

## 2022 Board Member of the Year

Congratulations to our inaugural Board Member of the Year nominees!

CENTER	NOMINEE
Aiken-Barnwell	Dr. Rosa Ishmal
Anderson Oconee Pickens	Carol Burdette
Beckman	Terri Mostiller
Berkeley	Reverend Bob Lee
Catawba	Alexa Esposito-Biniasz
Charleston/Dorchester	---
Coastal Empire	Addison Fender
Columbia Area	Jerry Dean Pate
Greater Greenville	Charlotte Walker
Lexington	Darren Rogers
Orangeburg Area	Sadie Jarvis
Pee Dee	Frances Feagin
Santee-Wateree	Sylvia Christian James (WINNER)
Spartanburg Area	Carey Rothschild
Tri-County	---
Waccamaw	Gilmore McManus

Learn more about our winner, Sylvia Christian James, in her nomination:

It's good to have friends in high places. Just ask the Chair of Santee Wateree MHC Board, Sylvia Christian-James. When the S-2 bill was adopted by the Senate without opposition and was sent to the SC House of Representatives last fiscal year, Ms. James, along with other board chairs from around the state sprang into action!

James met with other Board members via Zoom and came up with a strategy to thwart the S-2 bill. They all agreed to contact their state representatives by phone, mail, and in-person to educate them as to why reorganizing DHEC and merging the South Carolina Department of Mental Health and other agencies into one very large health agency in the process was not a good idea. She attended the Subcommittee hearings at the State House along with other SCDMH supporters. James was one of the first Board members that drafted letters to the Editors of several newspapers in the catchment area expressing opposition to the bill. She contacted several media outlets and personally talked to state representatives.

In an excerpt from James' letter to the Editor, she noted, "While S-2 reorganizes DHEC it also merges SCDMH and other agencies into one very large health agency in the process. There is a growing mental health crisis in the state because of the Covid-19 pandemic affecting many, including children in our schools.

"Now is not the time to require SCDMH staff to add reorganizational activities to its workload while providing medication and therapeutic care to some 170,000 or more adults and children, including school children, many of whom have serious mental health issues. Our catchment area of Sumter, Lee, Kershaw, and Clarendon counties together serve some 6,000 patients.

“SCDMH is an effective, innovative organization. It was one of the first in the country to offer Telepsychiatry services statewide and its network laid the foundation for telemedicine to expand in South Carolina. As a result, the state’s rural population has improved access to mental health and medical care. SCDMH also serves children in schools.

“Over many years now there have been efforts focused on separating DHEC into two agencies based on concerns about DHEC, not SCDMH. The bill in its present form could have negative impact on mental health care at a time when good mental health care is most needed. “Please remove SCDMH from the provisions of S2.”

Remember the phrase about having “friends in high places”? Well, as fate would have it, James and the Speaker of the SC House of Representatives Murrell Smith have been friends for many years. Smith remarked that it was James’ conviction and tireless education of him and his colleagues that single-handedly stopped the S2 bill from being passed this year, and for that we are grateful.

It is my pleasure to nominate, Ms. Sylvia Christian-James as the SCDMH Community Mental Health Center Board Member of the Year!

Jeffery L. Ham  
Executive Director, Santee Wateree MHC