

New Fellow Spotlight: Tanisha Briley

City Manager

City of Gaithersburg, Maryland



Tanisha Briley was appointed City Manager of the City of Gaithersburg, Maryland on July 20, 2020. She assumed the position on September 14, 2020. The City Manager serves as the chief administrative officer, managing the City's administrative operations in accordance with policies and procedures set forth by the City Council. The City government has a professional staff of 425 full time equivalent positions with a budget of \$69.3 million, serving a population of just over 70,200 people. Briley's career in the public sector spans nearly two decades, with 14 years in city management. She most recently served as City Manager of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, a community with just over 46,000 residents, 560 municipal employees and a budget of \$79 million. In that position since 2013, Briley listed among her accomplishments the increase of the City's reserve fund from four to 16 percent of expenses, overseeing the reduction of crime by 55 percent, and spearheading a citywide energy efficiency project that resulted in a 25 percent energy consumption reduction and cost savings.

Prior to becoming City Manager of Cleveland Heights, Briley served as Management Analyst, Budget Manager, and eventually Assistant City Administrator for the City of Davenport, Iowa. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Ohio State University and a Master of Public Administration, with a Local Urban Management Certificate from Cleveland State University, where she was recognized as a Distinguished Alumni. Briley is also a graduate of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Briley is an active member of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) and she is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). She currently serves as Vice Chair of the ICMA-RC Retirement Corporation Board of Directors, and in Cleveland Heights she was active in a number of professional and service organizations, including Treasurer of the Heights-Hillcrest Communications Center Board of Directors. She also served on the Board of Directors of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency and the United Way of Greater Cleveland, and is an instructor with the Cleveland State University Public Administration Graduate Program.

Briley enjoys fitness, travel, and finding ways to be of service to further her professional and personal goal of helping to shape a positive future for the community she serves. She and her partner Vincent reside in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

For more information please contact the Gaithersburg City Manager's office at 301-258-6310 or visit the City's website at www.gaithersburgmd.gov.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

I have passionately served the public for my entire professional career and specifically cities for the last 14 years. I believe city management is one of the best gigs on the planet because the job is to literally spend each day trying to make life better for the community than it was the day before. I love what I do. It's truly a calling.

Who or what inspired you to work in public service?

Coming from very humble beginnings, my early life was shaped directly by local public programs and services that my family and I relied on for everything from food and clothing to recreation and housing. As I grew up and could begin to appreciate the positive impact that public servants had on my life, I knew that I wanted to find a way to give back to the community and ensure that those programs and services that were so impactful for me would be available to others in the future. Initially, I thought my civic life would consist of donating time and money to causes that were important to me while I pursued a career in business, but by my junior year of college, I realized that I wanted to build a career serving others and building communities and I've never turned back.

Which of the Academy's Grand Challenges resonate most with you?

Of course, each of the Grand Challenges come with their own compelling since of importance and urgency, I would say at this moment I am most energized by the Grand Challenge of Modernizing and Reinvigorating the Public Service. I think my answer to this question would have been very different just a few short months ago but as our nation and world grapple with centuries-old challenges around race and equity, it has never seemed more important for the public service to attract, develop, and engage our best minds. The issues of the day should serve as a rallying cry to everyone desperately searching for a way to create meaningful change to pursue a career in public service. We need to meet this moment by showcasing the power of public servants to positively impact the political and bureaucratic systems that shape our lives.

What advice can you give to folks beginning careers in public service

Try to start and end each day with a focus on the bigger picture of why you chose to serve and recommit to your “why” each and every day.

What is the first concert you attended?

The Jackson’s Victory Tour at Cleveland Municipal Stadium in October 1984. I was a 5-year-old Michael Jackson superfan and only interested in seeing him perform hits from his Off the Wall and Thriller albums. My mom tells me that I stood upon the chair the entire time dancing and singing every word of each song. All I can remember are the bright stage lights, exciting pyrotechnics, and euphoric feelings that come back to me each time I hear one of those songs even today.