



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Sean M. Ryan

# **Senator Sean Ryan Selects Dr. Marie Cannon As 2025 ‘Women Of Distinction’ Honoree**

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Senator Sean Ryan presents Dr. Marie Cannon with a 2025 Women of Distinction Award, May 13, 2025

Community Leader Has Dedicated Her Career to Fighting Poverty and Serving Marginalized Communities

**ALBANY** – On Tuesday, May 13, 2025, New York State Senator Sean Ryan recognized Dr. Marie Cannon, President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Action Organization of Western New York (CAO of WNY), as a member of the 2025 New York State Senate Women of Distinction class of honorees.

**Senator Sean Ryan** said, “It was my pleasure to nominate Dr. Marie Cannon as a 2025 New York State Senate Woman of Distinction in honor of her efforts to fight poverty and uplift marginalized members of our community. Dr. Cannon has committed many years of her life to serving her community, from the Erie County Department of Social Services to the Head Start program at CAO, where she is now the first woman to serve as president and CEO of the organization. I’d like to thank her for her life of service and extend my congratulations to her and all of this year’s honorees”

The early loss of both of her parents taught Dr. Cannon to take responsibility for herself from a young age, and her personal growth in the wake of this tragedy inspired her life of service to others. An alumna of Canisius University with a

Master's degree and Doctorate in Social Work at the University at Buffalo, Dr. Cannon's depth of service in the health and human services field now spans three decades, during which she has been instrumental in fighting poverty and serving marginalized communities.

Dr. Cannon began her career of service with the Head Start Program at CAO of WNY from 1999 to 2001. From there, she became the Executive Director of Holy Cross Head Start, and she later became CEO of the Child Resource Center, fighting poverty and helping people overcome the barriers to economic self-sufficiency. Dr. Cannon became a leader who uplifted all she worked with; as she often said, "There's nothing about us without us." In 2024, she became the first woman to lead CAO, where she continues her unwavering, lifelong dedication to serving her community.

Between stints at CAO, Dr. Cannon served as Commissioner of the Erie County Department of Social Services, leading a 1,600-employee department that served 27,000 people each month. There, she developed and implemented a \$10 million housing and rental assistance program and a \$15 million childcare assistance program. Her other accomplishments included procurement of \$385,000 in foundation support for the development of a comprehensive housing plan, development of Virtual Learning Centers, implementation of a racial equity training initiative, establishment of a Disproportionate Minority Representation Committee, and facilitation of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute's Workforce Excellence Partnership.

Dr. Cannon's commitment to service also includes time as a member of Governor Kathy Hochul's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, as the 1st Vice President of the New York Public Welfare Association, as member of the Greater Buffalo Equity Roundtable, and as Co-Lead of the Erie County Child and Housing Task Forces in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.