance use disorder program and undergraduate and graduate medical education in addiction medicine and research. Baston is also an educator and consultant for Zero to Three, an organization focused on ensuring all babies and toddlers have a strong start to life, and an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University.

Baston has also served on many national level committees including the American Academy of Pediatrics Head Start National Expert Working Group the Facing Addiction Education Committee for National Addiction Curriculum, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Alliance for Innovation in Maternal Health Maternal Opioid Collaborative, and the National Symposium for Addiction Medicine at the White House. She is also a member of several community boards and committees including the Camden County Addiction Awareness Task Force, the Camden County Opioid Settlement Funds board, and the Advanced Practitioner Executive Committee. Baston has received many awards for her work and most recently honored with the New Jersey Healthcare Innovation Hero Award (2022) and has been listed on the New Jersey Top Female Doctors (2018, 2020, 2022) and New Jersey Top

Doctors (2017-2019, 2021, 2022) lists.

Commissioner Baston obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Miami University, a Master of Science degree in neuroscience from Kings College London, and an M.D. from Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University. She is also dual boarded in Family Medicine and Addiction Medicine.

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