

# The Advocate Newsletter

Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Program



## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Fair

TN Department of Transportation is committed to maintaining a sense of inclusion and belonging throughout its diverse workforce where employees are treated equitably.

The Civil Rights Division Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Program continues to host the Annual Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Fair. The fair was held in September and celebrated department wide. Headquarters along with each regional location participated in expressing the theme, "1 TDOT, TEAM and COMMUNITY". The event was hybrid so all activities could be enjoyed by all locations.

This event is one of the Department's special program initiatives to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion that brings TDOT employees together to learn about different cultures, customs, traditions, and histories of the diverse employees that make up the TDOT workforce.

TDOT employees set up booths individually or partnered with coworkers and special guests to present an array of information about their native countries and cultures. Participants share samples of artwork, artifacts, clothing, food, books, currency, and other items.

This year's participants represented Cameroon Africa, China, Egypt, Ethiopia East Africa, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hispanic Populations, India, Italy, Kurdistan, Mexico, Palestine, Philippines, South Korea, Türkiye, The Balkans Peninsula, and the USA.

*Growing Together as a Team through  
Sharing & Caring!*



## CELEBRATING



**DIVERSITY,  
EQUITY &  
INCLUSION**



### Inside this issue

- Headquarters DEI Fair photos .2
- Region I DEI Fair photos .....3
- Region II & III DEI Fair photos .4-5
- Region IV DEI Fair photos .....6
- Brown Bag Presentations .....7
- New CRD Staff .....8
- Seasons Greeting.....9

### Special points of interest

- Review your region's DEI Fair photos
- Read interesting information in each Brown Bag Presentation
- Welcome new CRD staff

For more information, or to contact the EEO/AA staff at 615-741-3681 or website: [Equal Employment Opportunity / Affirmative Action \(EEO/AA\) Program \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/eoaa)

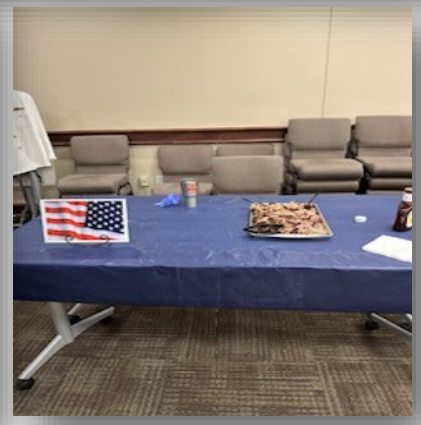


# Headquarters





# Region I





# Region II





# Region III

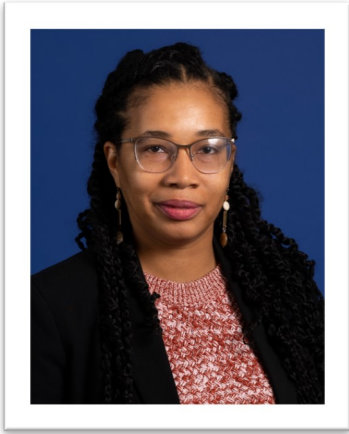




# Region IV



# Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Initiatives



## Disability Awareness

The Diversity Brown Bag Lunch to honor National Disability Employment Awareness Month was held on October 26, 2023. The presenter was Tanika M. Arms, Employee Experience, Director, with the Tennessee Department of Human Resources.

Tanika discussed the purpose of the SAME Program to ensure that state agencies and departments design and proactively implement best, promising, and emerging policies, practices, and procedures related to the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of qualified individuals with disabilities. She also discussed the purpose of the "This is Me" Campaign is having people share through storytelling about their experiences with individuals, which can bring about behavioral and cultural change. Part of the campaign's goal is for all state employees with disabilities to voluntarily make their disability election in Edison.

### ◆ What is Self-Identification?

Self-identification is a voluntary and confidential reporting of one's disability status.

Employees can now self-identify as a person with a disability through the Employee Self-Service.

Navigation: NavBar>Menu>HCM>Self-Service>Personal Information>Personal Details

### ◆ How do you define disability?

A disability is a condition that substantially limits one or more of your "major life activities."

If you have or have ever had such a condition, you are a person with a disability.

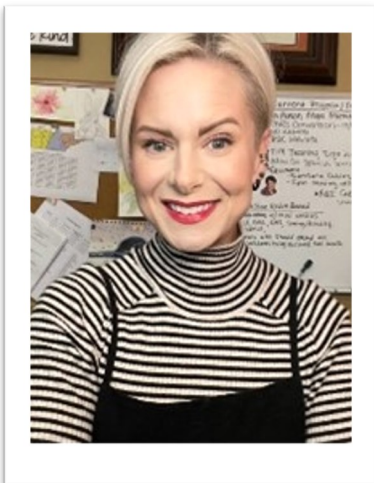
### ◆ If I have a disability, am I required to self-identify?

No, self-identification is always voluntary. Employees have 3 options in Edison:

1. Yes, I have a disability, or have had one in the past
2. No, I do not have a disability and have not had one in the past
3. I do not want to answer



## Brown Bag Lunch Presentations



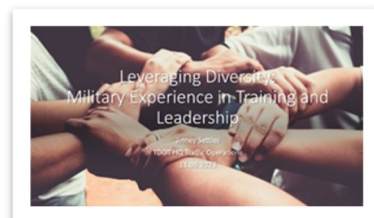
## Leveraging Diversity: Military Experience

The Diversity Brown Bag Lunch Presentation to honor Veterans was held on November 9, 2023. The presenter was Jinney Settles, Transportation Monitor II with Headquarters Traffic Operation Division. Jinney provides support to the regional Transportation Management Centers, HELP Program, Traffic Incident Management Program, and Yellow DOT Program. She joined the TDOT family in 2018 as a Training Specialist II managing the regional Training Program in Region IV. She earned her bachelor's degree in Public Administration and MBA in Human Resources.

