



KAREN BASS
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
37TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

May 18, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

From her early youth, Ashley D. Williams has turned adversity into advocacy. Despite being just 32 years old, she has nearly two decades of experience in fighting for justice for her community, especially for children and families involved in the child welfare system. I cannot recommend her highly enough for recognition of the **NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award**. Ashley exemplifies excellence not only in the high-quality legal representation of her clients, but her policy advocacy throughout her academic and professional career has no doubt elevated the standards of practice in the child welfare community. Ashley has consistently demonstrated a broad range of high achievement, including in innovation, vision, leadership, legal and community involvement.

I have known her for nearly 20 years and watched her develop from a community activist into an accomplished advocate. She was a youth leader in the Community Coalition (CoCo), a grassroots organization in Los Angeles, and served as President of CoCo's South Central Youth Empowerment through Action. There she helped to organize her peers in campaigns to improve school conditions and fight against cuts to education. She began her pursuit of a legal career by fighting to attend a law magnet high school, where she turned her own experiences as a foster youth into an opportunity to mentor her peers and to organize them to confront the challenges of the social welfare system and the ways it disrupts a child's education. Ashley continued to advocate on a local and state level through college and in law school, where she proved to be very instrumental in many legislative policies and bills that have been implemented from my office, such as AB12, SB342, and others. Foster youth have low high school graduation rates; less than 10% of former foster youth graduate from college; and a vanishingly small percentage complete graduate school, as Ashley has.

Not only did Ashley graduate from UCLA but, while there, she continued to mentor current and former foster youth. Yet again, she worked to build as she climbed, co-founding the Bruin Guardian Scholars Program and the First Star Bruin Guardians Summer Academy, as a way to create systemic supports for the unique challenges faced by those who grew up in foster care. I was proud to see her achieve many well-deserved accolades there, and to see her go on to achieve her dream of attending Southwestern Law School. In law school she again distinguished herself and continued to take leadership positions as a law student, always focusing on service to those in need, both among her peers and in clinical settings. On graduation, Ashley won a highly competitive position as a law clerk to Judge Harry Pregerson in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. I was delighted when she sought an internship in my Congressional office, where she drafted a policy report and presented her results at a Congressional briefing titled, "Fostering a Culture of Silence: The Need to Improve Reporting of Sexual Abuse in Foster Care."

Ashley has proven herself unstoppable both in pursuing her professional goals and in pursuing justice for children and families. In the legal profession and in her chosen field of Dependency law, ensuring that parents are heard and provided the necessary resources to reunify with their children, she continues

to seek out leadership opportunities to contribute to child welfare reform. I have no doubt that she will ultimately achieve her goal of becoming a judge, where I expect that she will bring her passion, her insight and her intelligence to making the court system more just.

Due to her significant contributions to the rights and well being of children and families I will be Nominating Ashley as this year's **Outstanding New Lawyer**.

If I can be of any further support to this nomination, please contact my Chief of Staff Darryn Harris at Darryn.Harris@mail.house.gov or 202-225-7084.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Bass". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karen Bass
Member of Congress



The Superior Court
JUVENILE DIVISION
201 CENTRE PLAZA DRIVE
MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA 91754

CHAMBERS OF
D. BRETT BIANCO
SUPERVISING JUDGE

TELEPHONE
(323) 307-8016

May 23, 2022

NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award Committee

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to submit this letter in support of Ashley Williams' nomination for the NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award. As a judge who has observed Ms. Williams' work from the bench, I believe her to be most deserving of this recognition.

Many of the attorneys assigned to represent parents in juvenile dependency cases have only recently graduated from law school and are just beginning their legal careers. Such was the case when Ms. Williams first appeared in my courtroom as a new attorney. But what immediately set her apart from her contemporaries was her obvious passion for the work, her extraordinary confidence, and her effervescent personality. From her first day, Ms. Williams carried herself with the self-assurance of a seasoned professional. Clients can be certain that Ms. Williams cares for them, will zealously argue on their behalf, and will interject a much-needed element of compassion and humanity into her advocacy. It is all the more remarkable that Ms. Williams' personal experiences within Los Angeles County foster care have not jaded her views of the system. Rather, that experience informs her work, serves as a lodestar for her efforts, and compels her to improve the system and the lives of those who live within it.

