

# Careers in Youth Justice



OFFICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST PROGRAMS  
**UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW**



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### AUTHORS:

Gabriella Cohen Herrera '24, UCLA School of Law  
Leah Zeidler-Ordaz, Youth Justice Policy Lead, Criminal Justice Program

### ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS:

Eugine Choo '24, UCLA School of Law  
Ingrid Eagly, Faculty Director, Criminal Justice Program

## ABOUT UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW

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UCLA School of Law, founded in 1949, is the youngest major law school in the nation and has established a tradition of innovation in its approach to teaching, research, and scholarship. With a rigorous public interest curriculum, the school is a preeminent training ground for students committed to careers across a spectrum of public interest practice areas.

## ABOUT THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST PROGRAMS

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The Office of Public Interest Programs strives to enhance UCLA School of Law's commitment to public service by offering an array of services to students and alumni. The Office's principal goal is to encourage students and alumni to embrace a career that incorporates an ongoing commitment to public service.

## ABOUT THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

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The Criminal Justice Program (CJP) serves as a central hub for research, education, and special projects in criminal and youth law at UCLA Law. CJP has several key areas of focus, including police brutality and accountability, criminal law and immigration enforcement, pretrial detention and bail policy, collateral consequences of criminal convictions, youth justice and the family policing system, restorative and transformative justice, and alternatives to policing and prosecution. Research undertaken by CJP faculty and staff helps to inform criminal law and policy at both the national and local levels. CJP also engages law students directly in research, policy advocacy, and legal advocacy in the fields of criminal law and youth justice.

## INTRODUCTION

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The practice of youth law is centered on addressing legal issues that may arise in an individual child's life. In this Guide, "youth law" is an umbrella term that includes diverse forms of legal advocacy for children in the United States legal system. Legally in the United States, "youth" or "juveniles" are defined as children under eighteen years of age.<sup>1</sup> This Guide also considers young people beyond the formal age of adulthood under the umbrella of youth law. Recognition of these "emerging adults"—also known as "transition age youth"—follows the increased scientific understanding of how the brain continues developing and maturing until around twenty-five years of age.<sup>2</sup>

As the narratives from UCLA Law alumni and descriptions of leading youth law organizations included in this Guide attest, youth law attorneys provide direct representation to individual clients, bring impact litigation, advocate for policy change, and conduct important research. Youth law attorneys work not only at community-based organizations and public defender offices, but also at think tanks and within educational institutions such as law schools. Often, they integrate multiple forms of advocacy in their work.

*Careers in Youth Law* aims to provide an overview of the many different areas of law and practice settings where youth law attorneys represent their clients. Youth law is highly intersectional. Attorneys practicing in this area straddle complex areas of the law that affect children's rights, including criminal and juvenile law, constitutional law, immigration law, education law, disability law, and housing and public benefits. This Guide focuses on six substantive areas of practice often included in the advocacy work of public interest attorneys focused on youth law. These are: dependency law, guardianship law, education rights law, youth defense, immigration law, and public benefits law. While one resource cannot possibly include all the different areas in which youth law attorneys practice, this Guide is meant as an important starting point and essential introduction to the field. After reviewing the Guide, students will be more equipped to identify the group of youth they wish to serve, the issues they would like to focus on, and the route they are interested in taking to meet their goals.

*Careers in Youth Law* is divided into four Parts. Part I defines the diverse practice areas that comprise youth law. Part II features narratives from UCLA School of Law alumni and current students working on issues affecting youth in the child welfare and juvenile legal systems through direct representation, policy advocacy, research, and teaching. Part III features diverse examples of practice sites for youth law from around the country. Finally, Part IV shares information on preparing for a youth law career through coursework, extracurricular activities, and youth law-focused internships. It also provides insider tips on how to land a youth law job after graduating, including interview preparation advice and post-graduate fellowship opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 5031.

<sup>2</sup> Ze'ev Hochberg & Melvin Konner, *Emerging Adulthood, a Pre-adult Life-History Stage*, 10 FRONTIERS IN ENDOCRINOLOGY, Jan. 2020, at 1, 2 (2020).

## POPULATIONS SERVED BY PUBLIC INTEREST YOUTH LAWYERS

In the public interest arena, which is the focus of this Guide, legal advocacy focuses on children growing up in poverty. As of 2020, there were 11.6 million children living in poverty in the United States, representing 16% of children nationwide.<sup>3</sup> In the 2020-2021 school year, over one million U.S. children in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade experienced homelessness.<sup>4</sup> That same year, nearly a quarter of a million U.S. children entered the foster system.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, children of color are overrepresented in the foster system. According to data collected in 2019, American Indian and Alaska Native children accounted for 1% of the total child population, yet 2% of the foster youth population. Black children accounted for 14% of the total child population, yet 23% of the foster care population.<sup>6</sup>

Similar to the foster system, Black, Latine, and Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the juvenile legal system.<sup>7</sup> In 2019, U.S. law enforcement agencies arrested 696,620 minors.<sup>8</sup> The more contact youth have with the juvenile legal system, the higher the risk of negative outcomes.<sup>9</sup> These outcomes include an increased likelihood of involvement in the justice system later in life,<sup>10</sup> worse education outcomes,<sup>11</sup> fewer employment opportunities,<sup>12</sup> and negative health impacts, such as behavioral health or substance use issues.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Emily A. Shrider, Melissa Kollar, Frances Chen, & Jessica Semega, U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports: Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020* 16 (Sept. 2021), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> SchoolHouse Connection & Poverty Solutions, *Child and Youth Homelessness in the United States: Data Profiles*, POVERTY SOLUTIONS: UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, <https://poverty.umich.edu/research-funding-opportunities/data-tools/child-and-youth-homelessness-in-the-united-states-data-profiles/> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> *Child Welfare and Foster Care Statistics*, ANNIE E. CASEY FOUND. BLOG (Sept. 26, 2022), <https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-welfare-and-foster-care-statistics>.

<sup>6</sup> CHILD WELFARE INFO. GATEWAY, CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE TO ADDRESS RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY 2-3 (2021), [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/racial\\_disproportionality.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/racial_disproportionality.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> NAT'L JUV. JUST. NETWORK, CREATING MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND YOUTH OF COLOR 2 (2017), [https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/903124DF-BD7F-3286-FE3330AA44F994DE/njnn\\_2017\\_policy\\_platform\\_on\\_meaningful\\_police\\_relationships.pdf](https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/903124DF-BD7F-3286-FE3330AA44F994DE/njnn_2017_policy_platform_on_meaningful_police_relationships.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> CHARLES PUZZANCHERA, SARAH HOCKENBERRY, AND MELISSA SICKMUND, YOUTH AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM: 2022 NATIONAL REPORT 108 (2022), <https://ojdp.ojp.gov/publications/2022-national-report.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> COUNTYWIDE CRIM. JUST. COORDINATION COMM. YOUTH DIVERSION SUBCOMM., A ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING YOUTH DIVERSION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY 12 (2017), <https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/9cdc324a-79d0-4057-b249-1bc747cbc733/A%20Roadmap%20for%20Advancing%20Youth%20Diversion%20in%20Los%20Angeles%20County.pdf> [hereinafter A ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING YOUTH DIVERSION].

<sup>10</sup> NAT'L JUV. JUST. NETWORK, REDUCING YOUTH ARRESTS: PREVENTION AND PRE-ARREST DIVERSION 2 (2020), <https://nyjn.org/publications/reducing-youth-arrests/>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> A ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING YOUTH DIVERSION, *supra* note 9, at 12; Rodney Funk et al., *Substance Use Prevention Services in Juvenile Justice and Behavioral Health: Results from a National Survey*, 8 HEALTH & JUST., May 2020, at 1, 2, <https://healthandjusticejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40352-020-00114-6>.

## I. YOUTH LAW PRACTICE AREAS

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This Part discusses some of the major substantive areas of practice for youth law attorneys. The substantive areas of practice discussed below are dependency law, guardianship law, education rights law, youth defense, immigration law, and public benefits law. The descriptions below define the practice areas and provide an overview of attorneys' work in each area.