Jinney is a West Tennessee native, born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. She joined the Air Force in 2002 as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician (EOD) and her rank was E-5. She later married an Army man, traveling with him and finally settling in Jackson, TN to raise a family. She relates to her family as the "Brady Bunch" because they are a large blended family of six children, with both she and her husband having three children each.

Jinney shared events from her military experience, and talked about the Air Force's core values, diversity in the military, and how veterans can leverage diversity in their civilian roles. She also discussed the wealth of diverse experiences veterans bring from their military service when working in a state government agency. Often, veterans have experience with complex logistics, problem solving, and teamwork; which are vital in state government positions, especially roles that are related to transportation, emergency management, or public safety.

Veterans backgrounds typically include cultural competence and adaptability, which enables them to engage effectively with diverse communicates and address a wide range of government challenges. Leveraging these experiences, veterans can make significant contributions to state government agencies, ultimately enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations.



# New Civil Rights Division Staff



## Katherine 'Katie' Swartwood Mariani Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action

Katherine "Katie" Swartwood Mariani comes to TDOT with degrees in history and sociology, from the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. She has a MA in Women's History from Sarah Lawrence College.

Katie joins the Equal Employment Opportunity/ Affirmative Action (EEO/AA) program as an Affirmative Action Officer II, and will be responsible for investigating discrimination and harassment complaints, ensuring EEO compliance on federal aid highway construction contracts, and assisting with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and EEO/AA related activities.

Katie comes to us from the TN Human Rights Commission where she worked as an Employment Investigator and Supervisor. In her free time, she enjoys reading, crocheting, and hanging out with her two dogs and two cats. Additionally, she is currently interested in learning sign language and has self taught herself some signs and the alphabet.

Please join us in welcoming Katie to the TDOT Family.

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## Welcome Katie, Trenton, and Michelle to the Civil Rights and TDOT Family.

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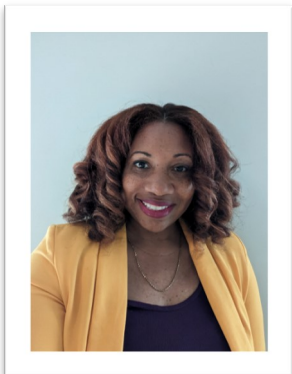
## Trenton Alsbrooks Small Business Development

Trenton Alsbrooks is a Tennessee native with a marketing and operations degree from the University of Limerick in Ireland.

Trenton is excited to apply the skills gained in these industries in his role as Transportation Program Monitor for the Small Business Development Program. Trenton will work with Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) during the certification process, by reviewing DBE applications, conducting on-site visits, and renewing certifications annually.

In his leisure time, Trenton enjoys, writing, and travelling.

Please join us in welcoming Trenton to the TDOT Family.



## Michelle Bacon Civil Rights Division

Michelle Bacon comes to TDOT with over fifteen years in Operations Management experience.

She is joining us as a Transportation Program Monitor who will be assisting the Director of the Civil Rights Division. Michelle will also have daily interactions with the Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action, Title VI and Small Business Development Programs.

She graduated from UNC Charlotte with a Bachelor's in Business Management and Concentration in Human Resources. Although, she enjoys living in Nashville for the last seven years, she will always consider North Carolina home. Outside of spending time with her husband, son, and newborn daughter, Michelle enjoys watching romantic comedies, reality shows, and trying out new hot fish restaurants.

Please join us in welcoming Michelle to the TDOT Family.



# Congratulations

## Yolando Y. Jackson Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action



Yolando was newly appointed as the Manager of the Equal Employment Opportunity Affirmative Action Program for the Civil Rights Division. She is also the department's Equal Employment Opportunity Coordinator. In her role, she is responsible for the daily operation and management of the Equal Employment Opportunity / Affirmative Action (EEO/AA) Program, including the design, implementation, and monitoring of the internal and external EEO/AA reporting; advising the Director of Civil Rights on a continual basis regarding the development in EEO/AA laws; investigating and resolving complaints of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation; promoting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives throughout the department; and ensuring adherence to EEO contractual provisions of federally funded highway construction contracts.

She is a Nashvillian but will always call West Tennessee (Jackson) her home. Yolando is a graduate of Tennessee State University and Southeastern Paralegal Institute. She is also a recent graduate of the TDOT Management EPIC Academy. She has over twenty-plus years of knowledge and experience in internal and external EEO/AA program activities.



**Our Team**  
would like to send **Best Wishes** for a restful and enjoyable  
**Holiday Season!**



EEO/AA Program Team  
Rodney Ursery and  
Katie Swartwood Mariani  
are not present in photo.



## Mission Statement

*“To facilitate equal opportunity throughout TDOT by ensuring all employment practices are conducted in a fair manner which affords employees and applicants equal employment on the basis of merit, experience and other work related criteria without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability.”*

## TDOT Civil Rights Division

**Jessica M. Starling, Director**

## Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Program Team

**Yolando Jackson**

Affirmative Action Manager

**Rodney Ursery, J.D.**

Affirmative Action Officer II

**Katie Swartwood Mariani**

Affirmative Action Officer II

**Natalie Douglass**

Affirmative Action Officer II