

MEET THE PANELISTS



Emily Billings is the program director of the YOU, Inc. Southbridge Family Resource Center, an Affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation. She has spent the past decade working with families and children, particularly children with behavioral and medical special needs, throughout Massachusetts and Connecticut. Her work experience includes facilitating the Community Connections Coalition in Southbridge, and managing a supportive living program for homeless teen parents in Worcester.



Anne Kandilis leads the Springfield WORKS/Working Cities Challenge initiative, which engages and aligns employer, community, and education partners to remove systemic and racial barriers and create pathways to economic opportunity and well-being for all. Before joining the EDC in 2017, she assisted the Davis Foundation in the launch of a high-quality early education and care center, Educare Springfield, in one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city. That same year, she led Springfield's Early Education Strategic Planning process. Prior to this work, Ms. Kandilis was a senior executive at a Fortune 100 Insurance Company in Corporate Strategy and led Federal Government Relations in Washington, DC.



Gina Plata-Nino has devoted much of her early professional life to addressing the many causes of hunger and ensuring that low-income individuals never have to place other needs above feeding themselves or their families.

She's an attorney at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute where she works with state and federal agencies to eliminate systemic barriers to food access. She has presented at both state and national conferences on the importance of equity in food security. She utilizes her skills as a vehicle for motivating and supporting lasting changes that bring about social justice and build grassroots leadership in her community.



Mirka Torres is the South County Area Administrator and Southbridge Office Director of Catholic Charities of Worcester County. She has over 20 years of experience in the areas of Housing Counseling, Homelessness Prevention, Case Management, Outreach, Workshop Facilitation, Grant Management, and Community Resources Specialist. Ms. Torres holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, Counseling Foundations and is currently a Senior at Anna Maria College's Social Work Masters Program. She is passionate about educating and serving the community. She serves as a member of several boards and steering committees in the Central MA area, fostering positive changes, and empowering others to become agents of change.