

GayStraight@Park Lake, “I’m Not Homophobic... Am I?”
using the Framework of the Pledge, November 14, 2024

Speakers:

Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith



A native of Fort Lauderdale, Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith is a member-elect of the Florida Senate from the 17th district, covering much of Orange County. He previously served as a member of the Florida House of Representatives from District 49, situated in northeastern Orange County from 2016 through 2022.

A well-known public servant, Carlos has prioritized housing affordability, lowering healthcare costs, reducing gun violence, protecting our environment and raising teacher pay, while defending our fundamental rights and freedoms.

Orlando Magazine has repeatedly named Carlos as one of Orlando’s 50 Most Powerful People. In 2020, Carlos was named Florida PTA’s Legislator of the Year, and he has received numerous awards from many organizations. With his election in Florida House in 2016, Carlos made history as Florida’s first openly-LGBTQ Latino lawmaker. He currently serves as Equality Florida’s Senior Policy Advisor and lives with his husband Jerick Mediavilla Negron, an educator from Corozal, Puerto Rico, in their East Orlando home in Union Park.

Attorney Larry Smith



Larry Smith celebrates his 40th anniversary as a Florida attorney this year. He has received Martindale Hubbell’s highest rating as AV Preeminent for more than half those, and been recognized by his peers as a Florida SuperLawyer for 15 consecutive years. His practice has focused on the defense of Fortune 500 companies in high exposure personal injury cases for most of his career.

Larry has also worked to improve the legal profession, and has served on, or chaired, committees on a local, state, national, and international level. His work to increase inclusivity has led to his receipt of, among others, the Orlando Business Journal’s Diversity Lifetime Achievement Award, the Florida Bar G. Kirk Haas Humanitarian Award, and selection by the Florida Bar as one of five “Legends Who Made A Difference” for which his commissioned portrait hangs in perpetuity in the Executive Board Room of the Florida Bar in its Tallahassee offices.

Larry continues to champion, speak, and coach about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Trans Activist Andrea Montanez



Andrea Montanez, Field Organizer for the National LGBTQ Task Force, is a proud transgender woman Colombian immigrant and a dynamic leader with over a decade of experience working within LGBTQ+ communities nationwide. With a master's degree in criminal justice, Andrea has dedicated her career to advancing social justice and equity, particularly for transgender individuals. Throughout her professional journey, Andrea has excelled in leadership and management, demonstrating her ability to lead medium to large-scale advocacy and community-center programs effectively.

As the Senior Racial Equity, LGBTQ+, and Immigration Organizer at Hope Community Center, Andrea led all programming related to LGBTQ issues, including clinical and behavioral health programming, Pride events, and advocacy initiatives. She has been instrumental in raising awareness about the impact of discriminatory legislation targeting transgender and immigrant communities in Florida, advocating tirelessly for policy changes and strategies to repeal harmful laws. Andrea's commitment to transgender justice extends beyond her professional endeavors. She has actively participated in fellowships and leadership cohorts, including the Human Rights Campaign's ELEVATE fellowship and the ACTIVATE leadership cohort, aimed at empowering transgender leaders of color. Her involvement in the Next Level Program as a community council member further underscores her dedication to community engagement and advocacy. She is the co-founder of the Queer and Transgender Immigrants (QT Immigrants) Group, a grassroots group focused on support for the queer and transgender immigrant community. She also serves on the boards of numerous community-based organizations across the country, all aimed at

serving systematically and structurally excluded populations. Andrea is also the Executive Director for the GOALCFL- Gay Officers Alliance of Central Florida.

Elder Mackenzie Bertram



Mackenzie Bertram currently serves as a ruling elder at Park Lake Presbyterian Church. She has an undergraduate degree in Religion from Presbyterian College in South Carolina and a Masters in Educational Leadership from American College of Education.

Mackenzie has worked in public education for nearly 20 years in a variety of roles including teacher, coach, school-based administration, and district level administration. Her passion is literacy and champions equitable outcomes for all students. As an educator, Mackenzie says that she is not in the business of life and death, but in the business of quality of life. Mackenzie and her spouse have experience with the foster care system, serving as temporary parents, standing in the gap for children, as well as now being parents to an amazingly resilient sibling group of four children.