

REV. DR. MICHELLE LAWS Bio

Rev. Dr. Michelle Laws is a native of Chapel Hill, NC and holds a PhD in Social and Behavioral Science from Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, Department of Health Behavior and Policy (Phi Kappa Phi); Master of Arts Degree in Sociology from North Carolina Central University (Magna Cum Laude); and Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communications from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Laws is a gifted and sought-after public speaker and is internationally known as a fierce advocate for poor women and children, human rights, and social justice.

Professionally, Dr. Laws is the Assistant Director of Consumer Support Services and Community Stakeholder Engagement for the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services, within the Department of Health and Human Services. She is also one of the leads for the NC Department of Health and Human Services' Historically Marginalized Populations COVID Workgroup.

Dr. Laws' distinguished professional career also includes serving as the Assistant Director for the Community Health Coalition, Inc., which focuses on culturally-tailored health education and promotion, improving health management, and eliminating health disparities among African American and historically marginalized populations; former Executive Director of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP a college adjunct professor where she taught undergraduate courses in sociology, research methods, and statistics at North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University and in federal and state prisons; and the legislative liaison for the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services.

Inspired, in large part by the profiles of courage of fierce Black women in North Carolina including her grand and great grandmothers; her Godmother, the late Senator Jeanne Lucas (the first Black woman to serve in the North Carolina Senate); and Congresswoman Eva Clayton (the first Black woman from NC to serve in Congress), Dr. Laws ran in the May 2018 Democratic primary for Congress in North Carolina's 4th Congressional District, challenging a 30-year incumbent. Dr. Laws' community activism and advocacy for poor women and children and social justice dates back to her childhood growing up in a public housing community in Chapel Hill, NC and during her time as an undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill. As an undergraduate, Dr. Laws was among the student activists advocating for a freestanding black cultural center at UNC in honor of a beloved professor, the late Dr. Sonja Haynes Stone; helped to organize student and community support for UNC housekeepers fighting for humane treatment and a living wage; and organized UNC students in support of Keith Edwards, UNC's first black female police officer in her lawsuit against the university for discrimination. Dr. Laws' skills as a community organizer and political strategist proved useful when she relocated to Maryland during the mid-1990s and was introduced to Maryland and Washington DC politics by landing a job as the campaign press secretary for former Congressman Albert R. Wynn (Md-4th) and a campaign organizer for Lafayette Barnes for DC City Council.

Dr. Laws believes that one of the greatest tragedies of social progress is for people to ascend the social and economic ladder and forget those who are left behind by ignoring the plight of the poor and marginalized. Her **life's guiding principles are lessons taught by the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:** *"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the*

welfare of others. In dangerous valleys and hazardous pathways, he will lift some bruised and beaten brother to a higher and nobler life.” **And Jesus Christ:** *“When I was hungry, you gave Me food; thirsty, you gave Me drink; a stranger you took Me in; naked, you clothed me; sick, you visited me; and in prison you came to Me...inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren you did it to Me.”*

Rev. Dr. Laws’ service to the community has won her numerous awards and honors however she says: “I firmly believe that ‘service is the price we pay for occupying our space on this earth.’ Awards and recognition are nice but victories in the fight for the protection and progress of women and girls, social justice and human rights are much grander aspirations.” Dr. Laws is happily married to Karl Laws and lives Orange County, NC.