



May 25, 2022

NACC Nomination Letter for Alex Cinney

I write, along with Mimi Laver, Director of Legal Representation at the ABA Center on Children and the Law and Phyllis Stricklan, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Children's Law Center, to enthusiastically nominate Alex Cinney of University of Miami School of Law for the Outstanding Student Award. We have all had the pleasure of working with Alex, a super star law student who devoted her law school career to child and family advocacy. She excelled as an intern with the University of Miami School of Law Children & Youth Law Clinic (UMCYLC) and the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law, prompting each organization to extend her internship and assign more sophisticated responsibilities. She rose to the challenge with well-rounded legal skills, deft organizational and people skills, and compassion, all while learning and growing with humility and grace. In a fitting culmination of her law school career, she received a post-graduate Equal Justice Works fellowship to launch a pre-petition civil family defense project at the UMCYLC.

Alex came to law school knowing that she wanted to do child advocacy, after serving as an undergraduate intern with the Massachusetts CPS agency and a staff guardian ad litem with Florida's equivalent of a CASA program. In her 2L year, she was selected for the UMCYLC where she deepened her understanding of the child welfare system and learned practical lawyering skills. Under the direct supervision of my colleague Bernie Perlmutter, she and a partner handled a case load of 7 children and young adults in the foster care system on a diverse range on issues including subsidized guardianships for clients with disabilities, independent living benefits, a motion to unseal a client's adoption records following a failed adoption, and consumer advice to a former foster youth with outstanding medical bills. Alex developed strong, trusting relationships with her clients, and advocated tirelessly to ensure that her clients needs were met. She handled all aspects of her cases with diligence and good judgment. She was engaged and thoughtful both in classroom discussion and in developing strategies for her individual clients. She was constantly making connections between the issues in her individual cases and class discussions about systemic issues. We selected Alex to return to the UMCYLC during her 3L year as a Fellow, with responsibilities for mentoring new interns, conducting clinic intake, and helping with more complicated client matters or advocacy work.

In the summer after her second year, Alex interned with the ABA Center on Children and the Law. As Mimi Laver details in her supporting letter, Alex took the lead on the Center's efforts around national reunification month. Among other things, she empathetically listened to, and documented the narratives of, parent reunification heroes, further expanding her understanding of the issues faced by families entangled in the system. Because of the quality of work she began during the summer on a new Race Equity Toolkit for the Family Justice Initiative, the ABA asked her to stay on in her 3L year as the co-chair of the committee working on the Race Equity Toolkit, along with Phillis Stricklan. The committee included a number of

experienced attorneys and social workers and, as Phyllis details in her supporting letter, Alex facilitated the group's work with poise, organization and a willingness to do heavy lifting where appropriate and useful to move things along. I was a participant in the group and, having facilitated working groups and served on many working groups, Alex mastered the nuanced art of effectively corralling group work better than many experienced attorneys. She left the project at the end of her 3L year with near finished work product, working right up until the very end to follow through on important feedback from the group by facilitating a focus group with parent advocates. The toolkit project culminated in Alex joining Phyllis and another experienced attorney to present the toolkit at the ABA Parent Representation conference. Alex was knowledgeable and articulate.

Alex's law school advocacy experiences inspired her to conceive an EJW fellowship proposal to provide civil legal services to families at risk of child welfare intervention in an effort to prevent family separation. From listening and really hearing her child clients in the UMCYLC and the parents she spoke to while at the ABA, Alex came to understand that helping to reduce barriers so that families living in poverty can get the resources they need without harmful child welfare intervention is one of the most powerful ways she can impact children and families. There is an urgent need in Miami to address the poverty-related drivers of child welfare involvement that result in racial disparity. Black children are only 20% of the child population, but over 60% of our out-of-home care population. In developing her EJW proposal, Alex interviewed our local child welfare agency, legal services providers, prevention providers and parents. The project consists of two main components: (i) provide direct civil legal services for parents deemed to be at risk of child welfare system involvement, and (ii) systemic advocacy and legal technical support for parents with lived experience in an effort to build parent voice and power. There is nothing similar in our community and this project is going to be incredibly impactful. The UMCYLC is thrilled to serve as the host organization, and we have already been brainstorming with other community stakeholders about long-term sustainability after the fellowship. I am fully confident that Alex has the talent and the temperament to successfully launch this important initiative in our community, and I look forward to working alongside her as she does this meaningful work.

For all of these reasons, Alex Cinney is extremely deserving of the Outstanding Law Student Award. In fact, the calibre of her contributions were at a level one would expect from an attorney already in practice, rather than a law student. This award would be a fitting way to recognize her contributions that went above and beyond to improve individual lives and the child welfare system.

Respectfully,



Kele Stewart
Professor and Co-Director, UM Children & Youth Law Clinic



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Access to Justice for Children and Families

May 21, 2022

Dear members of the NACC Outstanding Law Student Award Committee:

I am writing to strongly support the nomination of Alexandria Cinney for the 2022 Outstanding Law Student Award. Alex began interning at the ABA Center on Children and the Law in May 2021 (at the end of her 2L year) and continued to work with us through her entire 3L year. Alex is on my “very top interns of the last 24 years” list without a doubt. She is smart, analytical, organized, etc. but most importantly, she is passionate about the work she has and will do on behalf of children and families.