### DEPENDENCY LAW

*“Dependency court remains an arena in which the lack of due process (as compared to the criminal legal system) is immediately striking. This has obvious implications for families, but also creates opportunities for creative legal advocacy and meaningful structural interventions.”*  
- Kaveh Landsverk, Staff Attorney, Children’s Law Center Los Angeles, UCLA School of Law Class of 2020

One major area of practice for youth law attorneys is dependency law. The stated goal of dependency law is to protect children who are abused or neglected by their parents or guardians. “Dependency” refers to the fact that children in need of protection will be deemed “dependent” on the court for oversight and care.<sup>14</sup> Children going through the dependency court process may be removed from their parent’s care and placed with another adult, such as a relative or someone appointed to be a foster parent.<sup>15</sup>

Youth law attorneys represent children in the dependency court system, and advocate for the best interest of their clients. This advocacy can include ensuring that children can grow up free of abuse and neglect and that the legal process does not retraumatize them. It can also include ensuring that children are not wrongfully removed from their parent’s care and placed unnecessarily in the foster care system.<sup>16</sup>

In most states, judges in dependency courts handle abuse and neglect cases filed by the state. Dependency court judges weigh the best interests of the child to determine a course of action. In some cases, the child will be removed from the parent’s care, and the judge will supervise a reunification process to ensure that the home is safe for the child to return.<sup>17</sup> In other cases, the judge will terminate parental rights and consider what type of permanent plan, such as guardianship or adoption, is most appropriate.<sup>18</sup>

Youth law attorneys in dependency court also represent Native children and ensure that they are not wrongfully removed from their families and deprived of their cultural practices and traditions. Historically, the U.S. government targeted and forcibly separated Native children from their families to assimilate them into the dominant white Christian culture. As a result of U.S. policy, twenty-five to thirty-five percent of

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<sup>14</sup> *Guide to Dependency Court for Children*, JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., <https://www.courts.ca.gov/29205.htm> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Vivek Sankaran, *Preventing the Unnecessary Entry of Children into Foster Care*, 90 MICH. B. J. 41, 42 (2011).

<sup>17</sup> *Guide to Dependency Court for Parents*, JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/juvenile-dependency/guide-parents> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*



Native children were forcibly removed from their homes.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed by Congress in 1978 with the intent of ending forced removals of Native children and “promot[ing] the stability and security of Indian tribes and families.”<sup>20</sup> Attorneys who represent Native children in dependency court invoke ICWA to facilitate their client’s placement with a Native relative caregiver or within a foster home or institution approved by the child’s tribe, with the goal of maintaining the child’s connection to their tribe’s community and culture.

## **GUARDIANSHIP LAW**

Guardianship is when “someone who is not the child’s parent is in charge of taking care of the child.”<sup>21</sup> Guardianships are generally established because a parent is no longer able to care for the child. This can be because of abuse or neglect, but also because of other reasons that makes the parent unable to care for the child, such as death, incarceration, or military service.<sup>22</sup>

Attorneys practicing youth law may assist their clients to request guardianships in probate or in dependency courts. Legal guardians for children can include a sibling, a grandparent, a foster parent, or a family friend. Attorneys prepare and file petitions requesting guardianship on behalf of the child, represent their client at hearings, and advise appointed guardians on making decisions for the child.

Once the court appoints a guardian, the guardian has the same rights and responsibilities as a parent, including the right to make decisions about health care and education, and the responsibility to financially support the child.<sup>23</sup> Children placed in guardianships will generally live with their guardian.<sup>24</sup> Guardianship ends automatically when the child turns eighteen.<sup>25</sup>

## **EDUCATION RIGHTS LAW**

The main goal of education rights work is ensuring that every child has access to a quality education as well as removing barriers to success. Youth law attorneys practicing education law advocate for their clients’ rights to access educational opportunities regardless of family income, race, gender, disability, or

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<sup>19</sup> Ashley L. Landers, *Native American Mothers Whose Children Have Been Separated From Them Experience a Raw and Ongoing Grief That Has No End*, THE CONVERSATION, Dec. 1, 2023, <https://news.osu.edu/the-grief-of-native-american-mothers-whose-children-were-separated-from-them/#:~:text=An%20estimated%2025%25%20to%2035,Child%20Welfare%20Act%20of%201978>.

<sup>20</sup> 25 U.S.C. § 1902.

<sup>21</sup> *Juvenile Court Guardianship*, JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., <https://www.courts.ca.gov/1206.htm?rdeLocaleAttr=en> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., GC-205-INFO: INFORMATION ON PROBATE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE PERSON (2023).

<sup>23</sup> *What You Must Do as a Guardian*, JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/guardianship/duties> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> *How to End a Guardianship*, JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/guardianship/ending-guardianship> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

system involvement. This work spans the full range of a child’s education, from early childhood programs through high school, and even into college.

For the youngest children, youth law attorneys work to expand access to early childhood educational opportunities, often with a focus on children of color, children with disabilities, and children from low-income families. They also represent children with disabilities at due process hearings to access special education resources, including obtaining equitable Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). IEPs provide an outline of a student’s education program, including the services, and supports a child will receive to achieve their educational goals each year.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, attorneys practicing education law address unlawful or overly harsh disciplinary actions taken by school administrators, which disproportionately impacts low-income children and children of color.<sup>27</sup> For example, these attorneys represent their clients in administrative hearings to contest suspensions and expulsions.<sup>28</sup> This direct representation of youth and families, as well as policy and legislative advocacy, is used to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.<sup>29</sup>

Unhoused and system-involved youth experience unique challenges to obtaining an education. When students are required to change schools, which more frequently occurs when youth are unhoused or involved in the dependency or delinquency court systems, they are also more likely to lose time in school and class credits needed to graduate.<sup>30</sup> Youth law attorneys will advocate for these youth to receive access to quality uninterrupted education, extracurricular activities, and academic resources that are equal to other students. Their practice includes advocacy for youth to have seamless transitions and to ensure the transfer of academic credits when they move schools.<sup>31</sup>

## **YOUTH DEFENSE**

Many youth law attorneys work within the system of state and local courts that hear the cases of young people who are arrested and charged with offenses. Within juvenile or delinquency courts, judges are charged with determining whether a child violated the law and, if so, what the disposition should be.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> William H. Blackwell & Zachary S. Rossetti, *The Development of Individualized Education Programs: Where Have We Been and Where Should We Go Now?*, SAGE OPEN, Apr.-June 2014, at 1, 2.

<sup>27</sup> CALIFORNIA FOSTER YOUTH EDUCATION TASK FORCE, CALIFORNIA FOSTER YOUTH EDUCATION LAW FACT SHEETS (Jan. 2021), [http://www.cfyetf.org/publications\\_27\\_1555989899.pdf](http://www.cfyetf.org/publications_27_1555989899.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Jyoti Nanda, *The Construction and Criminalization of Disability in School Incarceration*, 9 COLUM J. RACE AND L. 265, 271-272 (2019).

<sup>29</sup> Marilyn Elias, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, TEACHING TOLERANCE, Spring 2023, at 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> *Operation: Education*, JUV. L. CTR., <https://jlc.org/juveniles-justice/operation-education> (last visited July 15, 2024).

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *What Is Juvenile Justice?*, ANNIE E. CASEY FOUND. BLOG (Dec. 12, 2020), <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-juvenile-justice>.

Juvenile courts are distinct from adult courts in that they involve bench trials instead of jury trials, and the stated goal of these courts is rehabilitative.<sup>33</sup>

In 1967, the Supreme Court found that youth charged in delinquency proceedings have a right to be represented by counsel.<sup>34</sup> As a result, public defender offices have developed units where attorneys specialize in representing youth impacted by the juvenile legal system. An example of a youth law unit in a public defender office is the Juvenile Justice Division of the Cook County Public Defender in Chicago.<sup>35</sup> Another example is the Legal Aid Society of New York, which is the main public defender for the youth of New York City.<sup>36</sup> The Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia is another example of a public defender office with a juvenile defense unit, the Juvenile Services Program.<sup>37</sup>

Attorneys representing youth in juvenile court are generally employed by public defender offices, although nonprofit agencies employ some.<sup>38</sup> Best practices in this area include a holistic and client-centered approach with the goals of reducing the trauma of system involvement, preventing recidivism, and increasing the chances that youth exiting the system will successfully transition to adulthood.<sup>39</sup> Juvenile defenders can present mitigating information about their clients' backgrounds to humanize and contextualize their behavior and to persuade courts to impose more rehabilitative sentences, such as counseling or therapeutic services, rather than incarceration. Public defenders for youth also often advocate for diversion or alternatives to formal court processing for their clients.

Beyond individual client representation, youth attorneys specializing in defense work can advocate for systemic reforms that make the system more rehabilitative. Some of the areas of advocacy include seeking legislative changes to end the practice of holding young people in solitary confinement, reducing penalties for emerging adults, raising the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction, and barring transfers of youth into adult court.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> NAT'L JUV. DEF. CTR., JUVENILE DEFENSE POLICY AND PRACTICE CAREER RESOURCE GUIDE 14 (2015), <https://hls.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Juvenile-Defense-Career-Resource-Guide-1.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> *In re Gault*, 387 U.S. 1 (1967).

<sup>35</sup> *Juvenile Justice*, L. OFF. OF THE COOK COUNTY PUB. DEF., <https://www.cookcountypublicdefender.org/locations-and-contact/juvenile-justice> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>36</sup> *Pursuing Justice for Juveniles*, LEGAL AID SOC'Y, <https://legalaidnyc.org/what-we-do/juvenile-justice/> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> *Navigating the D.C. Legal System: Juvenile Matters*, PUB. DEF. SERV. FOR D.C., <https://www.pdsdc.org/> (last visited Sept. 11, 2024).