It gives me great pleasure to support Ms. Williams in achieving the recognition that she richly deserves. I know that she would appreciate your careful consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Bianco".

D. BRETT BIANCO
Supervising Judge



The Superior Court

EDMUND D. EDELMAN
CHILDREN'S COURT
201 CENTRE PLAZA DRIVE
MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA 91754
CHAMBERS OF
D. ZEKE ZEIDLER
JUDGE

DEPARTMENT 404
TELEPHONE
(323) 307-8004

May 22, 2022

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing on behalf of Ashley Williams. I have been involved with the Los Angeles County Juvenile Dependency Court since 1992, first as an attorney representing parents and children, and now on the bench since 1999. When she was a foster child, Ashley's family was on my caseload for almost eight years, starting when she came into the system in approximately 2001 at the age of 10.

Like many children in the foster care system, Ashley struggled with issues of trust, always having her guard up. She will be the first to tell you that in a very flawed system she was one of those children often labeled as a "chronic runaway." Unless the right person looks deeper into the factors leading to this, it results in a vicious cycle of unsuccessful placements and often congregate care. But even with all of her struggles in the system, she had a drive that could not be stopped. Given that only 3% of children in the foster care system graduate from college or university, her academic success is even more significant.

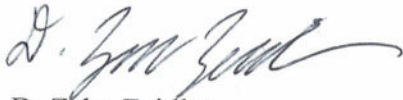
I reconnected with Ashley in 2016 when she came to tell me that she would be the Keynote speaker at the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' Celebration Graduation, recognizing those foster children graduating high school and going on to colleges and universities. I will never forget that night, thinking how, despite everything, here was a person who could do anything and be anything. Her resilience is beyond compare.

My sense of pride reached its peak in 2020 at the start of the pandemic. For the first three months, our court avoided shutting down completely by having a limited number of courtrooms open, handling initial hearings and emergency matters. I was assigned to handle initial hearings for four of the courtrooms in our building, Two to three mornings per week. I had approximately 50 different attorneys appearing before me, and Ashley was one of them. She stood out for her level of preparedness, intellect, and advocacy. She always anticipated any questions that I might have or issues that might arise.

Ashley's sound advocacy is just one component of her commitment to systemic improvement. In our discussions about the foster care system, I found that she brought a unique perspective as both a former foster child and an attorney. She is also committed to using that background to bring about real change. She is eager to participate in every conference, panel, and committee that can serve as a forum for her input. I truly believe that Ashley has the potential to have a major impact.

Ashley recently shared with me her rediscovered fifth grade graduation speech, entitled "Soaring To New Heights." (You may already have received this from her or one of her references). Soaring to new heights has continued to describe her throughout her life. I am very proud of the amazing, energetic adult (and lawyer) that she has become.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Zeke Zeidler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

D. Zeke Zeidler
Judge, Los Angeles County Superior Court
(he/el/they)
Chambers - (323) 307-8175



May 23, 2022

The Superior Court

EDMUND D. EDELMAN
CHILDREN'S COURT
201 CENTRE PLAZA DRIVE
MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA 91754
CHAMBERS OF
ANNABELLE G. CORTEZ
JUDGE

TELEPHONE
(323) 307-8012

Dear Nominating Committee:

I write this letter in support of Ms. Ashley Williams' nomination for Outstanding New Lawyer. As background, since 2019, I have been assigned to child welfare cases at the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court, department 401, currently presiding over the DREAM Court, a collaborative court that supports victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their families. Additionally, I preside over matters involving families who are deaf or hard of hearing. I have had the opportunity to get to know Ms. Williams since her assignment to DREAM court in November 2021, where she generally appears before me on a daily basis.

Ms. Williams is responsible for representing parents in a collaborative courtroom. She consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic and diligence representing her clients. Although she normally has to manage calendars in multiple courtrooms, she is always prepared, efficient, appropriately assesses her clients' needs, and is able to properly synthesize and argue the facts and the law. Notably, Ms. Williams' background as a child in foster care, gives her a unique and invaluable perspective in advancing equitable treatment for the families we serve. Ms. Williams is passionate about advocating for her client's needs and is very creative about her approaches. I wholeheartedly support Ms. Williams' nomination for Outstanding New Lawyer. Her experience, advocacy, and background are advancing equity and excellence in child welfare law and she is actively contributing to improve access to justice for those we serve.

Should you have any questions, you may reach me at (323) 307-8001.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "A. Cortez", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Hon. Annabelle G. Cortez



The Superior Court

STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE
111 NORTH HILL STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
90012
CHAMBERS OF
LAURA COHEN
COMMISSIONER

TELEPHONE
(213) 830-0830

National Association of Counsel for Children
899 North Logan Street, Suite 208
Denver, CO 80203

May 22, 2022

Dear Award Selection Committee:

It is with great pleasure that I recommend Ashley Williams for the NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award. I have been fortunate to know Ashley for many years primarily while she was a law student and at that time I was clinical faculty at Southwestern Law School. As a former foster youth Ashley has worked hard to overcome many obstacles to be where she is today. She focused her education and extracurricular experiences towards her dream of becoming a lawyer, which she succeeded, along with her goal to serve and support families in dependency court.

I saw her passion, drive and intellect while she was a participant in my Street Law Clinic where she spent a semester working with high school aged youth, many were court involved, teaching them their legal rights. In addition as Director of Public Service, I saw her commitment to the community as well as her leadership skills in many programs including Teen Court and the Public Interest Law Committee. Ashley embraced volunteerism, worked hard, recruited and trained classmates, and was always engaging and encouraging towards youth when they visited campus.

As can be seen on Ashley's resume, she has built her knowledge-base and deep understanding of these issues through her personal experiences, time in Washington DC, externing at the Children's Law Center, participating in law school legal clinics and her current position with Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers. She has expanded upon her undergraduate and law school coursework as an advocate for family reunification, permanence, health and mental services, self-sufficiency and overall well-being for the clients and families she serves. In addition to representing parents in the courtroom, she remains dedicated to bringing awareness to a range of issues impacting youth and the child welfare system locally, statewide and nationally. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Laura Cohen
Commissioner, Los Angeles Superior Court

Dear Committee:

It is my pleasure to recommend Ashley Williams for both NACC Outstanding Legal Advocate & New Lawyer Award.

I have had the honor of knowing Ashley for over 10 years as a high school student. First, I must say that Ashley knew at the very young age of 11 years old that she wanted to be a lawyer.

I am not exaggerating- **I have attached her 5th grade graduation speech that she wrote while in foster care.**

I have witnessed her grow into a reliable, responsible and an upstanding young woman at school, work, and within her community. I am elated to have been a part of her village to witness the relentless pursuit of her goals. Since that time, I have had the unique opportunity to mentor Ashley on a personal and professional level.

This recommendation will provide you with great insight into Ashley's suitability for this award and characteristics that will separate her from other applications you may receive. In the six years I have known Ashley, one quality stands out – a sense of professional maturity.

I met Ashley in my role as the Magnet Coordinator in the Dorsey High School's Teen Court & SHADES program as Ashley served as the Honorable Judge David S. Wesley's judicial clerk during her junior and senior year in high school. Dorsey's Law Magnet Program has a functioning courtroom on campus for Teen Court where students serve as jurors & decide innocence or guilt for juvenile offenders.

As a student in Dorsey's Law and Public Service Magnet Program, a graduation requirement is that students must serve as a juror or take on some courtroom role in Los Angeles County Superior Court's Teen Court Program and perform over 74 hours of community service. Ashley exceeded the requirements of both mandates.

Ashley took advantage of the unique opportunity of being in a real court room, with real cases, tasked with delivering opening statements, to even have experienced arguing the prosecution's case to judge Wesley... and working side by side with the honorable Judge Wesley,

Ashley was articulate, focused, and serious. She was an active and enthusiastic peer juror and judicial clerk and was immediately tapped to take on a leadership role because of her intelligence, maturity and confident manner.

Furthermore, it was not until after a Teen Court Session, Ashley casually asked for a ride to her foster home, that I learned that she was heavily involved in numerous organizations advocating for reform in many institutions and systems that have impacted her life.

Due to her work as a foster youth inspirational speaker, in high school, at just 17 years old, she was asked by then Presiding Judge Michael Nash to participate on a panel and be a part of child welfare reform ---on the California Blue Ribbon Commission for Children in Foster Care- She was able to bring to the fore front the abuse she endured while in foster care. It was not until later on when she presented her policy report that I was made aware that: In "2013 alone, 144,012 children placed in foster care were victims of one or more types of maltreatment, including sexual abuse. Additionally, 2,752 children reported having been sexually abused while in foster care" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families [HHS], 2015). Forty-nine states reported that 3,022 children were reported to have been victims of one or more forms of maltreatment by a foster parent, legal guardian, or group home." Despite this horrific experience she continued to succeed.

She was also the Youth President of the Community Coalition fighting for better school conditions under the QEIA Act, an organization founded by Congress woman Karen Bass.

While also being an active participant in the Teen Court & SHADES Programs. She was also served as the Teen Representative on the City of Los Angeles' West Adams Neighborhood Council (WANC). Her personal desire to serve her neighborhood was quite admirable and impressive. Miss Williams had an instrumental role in having the Neighborhood Council to donate twelve personal computers and printer to the Law and Public Service Magnet Program.

In appreciation of her commitment to the school. Dorsey's Law Library located in the back of the court room, has been renamed "*the Ashley Williams Computer Center*", and as of to date has been used...As the Jury deliberation room at our Dorsey's Teen Court Sessions. The center is also highly utilized by the Dorsey students who do not have a computer in their homes. Her unselfish concern for her peers has had a profound impact on the academic achievement of Dorsey High School 's present and future students.

Her participation with Teen Court did not stop there. Ashley continued to participate as a Teen Court Mentor during her time at UCLA and Southwestern law school.

Her commitment to this program led to Ashley not only being invited by Judge Wesley and the California Association of Youth Courts (CAYC) to provide the keynote address at the 2011 Youth Summit, as a Teen Court & SHADES participant, she was asked by the Anti-Defamation League to introduce Judge Wesley for his award. And discuss how her participation to serve as a juror ad judicial clerk ignited her goal of going to law school.

I have been fortunate to also see Ashley providing pro bono efforts in a range of programs. Ashley has been committed to helping Teen Court, a diversion program for first time youth offenders. She has been helping with Southwestern's Teen Court Club since her first day of law school and recruits her classmates to volunteer at five high schools that we partner with throughout Los Angeles County including Dorsey. She assists with training law students to help the youth during the deliberation process and to make sure the focus is on the youth as the decision makers. She helps consistently at the schools and when we host the Teen Court programs on our campus. The Teen Court Program just was awarded the California State Bar Education Pipeline Award <http://www.swlaw.edu/news/overview/teencourtprogramwinsaward> because of students such as Ashley.

HIGHLY INTELLIGENT, BRIGHT, GIFTED AND CONGENIAL YOUNG WOMAN, ASHLEY DISTINGUISHED HERSELF AT EVERY LEVEL OF HER EDUCATION AND ACHIEVED OUTSTANDING GRADES AND NUMEROUS ACADEMIC AWARDS. HER LEADERSHIP WAS NOTICED AND NURTURED AT AN EARLY AGE AND CONTINUES AS SHE PURSUES A CAREER IN LAW.


ASHLEY EMBODIES EVERYTHING THAT THE PROFESSION WOULD HOPE TO HAVE IN A YOUNG LAWYER. SHE IS AN ASSET TO THE PROFESSION.

AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THIS ATTCHED LETTER – SHE IS NOW A LAWYER!

Respectfully,

Mrs. Daphne McAdoo

Law and Public Service Magnet Coordinator



Soaring To New Heights !

Hi my name is Ashley Williams and my principals name is Mrs. Scott. I will attend Dotson Middle School. in San Pedro. My hobbie is playing Basketball, because I liker it and it is interesting.

Soaring To New Heights means to reach your goals and be successful. My goals are to be a Lawyer, a basketball player, or a pediatriitian, but in order to reach my goals I have to go to school and learn all I can while I can. While I am in school I will play basketball. Basketball helps me to exercize better and gives me strengthso I can focus.

5th grade has taught me how to really focus, not to give up, try my best, be very successful and most of all keep my head up and keep dreaming. Thats how 5th grade has taught me to Soar.

Soaring To New Heights will help me build a great future and inspire me to keep reaching for my goals. I would like to give a special thankyou to Mr. Williams, Mrs Scott, family, staff, and friends for showing me the starting line so I can Soar to the finish line.

Thank You,

By: Ashley Williams
June 20, 2001

Sasha Alexandra Stern
1111 Wilshire Blvd #402, Los Angeles, CA 90017
323.610.7032. sterns@clcla.org

May 13, 2022

To the NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award Committee,

It is a great honor and joy to write this letter on behalf of Ashley Williams. I am an attorney supervisor at Children's Law Center 3 (CLC3) in Los Angeles. I have known Ms. Williams both as a law clerk at my firm, and also as opposing counsel in the courtroom. In both capacities, she has shown incredible skill, determination and passion for justice on behalf of families.

I first met Ms. Williams in 2016 when she was a certified law clerk at Children's Law Center 3, the firm where I work currently, although I was not a supervisor at that time. She was eager to learn every day. She cared deeply about our clients and understood them in the most profound way. Her experience in the foster care system makes her one of the greatest advocates I have ever worked with. She is able to see the issues with so much clarity and compassion, and the fire that drives her is unstoppable.

Years later, in 2021, I was lucky enough to work with her as opposing counsel in department 401 at Edelman Children's Court. Department 401 houses our specialized DREAM (Dedicated to Restoration through Empowerment and Advocacy) Court. In DREAM Court we work with victims of CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children). The work is often very painful, but we have an extraordinary team. I am currently the supervisor for CLC3 in that courtroom, but I was a case carrying attorney for three years prior there. When Ms. Williams joined our courtroom it was a gift. Ms. Williams and I collaborated on multiple cases. She represented parents, and I represented children. Our goal was always to see how we could reunify families or keep families together who hadn't yet been torn apart. We collaborated on settlements, as well as plans for needed services. We were able to speak frankly and easily about concerns, even when it meant that we weren't aligned. She was always willing to hear any thoughts I had, and willing to work together to find the best solution for a family. She is endlessly attentive to her clients, and consistently well prepared for court every day. She makes creative and well-reasoned arguments and is trusted by our Judge and by all of the counsel in the courtroom. She handles cases in multiple courtrooms, which is a daunting task for any attorney, but she does so with grace. She is always willing to fight for what she believes is just, even when it is profoundly challenging.

I consider myself lucky to have gotten to share a courtroom with Ms. Williams. I cannot recommend her highly enough for this honor. She deserves to be recognized for her extraordinary advocacy and dedication to our work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sasha Stern', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sasha Stern

101 Centre Plaza Dr.
Monterey Park, CA 91754
May 17, 2022

NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award Selection Committee
899 N. Logan St., Suite 208
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Selection Committee:

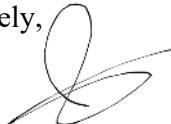
Re Letter of Support for Ashley Williams, Esq.

I am very honored to submit this letter in support of Ms. Williams' nomination for the NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award. I have worked closely with Ms. Williams for several years during her work with Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, and I continue to be impressed with the strength and zealotness of her representation and advocacy.

In my many years representing children in the Los Angeles County dependency system, I rarely interact with attorneys who are as committed to both quality representation and working toward systemic change. In our work in juvenile dependency, Ms. Williams and I have been appointed on dozens of cases. Many of these matters have required that she and I take opposing positions. Despite our different stances, I have always respected Ms. Williams' deep knowledge of the law and often-intricate facts relevant to her cases. Ms. Williams frequently seeks to educate the bench on the many nuances of California dependency law: she provides opinions to the Court in advance and then weaves such law seamlessly and elegantly into arguments. Ms. Williams is persuasive, and her clients frequently and consequently receive favorable outcomes.

