

**IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY**

# SPEAK UP!

## Women in History 2023

*“Serving the Four-State area for over 20 years”*

Speak Up Community News promotes the Culture, Health and Success of the community. Subscription is free. Articles and remarks are welcomed. Contact: Brothers Who Care, 131 W. North Avenue, Martin Luther King Community Center, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740. Phone (301) 393-9290. Download a full-color copy of this news publication at: [www.brotherswhocare.org](http://www.brotherswhocare.org)

## NEWS YOU CAN USE

### **Mayor Tekesha Ann Martinez, for the City of Hagerstown Maryland**

*“Working as a Mediator I learned conflict resolution, that’s my super power, to hear and understand.”*



In an interview with Tekesha Martinez, the first Black mayor for the City of Hagerstown Maryland, she told Speak Up Community that she has overcome challenges and a past that is not worth talking about and it is the connections she makes that adds success to her life, especially with her faith.

Connections Martinez made with poets during her stay in Baltimore led her to bring spoken word poetry to Hagerstown through her “Spit Ur Peace” program that featured popular poets and open microphone. Tekesha recognized that spoken word poetry and the poets in that community could be part of a healing process for people dealing with traumatic experiences and despair.

Spit Ur Peace was ahead of its time in Hagerstown back then. Spoken word poets tell about life’s challenges and share messages of hope, which Rap music abandoned to focus on materialism. Who could have imagined that spoken word artists would have such an impact in society like the young poet Amanda Gorman, who spoke during President Joe Biden’s Inauguration ceremony following in the path of poets such as Maya Angelou? Tekesha’s Spit Ur Peace program gave a platform for people to reflect, heal and inspire while having their voice and messages respected while on the microphone. She reignited the program that had stopped for a while.

Tekesha’s grandfather, Mr. Harold Martinez was a writer and poet; he was well respected in the City of Hagerstown. Her family was part of the tightly knit Frederick Manor community where Mr. Martinez and his wife Georgia, along with other parents, looked out for their community and its children with levels of respect and caring that has become rare these days.

Tekesha Martinez once served as a Program Director for a community center in the Jonathan neighborhood where she taught poetry and life skills to young people helping to regain the value of self respect and caring for others. She engages the seniors as well as the young in the Jonathan Street community that is so dear to her.

You may come to the conclusion that this impressive woman goes beyond what is expected of a leader. Her love for family and friends, even with those she encounters along the way, is the model of a servant leader. Tekesha acknowledges her faith in her work and even takes time to pray with or for others as she continually tries bonding people with hope and solutions. Her ability to help others reach a consensus comes from her time as a professional mediator. Tekesha said, “Working as a mediator I learned conflict resolution, that’s my superpower.” Congratulations Madam Mayor Tekesha Ann Martinez, from Speak Up Community News.

## **Maryland Special Secretary for Opioid Response, Emily Keller**

*“In order to make change, whether it’s government, whether it’s leadership or whatever... you have to lead with compassion and have the courage to be disliked.”*



Emily Keller’s journeyed into politics because she felt there wasn’t enough people in local government, especially in Washington County that were talking about the opioid crisis and overdose crisis that the area was experiencing. Her friend Ashley was trying to get help for an addiction and it was met with a lot of “red tape”, this frustrated Emily and she decided to run for office, to have a voice for victims of the opioid epidemic and have access to people who could help, such as the friendship she developed with Victoria Sterling, the Director of Behavioral Health Services at the Washington County Health Department in Hagerstown, Maryland. Challenged to run for City Council by then Hagerstown mayoral candidate Robert Bruchey, she reluctantly ran and unfortunately her friend Ashley lost her life to the addiction in the middle of her campaign.

Emily made a promise to her friend that she would be a voice for the voiceless and that she would be “loud”. Grieving for Ashley was done while pushing through a campaign that earned her a seat in the City Council. Her success at helping to pull together the Washington Goes Purple initiative made a tremendous impact on system changes in the Hagerstown – Washington County area with an increase in the “harm reduction” approach to helping those dealing with substance abuse. Harm reduction is a non judgmental and responsive approach to treatment instead of a rush to criminalize opioid victim’s addiction.

The next step in Emily’s political career was the run for Mayor and she became the first woman Mayor for the City of Hagerstown. As Mayor she had a bigger platform to advocate for the City by attending Mayor Conferences and being down in the State capitol more. Keller felt she did well at City Council and felt she did a good job as Mayor, being a voice Hagerstown needed to help make changes and she used the position to help save more lives in the opioid crisis.

“In order to make change, whether it’s government, whether it’s leadership or whatever, you have to lead with compassion and you have to have the courage to be disliked”, Keller said. For example, when they changed the City of Hagerstown logo, she said it was the right move and they took a lot of “heat” for it, which she said wasn’t easy, along with a lot of other changes they made. Emily said, “You have to be brave enough to say, ‘That’s fine, call me names’, even though there’s a lot of effort that goes into decisions to make change.”

About her connection to Maryland Governor Wes Moore, who recruited her to the newly formed cabinet position of Special Secretary of Opioid Response. Emily accepted to take on the task of reducing and eliminating the State’s opioid abuse, drug overdoses and opioid deaths. Emily said she met Moore in June 2021 and it was the five-year anniversary of Ashley dying. Keller said she spoke with Moore about Ashley. He left after she shared her story and she said she thought, “That’s going to be our next Governor.” She then joined Moore’s campaign. Emily’s efforts, in making a positive difference in the opioid epidemic, led the Governor to creating the Special Secretary position that was formerly a Directorship. Keller said all she did in the last eight year’s led her to where she is now.

Secretary Keller said her office is called, “The Opioid Operations Command Center”, a name that will be changing soon. Five major pillars they are focusing on are: Prevention, Harm Reduction, Treatment, Recovery and Public Safety. The long term for goal for the State is to save lives and prevent people from wanting drugs so Maryland can have the lowest overdose rate in the country. A finding through their Rapid Analysis of Drugs (RAD) is that of the drugs tested only 1.5 percent of it is actually heroin and the rest is mostly Fentanyl; a very lethal substance attributed to most of the opioid overdoses and deaths. Asked about her future endeavors and Keller said it is to stay in the field of helping with the Opioid crisis. Congratulations Secretary Emily Keller!

# Earth Day Clean Up

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The University System of Maryland at Hagerstown and the Washington County Health Department are teaming up for an Earth Day Clean up! Please join us on April 22 to clean up the most littered item in the world: cigarette butts. 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are littered every year. Let's do our part in taking care of our community and planet!

**EVERYONE IS INVITED!**

April 22, 2023  
9:00am - 11:00am  
University Plaza  
50 W. Washington Street  
Hagerstown, MD 21740



# TEEN HEALTH AND WELLNESS ADVISORY BOARD

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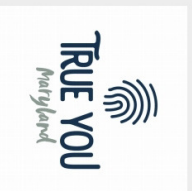
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code below, email

Lindsay.Ridenour@maryland.gov  
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## The 1st Youth Symposium



Monday, April 24, 2023

5:00-8:30 PM

925 N. Burhans Blvd

Hagerstown, MD 21740

Please join us in enjoying a fun and informational evening in learning more about Vaping and Tobacco Peer Ambassador Training, mindfulness and taking care of your mental health  
Dinner will be provided by Olive Garden

Scan here to sign up



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Eliminate Stigma.