<sup>38</sup> NAT'L JUV. DEF. CTR., *supra* note 32, at 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Specialty Areas: Juvenile Justice*, CONTRA COSTA PUB. DEFS., <https://www.cocopublicdefenders.org/juvenile-justice> (last visited Sept. 12, 2024).

<sup>40</sup> ACLU, GROWING UP LOCKED DOWN: YOUTH IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN JAILS AND PRISONS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES (2012) <https://www.aclu.org/report/growing-locked-down-youth-solitary-confinement-jails-and-prisons-across-united-states>.

## IMMIGRATION LAW

Youth law also includes representing children in the immigration system. Immigration law includes the laws surrounding immigration into the United States and the removal of noncitizens from the United States.

*“As a removal defense attorney, I represent youth placed in removal proceedings who the Department of Homeland Security seeks to deport. Many of my clients flee persecution, violence, and poverty in their home countries and come to the United States to seek refuge. My job is to prevent youth from being deported and help them obtain lawful status and remain in the United States...”*  
- Viviana Arcia-Quijano, Supervising Attorney, The Door Legal Services Center, UCLA School of Law Class of 2018

In recent years a growing number of children have migrated to the United States, including children unaccompanied by an adult. These individuals, many of whom were from El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala, often decided to migrate to escape violence, abuse, trafficking, economic deprivation, and persecution.<sup>41</sup> Youth law attorneys in the area of immigration work with children who are facing these grave issues.

One important immigration practice area related to youth is helping youth qualify for lawful permanent residence, citizenship, or some other form of lawful status. This work could include assistance in specialized forms of relief available to immigrant children. For example, Special Immigrant Youth Status (SIJS) is available to a child if a state court finds that the child has been abandoned, abused, or neglected by a parent and it is not in their best interest to return to their country of origin.<sup>42</sup> If a youth has a SIJS visa, it creates a pathway to apply for work permits and lawful permanent resident status.<sup>43</sup>

## PUBLIC BENEFITS LAW

According to the Children’s Defense Fund, about one in six children under five lived in poverty in 2023.<sup>44</sup> Nine million children faced hunger and food insecurity and four million children lived without health insurance.<sup>45</sup> Black, Latine, and Native families are disproportionately low-income, and children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience behavioral, social, emotional, and health challenges.<sup>46</sup> Access to public benefits, like cash aid and food stamps, has been shown to help children do better in school, have better health outcomes, and increase their earning power as adults.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> MUZAFFAR CHISHTI & FAYE HIPSMAN, DRAMATIC SURGE IN THE ARRIVAL OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN HAS DEEP ROOTS AND NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS (June 13, 2014), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/dramatic-surge-arrival-unaccompanied-children-has-deep-roots-and-no-simple-solutions>.

<sup>42</sup> *Guide to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status*, JUD. COUNCIL OF CAL., <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/special-immigrant-juvenile-status> (last visited Sept. 12, 2024).

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> CHILDREN’S DEF. FUND, 2023 STATE OF AMERICA’S CHILDREN REPORT: CHILD POVERTY (2023), <https://www.childrensdefense.org/tools-and-resources/the-state-of-americas-children/soac-child-poverty/>.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> ARLOC SHERMAN & TAZRA MITCHELL, CTR. ON BUDGET & POL’Y PRIORITIES, ECONOMIC SECURITY PROGRAMS HELP LOW-INCOME CHILDREN SUCCEED OVER LONG TERM, MANY STUDIES FIND 1 (2017) <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/economic-security-programs-help-low-income-children-succeed-over>.

Some youth law attorneys specialize in public benefits to help youth apply for benefits or to represent youth in administrative hearings appealing a denial of benefits. Attorneys specializing in public benefits also work to ensure that parents and caregivers are aware of and can access economic security programs on behalf of their families and children. There are a myriad of public benefits programs with eligibility rules that vary across states and it can be confusing for families to navigate without legal support. For example, some benefits are specific to certain groups, e.g., children under the age of five, children with disabilities, or children who have been in the foster system. In California, foster youth qualify for medical insurance, educational scholarships and grants, housing subsidies, and tax credits.<sup>48</sup> Without the help of an attorney with expertise in public benefits, many families may not be aware of the existence of some of these benefits or how to access them for their children.

Youth law attorneys also engage in policy advocacy designed to ensure that children of all backgrounds have equitable access to public benefits. For example, nonprofit organizations advocate for increasing funding levels for public benefit programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the creation of new benefits programs like universal school meals.<sup>49</sup>

## II. ALUMNI NARRATIVES

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There are multiple and diverse paths to pursuing a career in youth law. The UCLA School of Law alumni highlighted in this Part exemplify the varied and meaningful career paths in advocacy on behalf of children.

### VIVIANA ARCIA-QUIJANO '18

#### **Supervising Attorney, The Door Legal Services Center, New York, New York**

I am a Supervising Attorney at the Legal Services Center of The Door – a New York City-based organization specializing in comprehensive youth development services. I supervise a team of attorneys and paralegals representing young people in removal proceedings before the Immigration Court and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). I have grown as an attorney through the guidance of past and present supervisors, so I became a Supervising Attorney in part to use my knowledge and experience to mentor and support other attorneys. I also directly represent youth before the Immigration Court and USCIS.

As a removal defense attorney, I represent youth placed in removal proceedings who the Department of Homeland Security seeks to deport. Many of my clients flee persecution, violence, and poverty in their

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<sup>48</sup> *Foster Youth Benefits Eligibility (March 2024)*, JOHN BURTON ADVOCS. FOR YOUTH, [https://jbay.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Foster-Youth-Benefits-Eligibility-Chart\\_March-2024.pdf](https://jbay.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Foster-Youth-Benefits-Eligibility-Chart_March-2024.pdf) (last visited Sept. 12, 2024).

<sup>49</sup> *Universal School Meals Help All California Children Thrive*, CAL. BUDGET & POL'Y CTR. (Mar. 2024), <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/universal-school-meals-help-all-california-children-thrive/>.

home countries and come to the United States to seek refuge. My job is to prevent youth from being deported and help them obtain lawful status and remain in the United States.

Although The Door represents youth in a wide range of relief applications, many clients are eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) – a type of remedy that provides legal protections to immigrant children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent. Once granted SIJS, youth are eligible to apply for permanent residence and are afforded a pathway to citizenship. I work with eligible youth to apply for SIJS and permanent residence. Prior to petitioning for SIJS, youth must obtain special orders from a juvenile/Family Court, specifically finding that they were placed in the custody of an agency/individual, like a guardian or custodian. As such, I represent youth in guardianship/custody proceedings in Family Court that involve submitting client affidavits, attorney affirmations, and eliciting testimony from clients and proposed guardians/custodians. The process can be emotionally taxing for clients, many of whom are also experiencing poverty, unstable housing, and lack of access to education. Thankfully, The Door offers a holistic defense model that provides youth with social workers who can connect them to counseling, education, benefits, and housing. The work is difficult and the system an unjust one, but it's ultimately rewarding to see youth obtain immigration relief and a rare pathway to citizenship.

Before working at The Door, I was a Staff Attorney at The Bronx Defenders (BXD) – a public defender office in The Bronx, NY. There, I represented detained and non-detained noncitizens before the Immigration Court and USCIS. Because most of my clients had interacted with the criminal legal system, my work focused on advising clients about the immigration consequences of criminal arrests and convictions and demonstrating to Immigration Judges and USCIS how my clients were more than their contact with the criminal legal system – they were parents, hard workers, community members – and thus should be released from immigration detention and granted relief. My time at BXD was a formative one. I obtained experience advocating before the Immigration Court and other immigration agencies and deepened my understanding of the ways in which the criminal legal system and immigration system intersect to marginalize immigrants. My work at BXD solidified my commitment to representing vulnerable immigrant populations like youth seeking immigration relief.

My commitment to immigration defense work, while grounded in my own experience as a Cuban immigrant, was fostered at UCLA Law. I developed as an advocate in immigration-related clinical courses like the Criminal Defense Clinic and in the community-based clinics of El Centro Legal. I acquired a foundational understanding of the American immigration system and the ways in which racism and xenophobia contribute to that system in classes like Immigration Law and Critical Race Theory. UCLA Law also connected me to a network of faculty, staff, and practitioners who mentored me and have supported me well after I graduated law school.

My time at UCLA Law and organizations like BXD and The Door led me to devote my legal career to representing immigrant youth. The youth I work with are incredibly resilient and have so much to offer the world. I hope to use my law degree to help them avoid deportation, obtain lawful status, and empower them along the way.

## VALERIE GRAB '03

### **Executive Director and Co-Founder, The Children's Law Project of Hawai'i, Hilo, Hawai'i**

In 2017, I co-founded The Children's Law Project of Hawai'i. The mission of The Children's Law Project is to provide youth who come before the family courts on the Big Island of Hawai'i with holistic advocacy that meets their physical, emotional, and educational needs while ensuring that their voices are heard in court and throughout Hawai'i's child welfare system. In my organization, we primarily serve as Guardians *ad litem* (or best interest attorneys/advocates) for children who are involved in dependency, delinquency, contested custody, and/or domestic violence proceedings.

While many see Hawai'i as a tropical paradise and vacation destination, it is also home to intergenerational trauma, rampant drug use and widespread poverty. Our community's keiki (or children) are often caught in the fray of homelessness, domestic violence, and neglect. The Children's Law Project of Hawai'i was born from my experiences in child welfare advocacy across the nation. I started my legal career as a Staff Attorney at Public Counsel Law Center in Los Angeles, focused on homeless advocacy and legal work for homeless and runaway youth and children detained in the county's juvenile halls. From there, I worked as a Research Attorney for the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court in Los Angeles, the Honorable Michael Nash (who remains one of my personal heroes). My family eventually relocated to Washington, D.C., where I worked on behalf of survivors of domestic violence at the Legal Aid Society of D.C.

When my family relocated to Hawai'i in 2010, I worked first as a Staff Attorney and then as the Hilo Office's Managing Attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i. I was amazed (maybe appalled) to discover that in our judicial circuit (and in fact throughout the state) there was no law firm dedicated to providing legal advocacy for children in foster care proceedings. Such organizations existed in every other jurisdiction I had worked, and my law partner and I believed in the importance of having specialized child welfare advocates to represent children in these matters and establishing an organization with a core mission of improving the child welfare system on our island.

The first home for the Children's Law Project was a desk in the bottom floor of my house, next to my elliptical machine. Our first client was a sixteen-year-old homeless boy whose mother had abused him, kept him from going to school, and then did not allow him to return home once he asked for help from his school counselor and Child Protective Services. When he did cry out for assistance, it was not for him, but for his five younger siblings. He has since graduated from high school, and lives in New York City working in the music industry with his stepfather. He sent me his first paystub, which I still have hanging on the bulletin board of my office.

Today The Children's Law Project of Hawai'i has three offices on the Big Island (one located near every family court on the island), four attorneys, two paralegals, an office manager, and two social workers. Our organization serves over 150 children a year and collaborates with the Hawai'i State Judiciary and the Departments of Human Services, Health and Education. With a budget nearing \$800,000 a year, we continue to expand the scope of our child welfare services throughout Hawai'i and are committed to recruiting and training the next generation of child welfare advocates in Hawai'i.

## **KAVEH LANDSVERK '20**

### **Attorney, Children's Law Center of California, Monterey Park, California**

In the hazy first days of law school, one piece of advice from a professor has stuck with me over the years: the practice of law, she noted, has obvious limitations as a vehicle of social change. And yet the value of radical lawyering often lies in the malleability and portability of the work. There are so many particular injustices to which insufficient legal attention has yet been paid. Find yours, she advised, and get to work.

From the beginning of law school, I was sure that upon graduation I wanted to be a public defender. My first summer I externed with the Federal Public Defender's office in Los Angeles, and my second with the Public Defender Service (PDS) in Washington, D.C. At PDS, I worked specifically with the Juvenile Services Program, a unique project that provided direct legal representation to children detained in D.C.'s two youth detention facilities. My office was in the detention center, and each day I represented incarcerated young folks in penal disciplinary hearings and other matters.

My clients had a host of overlapping legal and nonlegal concerns, but there was one thing I hadn't expected that continued to come up in our conversations. Many of my young, detained clients happened to be parents, and for those that were, their children were at the forefront of their priorities. They wanted to know when they would be able to visit with their child, they were worried about losing custody and their parental rights, and, more than anything, they wanted to make sure their child was safe while they were locked up. It's an obvious thing, and yet still striking to witness first-hand: for my parenting clients, often the worst part about being detained was being separated from their children.

My plan upon returning to UCLA Law after that summer was to be a public defender focusing specifically on juvenile justice, but then a fellowship opportunity arose which, after my experiences in D.C., immediately caught my eye. The fellowship offered the chance to develop an early defense program representing parenting youth in the Los Angeles County foster care system. Those youth had, by definition, already experienced the trauma of family separation. And when they themselves became parents, their children were removed from their care (by the same family policing agency which had removed them from their parents) at extraordinarily high rates.

The fellowship allowed me to work alongside a parent support case manager with lived experience in the dependency system to build a program at Children's Law Center of California that would defend our clients from child welfare intervention at the earliest possible stage. The fellowship soon turned into a staff attorney position in which I was able to continue developing our early defense project from the ground up. Working in tandem with our case managers, we built a holistic representation project that aims to keep families together by equipping our young parents to effectively defend themselves from the family regulation systems.

At no point in law school did I imagine that I would practice in dependency rather than criminal court. But as our program has grown in the years since graduation, I find myself returning to my professor's advice to be open to where the work takes you and what people are telling you they need. Dependency court remains an arena in which the lack of due process (as compared to the criminal legal system) is immediately striking.



This has obvious implications for families, but also creates opportunities for creative legal advocacy and meaningful structural interventions. It has been nourishing to explore those pathways alongside my colleagues and clients, and I am always available to talk more about them with folks thinking of getting into dependency practice or other adjacent areas of youth law.

### **VIVIAN WONG '17**

#### **Supervising Attorney, Youth Justice Education Clinic, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, California**

Growing up as an immigrant, disabled woman of color, and a daughter of two public school teachers, I became very passionate about disability and racial justice and education equity. Prior to law school, I had worked as a college counselor at a small nonprofit inside a large urban high school. I worked closely with young people who were the first in their families to apply for college, many of whom grappled with abusive families, unstable homes, gang violence, and anxiety over poverty and legal status or how to identify with their disability. I applied to law school knowing I wanted to help these young people in a more impactful way, but without a clear understanding of how.

In law school, I finally learned the vocabulary and critical race theory to explain how our education system was rooted in historical oppression and how it was designed to exclude students of color and students with disabilities. Throughout my time at UCLA Law, I took advantage of every opportunity to serve this marginalized population and better grasp its needs. During my 1L summer, I clerked at the National Center for Youth Law where I gained a better understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline and how to address it through impact litigation. I also participated in Professor Jyoti Nanda's Youth and Justice Clinic, where we worked closely with the Alliance for Children's Rights to represent system-involved clients in education advocacy. I also externed at Public Counsel to support the education litigation they were pursuing at the time that pushed forward the concept of how schools should address trauma as a disability. All of these working experiences taught me powerful lessons that I still rely on in my work.

Importantly, for my 2L summer, I interned at the East Bay Community Law Center in the Education, Defense, and Justice for Youth Clinic. Learning how education advocacy and juvenile defense should work together gave me the inspiration to apply for a postgraduate public interest law fellowship. Applying for fellowships is truly a strenuous process. At the end of that summer, my father had just passed away unexpectedly and I would not have been able to submit my fellowship applications without the tremendous support of Cathy Mayorkas, who was the Director of the Epstein Program in Public Interest Law and Policy. Fortunately, I was awarded a Skadden Fellowship which allowed me to pursue the career of my dreams: to provide trauma-informed special education legal services to students involved in the juvenile injustice and foster care systems.

Given how relatively niche this area of law is, I was able to create my own support networks and grow expertise in this subject matter – because I had to! There were few folks doing this work in Los Angeles County, despite how much need existed. Often the work felt exciting, because I was challenging the education system to care about the young people it was again designed to exclude, while educating the justice system on my clients' right to receive an appropriate education.

Now, I co-teach the Youth Justice Education Clinic and Education Policy Practicum at Loyola Law School and have the pleasure of training law students to do the work I am so passionate about. Much of how I design these courses is based on how I was trained by my mentors or how I would have liked to learn the skills I rely most on in the work. My hope is that I inspire others to commit to a career in holistic advocacy, to see our clients as whole persons, and uphold their dignity, as we help them navigate grueling legal processes and systemic oppressions.

### III. YOUTH LAW PRACTICE SITES

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Part III is designed to introduce students to a range of practice sites for youth law. This Guide organizes the practice sites into three groups: nonprofit organizations, public defender offices, and university-affiliated employers. This listing is meant to provide a sampling of the kinds of practice sites that exist, not to provide an exhaustive cataloging of all opportunities. Students should use this as a starting point and conduct additional research regarding groups that they find of interest.

#### NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

*“The Children’s Law Project of Hawai’i was born from my experiences in child welfare advocacy . . . Our organization serves over 150 children a year and collaborates with the Hawai’i State Judiciary and the Departments of Human Services, Health and Education.”*

- Valerie Grab, Executive Director and Co-Founder, The Children’s Law Project of Hawai’i, UCLA School of Law Class of 2003

Nationally, there are many nonprofit organizations that offer free legal and social services to children and families. Attorneys in these nonprofit organizations may provide direct services, conduct policy and legislative advocacy, and engage in impact litigation on various civil and juvenile legal issues, including healthcare, foster care, public benefits, and housing. For a more complete listing of nonprofit organizations that work with youth and children, see the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s [List of Advocate for Change in Juvenile Justice](#) and National Youth Justice Network’s [member list](#).

#### ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHTS (LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA)

Alliance for Children’s Rights (ACR) is a nonprofit organization who provides legal representation, supportive services, and policy advocacy on behalf of children, TAY, and families impacted by the foster system across the state of California. ACR provides free legal services in the areas of healthcare, public benefits, education, guardianships, adoptions, caregiver supports, and extended foster care. Additionally, ACR identifies systemic issues and barriers that impact their clients and advocates for broad solutions and improvements through legislative change. To learn more, visit <https://allianceforchildrensrights.org>.

#### CENTER ON JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA)

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJ CJ) is a nonprofit organization that works towards reducing incarceration through direct services, technical assistance, and policy research and advocacy at both the state and local levels. CJ CJ has numerous model direct service programs, including behavioral mental health, diversion, and re-entry services, that cater to both adults and youth at various stages of the criminal and juvenile legal systems. Their policy and research focus on upending the cycle of the criminal and

juvenile legal systems; improving community safety; creating legislative change; and developing leadership skills for formerly incarcerated and system-impacted people. To learn more, visit <https://www.cjcj.org/>.

#### **CHILDREN’S DEFENSE FUND (WASHINGTON D.C., CALIFORNIA, MINNESOTA, MISSISSIPI, NEW YORK, OHIO, SOUTH CAROLINA, TEXAS, TENNESSEE)**

The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is a nonprofit child advocacy organization that focuses on policy advocacy, community organizing, direct services, and public policy. CDF advocates for children at the federal, state, and community levels across the United States for policies that promote just and caring communities, family stability and economic mobility, children’s health and healing, education for civic life and work, and early learning and development. To learn more, visit <https://www.childrensdefense.org/>.

#### **CHILDREN’S LAW CENTER OF CALIFORNIA (MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA)**

Children’s Law Center of California (CLC) is the court-appointed counsel of children and youth with dependency court cases in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer Counties. CLC works to ensure their clients are educated about their legal rights and can actively participate in legal proceedings. Attorneys also advocate for their clients’ safety and well-being throughout the court process. As part of their holistic practice model, CLC provides multidisciplinary advocacy for commercially sexually exploited youth, transition age youth, and expectant and parenting youth, among others. In addition to direct services, CLC conducts policy and systems reform advocacy statewide. To learn more, visit <https://www.clccal.org/>.

#### **COLLECTIVE FOR LIBERATORY LAWYERING (LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA)**

The Collective for Liberatory Lawyering (C4LL) is a grassroots movement lawyering organization that works to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and create conditions for transformative education. C4LL partners at the state and local levels with base-building organizations to create strategies for school transformation and decriminalization of families and youth. Attorneys work with organizers, parents, and community members to monitor school district and county policy implementation spaces, and to co-create and democratize legal education tools to build the capacity of parent leaders to engage in education defense. For more information, visit <https://www.c4ll-ca.org/>.

#### **HOPE4FAMILIES (LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA)**

Hope4Families is a community based nonprofit public interest law firm that specializes in special education law. Hope4Families’s attorneys advocate for children to receive special education services in schools and represent students at due process hearings. Hope4Families is based in Los Angeles, but serves families throughout California. To learn more, visit <https://hope4familiesca.org/>.

#### **IMMIGRANT DEFENDERS LAW CENTER (LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA)**

Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef) provides full-scope deportation defense, legal consultations, legal education, and holistic social services support to detained and non-detained immigrant children. ImmDef represents children living throughout Southern California, in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Kern Counties. Attorneys represent children in fighting their deportation cases through applying for asylum, special immigrant juvenile status, or visas for victims of crimes and human trafficking. To learn more, visit <https://www.immdef.org/>.

### JUVENILE LAW CENTER (PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA)

Juvenile Law Center (JLC) is a national advocacy organization that works to reduce the harm of the child welfare and justice systems, with the ultimate goal of abolishing them so all youth can thrive. Attorneys at JLC use impact litigation, appellate advocacy, amicus briefs, policy reform, trainings, youth advocacy programming, and strategic communications to create systemic change in the juvenile legal system. JLC works on issues that include banning solitary confinement; limiting the prosecution of children as adults; preventing youth homelessness; and eliminating fines and fees in the juvenile legal system. To learn more, visit <https://www.jlc.org/>.

### KIDS IN NEED OF DEFENSE (ATLANTA, BALTIMORE, BOSTON, HOUSTON, NEWARK, NEW YORK CITY, LOS ANGELES, WASHINGTON DC, SAN FRANCISCO, SEATTLE, AND TIJUANA, CIUDAD JUÁREZ, MEXICO CITY, AND TAPACHULA, MEXICO)

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) is an international nongovernmental organization that provides unaccompanied migrant children who are facing removal proceedings with holistic legal and psychosocial support services. Attorneys provide direct legal representation, education, and family reunification services on behalf of their clients. Additionally, KIND partners with governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to provide trainings, technical assistance, and capacity strengthening to promote safe and developmentally appropriate practices in federal immigration custody cases, uphold children's rights to due process and fundamental fairness in court, and advocate for durable solutions to child migration that are grounded in the best interests of the child. To learn more, visit <https://supportkind.org/>.

### LAWYERS FOR CHILDREN (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)

Lawyers for Children (LFC) is a public interest law firm that provides free legal services to youth in the foster system. Every case is worked on together by an attorney and a social worker. Attorneys provide individual representation for youth in proceedings involving abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights, voluntary foster care placement, adoption, guardianship, paternity, custody, and visitation. LFC also offers specialized services for certain populations of foster youth, including LGBTQIA+ youth, commercially sexually exploited youth, youth with mental health and developmental disabilities, and immigrant youth. Attorneys also work on legislative advocacy and class action litigation with the goal of systems change. To learn more, visit [www.lawyersforchildren.org](http://www.lawyersforchildren.org).

### LEGAL AID CHICAGO (CHICAGO, ILLINOIS)

Legal Aid Chicago provides free legal services in civil cases to vulnerable groups, including children and families, living in Cook County. Attorneys assist clients with legal issues related to personal safety and financial stability and juvenile record sealing. They also assist children with education-related legal issues involving school discipline and special education. To learn more, visit <https://legalaidchicago.org/>.

### LEGAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA)

Legal Services for Children (LSC) employs a holistic social work and legal partnership services model to provide free legal and social-emotional support services to Bay Area youth. Attorneys provide direct representation to youth in the areas of immigration, education, guardianship, and dependency. Attorneys

also provide technical assistance, information, and referrals via LSC’s warmline, and engage in policy advocacy and training for community members. To learn more, visit <https://www.lsc-sf.org/>.

#### [NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNSEL FOR CHILDREN \(DENVER, COLORADO\)](#)

The National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) is a national non-profit professional membership and advocacy organization based in Denver. NACC’s mission is to advocate for children in the child welfare system and advance policies that enhance children’s opportunities and rights, such as the right to counsel. NACC also trains and certifies attorneys who represent children, families, and agencies as Child Welfare Law Specialists. Attorneys and advocates engage in public policy and legislative advocacy and provide NACC members with trainings, programs, and resources that improve legal representation for youth, parents, and agencies. To learn more, visit [www.naccchildlaw.org/](http://www.naccchildlaw.org/).

#### [NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH LAW \(OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA AND WASHINGTON, D.C.\)](#)

The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) advocates for youth on issues of education, health, immigration, foster care, commercial sexual exploitation, and youth justice through impact litigation, policy advocacy, and research. NCYL attorneys work with plaintiffs, co-counsel, and community organizations to engage in impact litigation, and develop and implement policy change at the federal, state, and local levels through lobbying, coalition building, and community organizing. To learn more, visit <https://youthlaw.org/>.

#### [603 LEGAL AID: THE YOUTH LAW PROJECT \(YLP\), \(CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE\)](#)

The Youth Law Project (YLP) of 603 Legal Aid provides free legal services to youth who are facing suspensions or expulsions from school, or who have come into contact or are at risk of contact with the juvenile legal system. Attorneys advocate for their clients to obtain the educational, health, and mental health services they need to stay in their communities and schools, and out of the juvenile legal system. To learn more, visit <https://www.603legalaid.org/about-the-youth-law-project>.

#### [NORTHWEST JUSTICE PROJECT: THE NATIVE AMERICAN UNIT \(NAU\) \(WASHINGTON STATE\)](#)

The Native American Unit (NAU) of the Northwest Justice Project serves Native communities statewide. The NAU works on reforming state and federal agencies’ policies and practices that have had disproportionate adverse impacts on Native children and families. The NAU serves youth and families seeking legal assistance in the areas of education, dependency, housing and economic insecurity, and civil legal issues related to crime victimization. Additionally, the NAU conducts outreach, provides community legal education, and supports other advocates working with Native people. To learn more, visit <https://nwjustice.org/NAU>.

#### [THE CHILDREN’S LAW PROJECT OF HAWAI’I \(HILO, KONA, AND KAMUELA, THE BIG ISLAND OF HAWAI’I\)](#)

The Children’s Law Project of Hawai’i is a nonprofit law firm that serves court-involved children on Hawai’i Island. The Project is comprised of attorneys, social workers, and lived-experience advocates who work collaboratively to holistically support youth’s needs and improve outcomes. Attorneys are primarily appointed as guardians *ad litem* for children in Hawai’i County court cases involving family law, dependency, guardianship, child abuse, domestic violence, truancy, or juvenile law. The Children’s Law

Project also represents non-parent caregivers in guardianship and adoption proceedings. To learn more, visit <https://www.clphi.org/>.

#### **THE DOOR (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)**

The Door provides holistic and comprehensive youth development services to youth between the ages of 12 and 24. These services include health care, education, mental health counseling, crisis intervention, career development, housing support, recreational activities, and nutritious meals. The Door also offers free legal assistance to youth with immigration, family law, foster care, landlord-tenant, public benefits and other civil legal issues. To learn more, visit <https://door.org/>.

#### **THE GAULT CENTER (WASHINGTON, D.C.)**

The Gault Center's mission is to promote justice for all children by ensuring excellence in youth defense. To that end, the Gault Center provides training, educational materials, and technical assistance to youth defenders nationwide. Additionally, attorneys conduct policy advocacy and advocate for systemic reforms to strengthen youth defense systems and encourage developmentally appropriate practices at the local, state, and national levels. Issues that the Gault Center addresses include ensuring access to counsel, prohibiting the practice of shackling, eliminating fees and costs, and raising the minimum age of prosecution, among other issues. To learn more, visit <https://www.defendyouthrights.org>.

#### **YOUTH ADVOCACY FOUNDATION (BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS)**

The Youth Advocacy Foundation (YAF) addresses systemic issues in the Massachusetts juvenile legal system. Examples of work undertaken by YAF attorneys include advocating for the establishment of regional juvenile public defender offices in Massachusetts, increasing the age to be tried as an adult to eighteen years old, and ending the sentencing of youth to life without parole. YAF has an EdLaw Project in which attorneys provide education advocacy to court-involved youth. Along with direct representation and policy advocacy, the Youth Advocacy Foundation lawyers provide training, mentoring, and capacity building to youth advocates and juvenile public defenders in Massachusetts. To learn more, visit <https://www.youthadvocacyfoundation.org/>.

#### **YOUTH LAW CENTER (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA)**

The Youth Law Center (YLC) works to transform foster and juvenile legal systems across the nation. YLC's strategies include litigation, policy reform, public education, and technical assistance, all of which are child and youth-centered and research informed. YLC's issue areas include protecting children's rights through ending: the use of inappropriate group care, the incarceration of youth in the foster system, and the handling children in the adult court system, among other issues. Additionally, YLC focuses on promoting effective parenting through its Quality Parenting Initiative, and healthy transitions of system-involved youth into adulthood. To learn more, visit <https://www.ylc.org/>.

### **PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICES**

Public defender offices employ most attorneys representing youth in the juvenile and adult systems. The defense lawyers in public defender offices represent youth involved in juvenile delinquency proceedings and aim to prevent their clients from being transferred into adult court. For a more complete listing of public

defender offices and tips for obtaining positions in public defense, see the [Guide to California Public Defender Offices](#) and the [Guide to Careers in Public Defense](#).

#### LAW OFFICE OF THE COOK COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER (CHICAGO, ILLINOIS)

The Juvenile Justice Division of the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender is comprised of defense lawyers who represent youth accused of crimes. Clients of the Division are seventeen years old or younger when the incidents that trigger their cases start. The attorneys also represent youth when the State seeks to have the case transferred to adult court. To learn more, visit <https://www.cookcountypublicdefender.org/locations-and-contact/juvenile-justice>.

#### PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

At the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia (PDS), attorneys in the Trial Division represent children in delinquency matters. These cases include defending children threatened with transfer to adult court, children with serious mental illness, and children with learning disabilities. To learn more, visit <https://www.pdsdc.org/about/legal-services-divisions/trial-division>.

#### THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)

The Legal Aid Society of New York represents children and adolescents in holistic defense teams comprised of attorneys, social workers, paralegals and investigators. The Legal Aid Society has five juvenile practice teams, as well as an Education Advocacy Project, Education Law Project, and a Juvenile Rights Practice Appeals Unit. To learn more, visit <https://legalaidnyc.org/what-we-do/juvenile-justice/>.

### UNIVERSITY EMPLOYERS AND THINK TANKS

*“Now, I co-teach the Youth Justice Education Clinic and Education Policy Practicum at Loyola Law School and have the pleasure of training law students to do the work I am so passionate about . . . My hope is that I inspire others to commit to a career in holistic advocacy, to see our clients as whole persons, and uphold their dignity, as we help them navigate grueling legal processes and systemic oppressions.”*

- Vivian Wong, Supervising Attorney, Loyola Law School’s Youth Justice Education Clinic, UCLA School of Law Class of 2017

There are youth law attorneys who conduct research and teach on the subject of youth law. Research in this area identifies issues facing youth and informs policy advocacy and best practices that benefit youth. Research findings are foundational to advocacy efforts that impact the juvenile legal system and the child welfare system. Academia is important to the area of youth law because professors teach, communicate with students, and research issues that impact youth. Research leads to transparency and solutions for problems systems-involved youth face. Students can hone their research skills at UCLA Law through the [Empirical Research Group](#).

#### VERA INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE: INITIATIVE TO END GIRLS’ INCARCERATION (BROOKLYN, LOS ANGELES, NEW ORLEANS, AND WASHINGTON, D.C.)

The Vera Institute for Justice (Vera) is a national organization that researches, tests, and develops evidence-based solutions with the overall goal of ending mass incarceration and building institutions to deliver safety

and justice. Vera's Initiative to End Girls' Incarceration aims to zero out the incarceration of girls and gender-expansive youth in the country's juvenile legal system by 2030. To do this, Vera's team partners with government and community leaders to develop solutions based on community needs while advocating for broader policy changes at the state and local levels to advance the freedom and well-being of girls and gender expansive youth. To learn more, visit <https://www.vera.org/>.

#### [THE UCLA PRITZKER CENTER FOR STRENGTHENING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES \(LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA\)](#)

The UCLA Pritzker Center for Strengthening Children and Families (Pritzker Center) is a think tank comprised of attorneys, philanthropists, doctors, and students across UCLA programs that work together to create multidisciplinary approaches to solving issues in the child welfare system. They conduct research and collaborate with community leaders to identify and propose solutions to systemic injustices children, youth, and families are facing. They focus on identifying foster care entry prevention strategies and supporting equitable reform to the child welfare system. The Pritzker Center's research informs policy, and their trainings teach child welfare system actors about evidence-based best practices. To learn more, visit <https://pritzkercenter.ucla.edu/>.

#### [GEORGETOWN LAW, JUVENILE JUSTICE CLINIC \(WASHINGTON, D.C.\)](#)

The Juvenile Justice Clinic is a law clinic that focuses on delinquency and education cases. The clinic represents youth who are accused of a crime. In 2015, the faculty of the Juvenile Justice Clinic expanded its reach by establishing Georgetown Law's Juvenile Justice Initiative, which advances new policies and programs that assist youth in the juvenile system and provides training to juvenile defenders across the nation. The initiative emphasizes racial justice and advocates for a just juvenile legal system in the District of Columbia, the Mid-Atlantic region, and across the country. To learn more, visit <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/experiential-learning/clinics/our-clinics/juvenile-justice-clinic/>.

#### [MICHIGAN LAW, CHILD ADVOCACY LAW CLINIC \(ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN\)](#)

Michigan Law's Child Advocacy Law Clinic (CALC) provides direct representation to children, parents, and the Department of Health and Human Services in foster care proceedings. They also draft statutes, conduct trainings, write articles, and work on appeals. The students are trained in child welfare and procedure, preliminary hearing simulations, interviewing clients, dealing with evidence, case and trial preparation including direct and cross examination, and mock trial. They work with faculty and student colleagues from the pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, and social work departments. The clinic's work has led to systemic reform on the state and national level. To learn more, visit <https://michigan.law.umich.edu/academics/experiential-learning/clinics/child-advocacy-law-clinic-0>.

#### [STANFORD LAW SCHOOL, YOUTH AND EDUCATION LAW PROJECT \(STANFORD, CALIFORNIA\)](#)

The Youth and Education Law Project (YELP) of the Mills Legal Clinic advocates to achieve equal educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth using direct client representation, policy reform, policy research, reform litigation, and class-action litigation. Students work on case planning, development, and management skills. They engage in client interviewing and counseling, fact investigation, theory development, negotiation, and oral and written advocacy. They work on educational policy reform and



advocacy with the goal of achieving equality of educational opportunity. To learn more, visit <https://law.stanford.edu/youth-and-education-law-project/>.

#### LOYOLA LAW SCHOOL, CENTER FOR JUVENILE LAW AND POLICY (LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA)

The Center for Juvenile Law and Policy at Loyola Law School represents court-involved youth at every stage of the juvenile and education legal process. This clinic focuses on the overlap between the foster and juvenile justice systems, with the goal of helping foster youth avoid the school-to-prison pipeline. The clinic works to combat the effect that unmet special-education needs have on court involvement. Their work includes special education due process hearings, disciplinary hearings, and assessments for Individualized Education Plans. The clinic represents foster youth who are entitled to Regional Center services and/or social security relief, and students with disabilities that school systems failed to provide. The clinic works with a team that includes education advocates, criminal defense representatives, and social workers. To learn more about the center, visit <https://www.lls.edu/academics/centers/centerforjuvenilelawpolicy/>.

## IV. PREPARING FOR A CAREER IN YOUTH LAW

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This Part summarizes steps that law students can take towards becoming lawyers specializing in youth law. Course selection can enhance learning in the diverse areas that youth law attorneys practice. Students can also pursue externships during the semester and summer employment related to youth law. Engagement in extracurricular activities can also foster exposure to the field and provide opportunities to meet other students and faculty interested in youth law issues.

### COURSE SELECTION

As discussed in Part II of this Guide, youth attorneys practice in many different substantive areas. As a result, the path to course selection that students choose will vary. For example, students interested in youth defense work may focus on courses in the area of criminal law and procedure. In contrast, students interested in the intersection of youth and poverty law issues may pursue classes related to welfare benefits and public interest practice.

Courses during the first year of law school are generally all required courses. At UCLA Law, however, in the Spring semester 1Ls have the opportunity to choose an elective. Students interested in youth law may use this opportunity to select an upper-division course aligned with their interest in youth law.

During the second and third years of law school, students can choose to enroll in courses and clinics that cover youth law and areas that overlap with and tie into youth law. Examples courses include classes related to family law, poverty law, Native law, criminal law and procedure, education law, disability law, and immigration law.

Students interested in youth law should also pursue clinical courses at the law school. Clinics can provide meaningful opportunities to gain hands-on experience in serving local communities such as disadvantaged

families and children in Los Angeles. In addition, several of UCLA Law's clinics allow students to work directly with youth on legal issues, such as the Immigrant Family Legal Clinic, Community Lawyering in Education Clinic, and Street Law Clinic. More information about clinical and other course offerings is available in UCLA Law's course catalog.

Students interested in pursuing a youth law practice area that involves courtroom work should check the applicable state bar rules for becoming a certified law clerk. For example, under the California bar state rules, law students can become certified and appear in family court, dependency court, or any court if they have either successfully completed or are currently enrolled in and attending academic courses in evidence and civil procedure.

Some students interested in youth law have pursued joint degrees, such as with the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and the Department of Social Welfare at UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Even if you do not pursue a joint degree, students can enroll in courses from other departments at UCLA for law school credit. For example, students in the past have cross-registered for courses on topics of social welfare and sociology of the family. After JD students' first year, they can enroll in up to six semester units of courses in other UCLA departments during fall, winter, or spring quarters.

## **EXTERNSHIPS**

During 2L and 3L years, students can apply for a part-time or full-time externship. Externships are off-campus learning experiences in which students work under supervision of an attorney at a nonprofit organization for academic credit. Part-time externships are supplemented by a one-credit course at the law school, while full-time externships require a faculty member to tutor the student in written work and reflection connected to the externship.

Externships provide students with hands-on experience and give students a better sense of the type of day-to-day work they would be performing as future youth law attorneys. Part-time externships that UCLA Law students have undertaken related to youth law include the Alliance for Children's Rights, Learning Rights Law Center, the Collective for Liberatory Lawyering, and Public Counsel. Full-time externships provide students with an opportunity to accept an externship in a different state or city. For example, students have pursued full-time externships at specialized juvenile division public defender office unit, such as the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia.

## **EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES**

Students are encouraged to seek out extracurricular activities that expose them to the varied legal opportunities to serve youth and meet other students interested in youth law.

For example, UCLA Law has a student Chapter of the National Lawyers' Guild, an organization of progressive lawyers that works locally, nationally, and internationally on reforming the political and economic system. Lawyers, law students, and legal workers work together to make political and social change in peoples' best interests. Students interested in youth law can contribute their perspectives and

convictions to NLG and focus on youth issues in the context of NLG's broader social and political goals. To learn more visit <https://law.ucla.edu/life-ucla-law/student-organizations/national-lawyers-guild>.

The UCLA Law Students for Decarceration (LSFD) advances justice in the criminal law system through promoting criminal law dialogue, practice, policy reform, scholarship and career development. This student organization offers a forum for UCLA Law students to contribute to criminal law practice discourse and policymaking, and students who are interested in youth law can contribute to the forum in this capacity. To learn more, visit <https://law.ucla.edu/life-ucla-law/student-organizations/law-students-decarceration>.

Law Students for Immigrant Justice work to advance efforts that serve immigrants in the Los Angeles community. This student organization facilitates immigration-related dialogue, connects UCLA Law students with alums in the immigration field, and organizes volunteer opportunities with community sites that provide free and low-cost legal services to immigrants. Students interested in the intersection of immigration law and youth law could participate by bringing awareness to the importance of immigration issues affecting youth, such as unaccompanied migrant youth. To learn more, visit <https://law.ucla.edu/life-ucla-law/student-organizations/law-students-immigrant-justice>.

Students can also join identity student organizations that bring together students impacted by the youth legal system. For example, the Bruin Guardian Scholars is an identity organization that brings together current and former foster youth attending UCLA undergraduate and graduate programs to support each other. To learn more, visit <https://guardianscholars.ucla.edu/>.

Another example of an identity organization is Bruin Underground Scholars, an alliance of formerly incarcerated UCLA students from the undergraduate and graduate programs that support one another through their academic journeys. To learn more, visit <https://undergroundscholars.ucla.edu/>.

## **SUMMER EMPLOYMENT**

During the first year of law school, we recommend students build a public interest-focused resume focused on youth law, for example by volunteering with groups that advocate for marginalized communities including children. Although first year coursework is generally fixed, students can join student organizations and seek volunteer opportunities that expose them to public interest law including youth, family, immigration, and criminal law. Students can join moot court competitions, which improve oral advocacy and writing skills and can especially prepare students for becoming public defenders for system-involved youth.

UCLA School of Law hosts the Southern California Public Interest Career Day each year in the Spring semester. Many youth law organizations have attorneys representing them at the Job Fair, so students should sign up in advance to interview with any employer they may find of interest for a summer position. Among the organizations that regularly recruit at the Job Fair are the Children's Defense Fund, Children's Law Center of California, Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project, Kids in Need of Defense, and Levitt & Quinn Family Law Center.

Different organizations, offices, and programs have their own deadlines, but in general, 1L students should contact placements they are interested in by early December. Often 1Ls apply for positions through the Job Fair. 2L students are encouraged to contact the placements they are interested in during the beginning of the fall semester of their second year and should also participate in the Job Fair. Students who have taken the required coursework can become certified law clerks under state bar rules to appear in court under supervision of an attorney. Students can now take Evidence in their 1L year and thus be eligible to appear in court in their 1L summer.

## **PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT**

Some 2L summer employers will make permanent offers in the field of youth law. For most students, however, searching for a permanent job during 3L year is necessary. Students should apply to offices offering permanent positions as well as programs that offer post-bar clerkships or sponsor graduating students for public interest fellowships. A list of public interest organizations specializing in youth law is found in Part III of this Guide. A list of fellowship opportunities in youth law is included in this Part of the Guide.

## **PREPARING YOUR RESUME AND COVER LETTER**

Your résumé and cover letter can serve as the first impression you make on an employer. They are usually the first and main documents that youth law employers will review about you. You should first research the positions of interest. Then you should identify which of your work experiences and skills to highlight. In your résumé, you should include your paid employment and volunteer experiences as well as your academic experiences and student organization leadership positions, usually since your undergraduate years. You should include work, volunteer, and academic extracurricular activities related to children and youth as well as other public interest related experiences. For more specific information including guidelines and résumé samples, you can visit the [UCLA Public Interest Résumé Guide](#). The *UCLA Public Interest Résumé Guide* provides guidance to assist you in drafting your résumé and is tailored to law students seeking summer and post-graduate positions with public interest entities.

## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

This Part provides guidance for preparing for and responding to interview questions including sample questions that youth law practice sites may ask in their interviews.

Employers at youth law practice sites including nonprofit organizations, public defender offices, and law school clinics look for applicants who are passionate about bettering the lives of youth and who are committed to public interest work. Youth law interviews often focus on getting to know the interviewees motivations for wanting to work in youth law and for the public interest generally. Many interviews focus on the question of “Why youth law?” Interviewers want to hire interviewees who believe in the potential of youth of all backgrounds. Interviewers, particularly at public defense offices and at other sites that focus on juvenile defense, hope to hire those who understand that rehabilitative practices in response to youth

behavior are more beneficial than punitive practices. Interviewers at nonprofits and clinics particularly seek candidates who work well in teams. Within the field of youth law, there is an emphasis on hiring interviewees who demonstrate an understanding of developmental science, trauma-informed care, anti-racism, anti-ableism, and cross-cultural communication.

When interviewing for summer law clerk positions or full-time attorney positions, interviewees should be prepared to address the following topics:

1. Interest in Youth Law Work Generally:
  - o Why are you interested in youth law?
  - o Do you see yourself staying in the youth law field or do you want to work in youth law for a while and then move on to something else?
  - o What about your background has led you to pursue this work?
  - o Do you feel comfortable sharing any personal experiences that may have contributed to your desire to do this work?
  - o What other jobs have you applied to?
  
2. Trauma-Informed Practices:
  - o Are you comfortable working with young clients who have experienced abuse?
  - o Do you have ways to cope with the emotional difficulties that can come with working in youth law?
  - o How would you deal with a young person who does not want to respond to your questions?
  - o What would you do if your young client's wishes did not match with what you viewed as being in their best interest?
  - o What would you do if you realized there was a communication barrier, such as a language barrier or cultural barrier, between you and a client?
  
3. Commitment to Zealous Client Representation:
  - o Do you think youth who commit crimes should be punished?
  - o Do you think you would have a harder time assisting a client you feel is guilty than a client who you firmly believe is innocent? Why or why not?
  - o Do you think you would have any issues defending someone accused of a particularly disturbing or gruesome crime?
  - o Is there a certain type of charge for which you would be unable to defend a client?
  
4. Ability to Relate to Young Clients:
  - o Do you think you will be able to work well with young people who may have very different backgrounds from your own?
  - o Do you have any experience working with vulnerable or stigmatized populations?
  - o Imagine you are a summer law clerk/attorney at our office attempting to interview a client. The client is completely unresponsive to your questions and refuses to speak to you. What would you do?

5. Interest in Working at the Site:
  - o How did you find out about our nonprofit organization/office/clinic?
  - o Why are you interested in our nonprofit organization/office/clinic?
  - o Why do you want to be in this city?
  - o Where do you want to practice after law school?

## **POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS IN YOUTH LAW**

Students interested in pursuing careers in youth law should consider applying to post-graduate fellowships. Post-graduate fellowships typically provide recent graduates with a salary award to work in a public interest job for up to two years. Most post-graduate fellowships below are for the year after graduation, and some allow for lawyers to apply after a clerkship or up to two years out of law school. Students should check the rules of each specific fellowship.

A post-graduate fellowship can be a meaningful learning experience for a recent graduate to learn about a specific field and receive valuable training and experience that lead to permanent employment. Fellowships also provide an opportunity to design a unique project that fills a gap in existing legal services.

Below we list fellowship opportunities that can support projects related to youth justice, family policing, and other areas within youth law.

### **THE SOL & HELEN ZUBROW FELLOWSHIP IN CHILDREN'S LAW**

The Sol & Helen Zubrow Fellowship in Children's Law is a two-year fellowship at the Juvenile Law Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Recent law graduates awarded this two-year fellowship will work with the Youth Advocacy Program of the Juvenile Law Center. Fellows participate in legislative, policy, and appellate advocacy, in addition to providing technical assistance and training to other youth advocates. To learn more, visit <https://jlc.org/careers/fellowships>.

### **EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS FELLOWSHIP**

Equal Justice Works (EJW) provides two-year fellowships to recent law school graduates who undertake public interest projects at sponsoring nonprofit host organizations. Applicants propose a new and innovative project of their own design or can apply to join an established program at an existing nonprofit organization. EJW's mission is to advocate for individuals who are not adequately represented due to systemic barriers and past fellows have practiced in diverse areas of youth law, including special education and employment discrimination against youth with criminal records. EJW fosters connections to the EJW support-system and a public interest network for the rest of their fellows' careers. To learn more, visit <https://www.equaljusticeworks.org/become-a-fellow/>.

### **GEORGE N. LINDSAY CIVIL RIGHTS FELLOWSHIP**

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, one of the nation's leading racial justice legal organizations, sponsors a one-year George N. Lindsay Civil Rights Fellowship at their Washington, DC office. Fellows can work in Voting Rights, Economic Justice, Criminal Justice, Educational Opportunities, Public Policy, Fair Housing and Community Development, and Digital Justice. Once the Fellowship

Committee selects semi-finalists from the applicants, they can propose a youth justice project proposal. To learn more, visit [https://www.lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/20220505\\_2023-2024-George-N.-Lindsay-Civil-Rights-Fellowship-Final-.pdf](https://www.lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/20220505_2023-2024-George-N.-Lindsay-Civil-Rights-Fellowship-Final-.pdf).

### GEORGETOWN LAW FELLOWSHIPS

Georgetown has four youth justice fellowships: The E. Barrett Prettyman/Stuart Stiller Fellowship; The Racial Justice and Youth Defense Fellowship; The Racial Justice and Youth Defense Fellowship; The Juvenile Defense and Policy Fellowship Program; and The Investigative Internship Program. To learn more about the various Georgetown Law Fellowships relating to youth justice, visit <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/experiential-learning/clinics/our-clinics/juvenile-justice-clinic/fellowships-and-internships/>.

### JUSTICE CATALYST FELLOWSHIP

The Justice Catalyst Fellowship is a one-year project-based fellowship, with a potential for a one-year renewal. Most projects are hosted at U.S. nonprofits, although some are with government agencies, unions, and private public interest law firms. The fellowship funds social justice lawyering and affirmative litigation with the goal of improving the lives of marginalized groups of people, those facing poverty, and low wage workers. Applicants can propose projects that are focused on youth law. To learn more, visit <https://catalystfellowships.org/fellowships/>.

### SKADDEN FELLOWSHIP

The Skadden Fellowship is a two-year project-based fellowship for recent law school graduates to pursue public interest law full time. The mission of the Skadden Fellowship is to improve legal services for economically disadvantaged groups of people and advance social justice. Applicants can design their dream job in the public interest and have the opportunity to fund it through this competitive fellowship. Skadden Fellows have worked on a wide range of projects serving people in need including projects related to children's rights. To learn more, visit <https://www.skaddenfellowships.org>.

### SOROS JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP

Soros Justice Fellowships are eighteen months long and fund lawyers as well as advocates, grassroots organizers, researchers, and others with unique perspectives to undertake full-time criminal justice reform projects at the local, state, and national levels. The fellowship may be undertaken with the support of a host organization. Projects may include policy research, litigation, public education work, and coalition building. Past fellows have represented young people in delinquency hearings, advocated for youth with disabilities, and provided representation for immigrant families affected by domestic violence. To learn more, visit [https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/soros-justice-fellowships?filter\\_past\\_year=1997%2C1998&eligibility=1](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/soros-justice-fellowships?filter_past_year=1997%2C1998&eligibility=1).

### UCLA PUBLIC INTEREST FELLOWSHIPS

Students should consult with the Public Interest Office regarding the most up-to-date information on UCLA-specific fellowships. As of the publication of this Guide, UCLA has a UC President's Public Service Law Fellowship, the Post-Graduate Public Service Law Fellowship, that provides funding for post-graduate work to make it more accessible for students who want to pursue public interest law careers but might otherwise be deterred due to financial need. The fellowship funds selected law school graduates' work at a

public service organization. The law school manages the application process and selects the fellowship recipients. To learn more, visit <https://www.ucop.edu/public-service-law-fellowships/>.

## CONCLUSION

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The goal of this Guide is to spread awareness about the important work being done in youth law and to give students a general roadmap toward pursuing a fulfilling career in the field. The powerful alumni narratives contained in this Guide attest to the varied and rewarding paths that UCLA Law graduates have taken to make a difference in the lives of young people.

As this Guide explains, the field of youth law is varied and includes dependency law, guardianship law, education rights law, youth defense, immigration law, and public benefits. Dependency law involves matters related to abused or neglected children, including whether to terminate a parent's legal rights to care and custody of their child. Guardianship law is the process of determining who has physical custody and who can make decisions on behalf of a child when a parent is unable to care for them. Education rights law is about protecting students' and families' rights to access educational services and support, and includes the defense of students in school discipline hearings. Youth defenders represent and protect the rights of young people in the juvenile legal system. Immigration law is the practice of helping children qualify for lawful status in the United States, including permanent residence or citizenship in the U.S. and includes removal defense. Public benefits law can give youth access to benefits they are eligible for, including foster benefits, cash aid, medical coverage, or food stamps.

During law school, students can gain a basic understanding of the substantive areas in which youth law attorneys practice through their course work and enhance that learning with hands-on opportunities gained in clinics, externships, and summer internships. Recent graduates can undertake exciting projects in youth law through post-graduate fellowships and obtain permanent employment through organizations that regularly hire in this area, such as public defender offices, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. UCLA School of Law can help you navigate your way to becoming a youth law attorney.