During Alex’s first week of her internship, she participated in the National Parent Representation Virtual Conference which, by her account, re-framed the way she was viewing children within the context of their families. She went on to work with me on National Reunification Month. When I say “worked with me” what I really mean is she took it over, organized our other Center interns, interviewed many Reunification Heroes with an empathetic ear, created the written stories about them, and did nearly every task associated with our Center’s leadership on this national effort. It was, in part, because of her interviews with impacted parents and the professionals that serve them that she started to design her Equal Justice Works Fellowship application (more on that below).

As the summer progressed, Alex worked on a new Race Equity Toolkit for the Family Justice Initiative. It was through this effort that I really saw all of Alex’s passion and talents, and why she became an extern for all of 3L. Alex started by researching similar toolkits and learned that none existed in the child welfare space. She gathered relevant, related material so the subcommittee would have a place to begin its work. In the fall of 2021, Alex became a co-chair of the committee with Phyllis Stricklan – an attorney and Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at CLC of California. Alex worked with Phyllis and the committee to create a roadmap of the Toolkit, organize the materials, interview people with lived expertise and other professionals, write narratives of anti-racist efforts across the country, and provide all the support the committee needed. In April 2022, Alex co-presented a session at the ABA Center on Children and the Law’s Access to Justice Conference about the Toolkit. She was poised and

able to generate excitement for the Toolkit by conference participants. It is a rare law student who is able to present at a national conference with the grace and confidence Alex showed. The Toolkit will be a set of concrete tools for our colleagues to use on their anti-racist journeys. It will assist practitioners in providing high-quality legal representation for parents and children and it would not be what it is without Alex's work.

Alex joined the Center on Children and the Law with much more experience with the child welfare system than our typical summer intern. She was a Staff Advocate with the Guardian ad Litem Program, worked in the Children and Youth Law Clinic, and interned with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. She had demonstrated her commitment to public service even before law school and became a Miami Public Interest Scholar. As mentioned above, Alex applied for, and was granted, an EJW Fellowship. With that Fellowship, she will be creating a pre-petition representation law clinic at the University of Miami Law School. I have no doubt that Alex and her colleagues will positively impact many families in Miami and Alex will then launch her career serving children and families.

Alex has an incredible work ethic and deep understanding of the issues facing people living in poverty who are involved in the child welfare and related systems. She has great insight into her own values and her goals for her legal career. She is a rising star in our field, and I can't wait to watch all the good she does into the future. Thank you for considering this nomination for Alex Cinney.

Sincerely,

Mimi

Mimi Laver
Director of Legal Representation
ABA Center on Children and the Law

TO: NACC

DATE: 5/24/2022

RE: PROMOTING EXCELENCE AWARD FOR A LAW STUDENT, ALEXANDRIA R. CINNEY

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Alexandria Cinney for the Outstanding Law Student Award. I have worked with Alexandria for the past year on a unique project that will surely advance the legal practice of those working with children and families. This project sponsored by the Family Justice Initiative is to develop a race equity "tool kit" for defense practitioners. Evidence of Alexandria's leadership skills and other outstanding qualities was unmistakable during the research and development of this tool kit.

For example, although a 3L law student, Alexandria ["Alex"] was a big picture person who identified various components of the tool kit, determined how to gather pertinent information and from whom, and then figured out the best way to put the information together. Her lack of actual legal practice did not prevent her from forming this high-level perspective of the project. Further, Alex's confidence yet humbleness promoted trust with others which allowed her to gather a great deal of key information and resources from a myriad of people across the country.

Additionally, I was very impressed and grateful for how organized Alex was. Even though both she and I were usually multi-tasking, her with her busy schooling and me with my work tasks, Alex followed through on her project assignments and kept track of the pledges of others. Alex demonstrated her commitment to excellent advocacy efforts for children and families, among other things, through her well-ordered, results oriented processes, and through her passionate and persuasive 2022 ABA panel presentation about the tool kit to some very seasoned attorneys, administrators, and social workers.

Lastly, this nomination is being put forward because of Alex's demonstrated dedication to client-centered practice and advancing equity and justice. Alex did not shy away from some "courageous conversations" that were had in the meetings about anti-racist representation. Further, Alex showed cultural humility and an openness to learn about issues impacting youth who are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. Notably, Alex set up (and was so excited about) a focus group with parents with lived experiences. She saw the importance of hearing from them and wanted to make sure their perspectives were given voice within the tool kit. Her attitudes and sense of justice is very impressive.

In conclusion, I strongly endorse Alexandria's nomination for the *promoting excellence award* because she stands out as a law student that others should emulate. Her organizational skills, knowledge, cultural responsiveness, and track record of following through with her commitments is something to be admired.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Stricklan
Children's Law Center of California
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion