

TO: NACC

DATE: 5/20/2022

RE: PROMOTING EXCELENCE AWARD FOR AN INDIVIDUAL, BRENDA ROBINSON

Consistency, drive, and grace are three words that come to mind in describing attorney Brenda Robinson's legal career. Although Brenda has practiced juvenile dependency law for the past 22 years, it is inspiring to know and work with a practitioner that remains focused and at times doggedly so, in getting the best results for her clients. Brenda exudes genuineness, honesty and compassion and thus easily develops trust with individuals (clients, caretakers, staff, the bench, etc.). Brenda's trustworthiness goes a long way in being respected and persuasive in court and in committee work. She is someone people want to know and follow because she demonstrates a high caliber of excellence in how she represents clients and in her work. Please consider a sampling of Brenda's accomplishments in the following areas.

Legal Representation:

As stated above, Brenda has practiced in juvenile dependency for 22 years. For three of those years, she represented children in a specialized "ICWA" courtroom. Learning the laws related to ICWA and righteously adhering to advocating for native communities is a skill Brenda consistently demonstrated.

Committee Work:

Brenda is ranked as an exceptional trial attorney by her superiors and colleagues because she delves into her cases and comes to court and to mediations focused, professionally groomed and prepared. But she extends herself further by leading out and actively participating in various committee work. This work takes time, commitment, and a desire to move the needle forward to change legal practices, organizational structures, better client outcomes (for more than just her assigned clients) and within child welfare systems at large. Brenda actively served on or currently serves on the following committees:

- Commissioner to the American Bar Association Commission for Youth at Risk (2019-2020), (2020-2021), (2021-2022)
- Member of the Strategic Planning Executive Committee for Children's Law Center of California (2020-2021). The outcome of this time consuming and arduous work resulted in a strategic plan laser focused on promoting race equity.
- CLC Mentoring committee. Brenda mentors and teaches new attorneys about case management, case analysis and strategies and interviewing and interacting with child clients and their caretakers. Brenda is involved with new hires, and they comment how Brenda is caring, patient and committed to their success.

Legal writings

Brenda co-authored an article for the Human Rights Magazine, a publication of the American Bar Association Section of Civil Rights and Social Justice Vol.47, No.1 2021 entitled:

“The Right for Children to be Present, Be Heard, and Meaningfully Participate in Their Own Dependency Court Proceedings.”

<https://www.americanbar.org/.../empowering-youth-at-risk/the-right-for-children>

Speaking Opportunities/Engagements

Sharing what she has learned through her legal practice is another way that Brenda promotes excellence in the legal profession. Brenda recently gave the following well received national and international presentations. She is a sought-after speaker because she presents the information in a well-organized, well-paced and thoughtful manner with examples of successes, failures and lessons learned that others can relate to and apply to their own work.

- Guest speaker at the 2021 Live Your Vision LIVE International Conference presenting the International Women of Courage Award.
- April 2022 ABA National Conference on Parent Representation panel speaker on “Innovative Approaches to Serving Incarcerated Parents in Dependency”, Washington, D.C.
- April 2022 ABA National Conference on Access to Justice for Children and Families panel speaker on “Things We Lost during the Pandemic: In and out of court advocacy and legal strategy to address deficits developed and widened during the pandemic”, Washington D.C.
- March 2022 National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) conference panel speaker on “Innovation Approaches for Children with Incarcerated Parents”, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 2021 Guest lecturer, Chapman University, “Women in the Law: The Need for Diversity”
- 2019 Conference Speaker on Children of Incarcerated Parents at the International Conference of Children with Incarcerated Parents, Huddersfield, UK

Awards and Recognition:

Lastly, two of the awards that Brenda has received speak to how well rounded and respected Brenda is. This certification and award are given when others see and can attest to the good work that she has accomplished.

- Certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist by the National Association of Counsel for Children in December 2021.
- Recipient of the Court Service Award presented by CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Los Angeles (AV and Santa Clarita) for outstanding legal service to the court, CASA and their clients. (2018)

In conclusion, I strongly endorse Brenda’s nomination for the ‘Promoting Excellence’ award and believe that recognizing her accomplishments and contributions to the legal field will motivate others to keep forging ahead even though being a dependency lawyer can be so demanding. I hope that I’ve displayed Brenda’s capabilities and contributions effectively. Thank you for your time.

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

Nancy Sariñana
Supervising Writ Attorney
Children's Law Center of California
sarinanan@clcla.org

May 26, 2022

Dear NACC Awards Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Attorney Brenda Robinson for the 2022 NACC Outstanding Legal Advocate Award. I have worked with Brenda for over ten years at Children's Law Center of California. Brenda is an outstanding example of the type of legal advocate each child in the child welfare system deserves. She works tirelessly to protect the well-being of children and to promote improved outcomes for children and their families.

Brenda makes significant contributions to the well-being of her clients on a daily basis. This past year in particular, Brenda exemplified zealous legal advocacy while maintaining professionalism and poise. She represented a group of children placed outside of the State of California with their grandmother. Despite the children thriving in the grandmother's care, they risked being returned to California to return to separate placements with non-relatives. Although the grandmother initially presented as aggressive and uncooperative, Brenda patiently and professionally worked with the grandmother to understand her resistance to working with others in the child welfare system. Brenda even traveled out of state to visit the children, meet the grandmother in-person, and assess the safety and well-being of the children. Brenda's ability to understand cultural differences and to actively listen allowed her to connect with grandmother in an unthreatening way. Brenda was able to look beyond the initial image grandmother presented and see a stern but loving grandmother who was providing safe care for her grandchildren. Brenda returned to California equipped with the information and assurance that allowing her clients to remain with their grandmother out of state was in their best interest. Despite resistance from the agency and legal hurdles, Brenda forged ahead, filing motions, and preparing legal arguments that zealously advocated for her clients to remain out of state with their grandmother. Thanks to Brenda's advocacy, the long-term outcome for her clients is not separate homes away from each other and family, instead her clients will be raised by their grandmother where they will enjoy shared experiences.

Brenda's passionate legal advocacy and her commitment to children in the child welfare system is the foundation that paves the way for Brenda to achieve favorable outcomes for her clients. She earns her clients' trust and respect, and she is not swayed by initial unfavorable rulings or strenuous arguments by opposing counsel. Brenda was steadfast and stayed the course on a case that was highly contested for two years. Brenda visited her client several times in his home and was consistently available to the young man when he had questions or concerns. The youth came to trust Brenda and would call her when he was in crisis. Brenda dedicated many hours to trying to understand her client's needs, consulting with several experts to assess the youth's well-being. Despite the numerous motions, exhibits, and expert witnesses, Brenda's advocacy on behalf of her client remained focus on ensuring his needs were met. In this case, like in all cases and for all children, Brenda stays the course and thinks creatively to achieve safe and favorable outcomes.

Brenda's work and advocacy is worthy of recognition and accolades. Despite her many years of experience in the child welfare system, she has not lost the passion and motivation to improve children's experiences and positively affect outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nancy Sariñana". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nancy" written in a larger, more prominent style than the last name "Sariñana".

Nancy Sariñana

Britta Roosendahl
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To Whom It May Concern,

I enthusiastically nominate Brenda Robinson for NACC's Promoting Excellence Award due to her impact in the courtroom and her steadfast support of new attorneys. I was sworn in as an attorney on my first day in Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court, where Brenda Robinson was my assigned court partner. From my first day in the courtroom, Brenda was an inspirational and supportive colleague.

Brenda Robinson expertly balances both a powerful and persuasive presence in the courtroom; as a new attorney, I did my best to emulate her tone in my own arguments. Whether questioning a difficult witness or giving a closing argument, Brenda has mastered the combination of both confidence and restraint. Our hearings can often be intense and heated – when Brenda speaks, she steadies everyone in the room. She creates space for nuances in her positions and conveys them with a sense of knowing that persuades the court. I recall discussing a contested hearing with her during my first year as an attorney, where Brenda encouraged me to think carefully about not just my argument, but also *how* to present my position to the court. In a legal practice where we generally remain seated for the entirety of our arguments, Brenda advised me to stand. She reminded me that every detail, no matter how subtle, conveys a message to the court that we have something important to say.

Despite having her own caseload, Brenda Robinson was an honest and open ear when I needed advice. The relationship between a new attorney and her supervisor is different than that between a new attorney and a seasoned, experienced colleague. Brenda was in court with me every day – she saw all of my hearings and, despite not being required to, paid attention when I made my appearances. She was the voice who pointed out my strengths before I could see them in myself. She also thoughtfully observed areas where I could improve - always with a cheerful forthcomingness that made me grateful to have a constructive friend. Even now, despite staffing a different courtroom, Brenda reaches out to me when she hears of interesting opportunities and continues to invest herself in my career.

Brenda Robinson is the sort of experienced legal advocate that shapes new attorneys by leading through example – I am grateful to have worked with her and welcome any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Britta', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Britta E.S. Roosendahl