As much as I value Ms. Williams' litigation skills, I often marvel at Ms. Williams' profound understanding of how the child welfare system operates. Having her own direct experience with the system, Ms. Williams is very often able to take the long view on her cases. She understands that our clients often live at the confluence of systemic racism and classism, political and social disenfranchisement, neglected physical and mental health, and government systems that compound such issues. Knowing this, Ms. Williams humanizes her clients before the bench, ensuring that the Court is keenly aware that her clients are more than their actions. She is compassionate and collaborative, and while earnestly fighting for her clients, Ms. Williams never loses sight of the needs and realities of the entire family.

I would be delighted to speak to you further regarding Ms. Williams' candidacy. I am available by email at vallesj@clccal.org or by telephone at (323) 980-7745.

Sincerely,


Juan M. Valles, Esq.
Attorney Supervisor
Child Welfare Law Specialist (as certified by NACC)
Children's Law Center of California

May 20, 2022

Good day, members of The NACC Award Committee.

First, as one who worked daily with Ashley Williams in the dependency system to a courtroom where we were both assigned, and second, as one who served with Ashley Williams on the board of the Black Women's Lawyers Association of Los Angeles (BWL), I am delighted to nominate her for both the Outstanding Legal Advocate Award and Outstanding New Lawyer Award.

I first worked with Ashley in 2019 when we both served on the board of BWL. I knew Ashley to dig deep into the requirements to serve. By participating in both mandatory and voluntary positions, always remaining uniquely vocal and while collectively working with the board to execute the vision of BWL, Ashley presented as a dedicated, spirit-filled leader. As a young lawyer, her dedication and enthusiasm was seen by many.

Later that year, I was able to work in a different capacity with Ashley when she transferred into the courtroom in which I worked. By no means was that department an easy assignment! High turnover and burnout ran rampant with the attorneys. Rotating hearing officers were commonplace and high case counts were the norm. Notwithstanding those challenges, I observed Ashley to be well-prepared and to advocate strongly for her clients. Ashley routinely represented her clients well, ensuring their position was heard by the court and advocating for the parents whom she represented. Her impact was known in that department and as an attorney usually representing an adverse position to Ashley's, I knew to be prepared to the last detail! She helped me to grow as a trial attorney.

A most important and unique trait that Ashley possesses is her success who as a former foster child, overcame the challenges that many of her clients now face! I believe her understanding of the needs of the dependency families, plus her strong advocacy skills produced a compassionate and skilled attorney. She is not only an example for the foster care families that she serves, but also is a strong, positive role model to the attorneys that represent children, parents and even the County in our foster care system – and should be recognized and celebrated as such.

In the dependency system, where a disproportionate number of the families are African American, it is refreshing to see a young African American woman that successfully and positively emerged from a strained system to flourish and to reinvest her knowledge and dedication to fight for her clients and to provide them with excellent representation! Ashley has certainly overcome many odds, but to all who know her, I mean really know her well, know this is just the beginning of what will be an impactful journey!

Thank you kindly for considering my nomination letter on behalf of Ashley Williams.

Sincerely,



Mercedes Lee Akounou
mercedes_akounou@yahoo.com

May 13, 2022

Dear NACC Outstanding New Lawyer Award Committee:

I have been fortunate to work with Ashley Williams in the child welfare system from the start of her career with the Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc. in 2019, where she remains currently employed and assigned to represent parents in child welfare proceedings. It is my pleasure to endorse Ms. Williams for nomination for the NACC Outstanding New Lawyer award without hesitation.

Although our clients would often have opposing positions and interests, working together daily provided me with extensive knowledge and appreciation of the excellent legal representation she provides to her all of her clients. Ms. Williams has proven to be an outstanding legal advocate who uses her knowledge of child welfare to give her clients the outstanding legal representation. I have observed Ms. Williams to be extremely dedicated to her clients, in a manner that has proven effective with multiple bench officers.

I believe the real life experience Ms. Williams possesses as a former youth raised in the child welfare system has provided her with a unique insight and true passion for this work, which shows through her legal representation. I have no doubt that she is highly dedicated to advocating for justice and equity and improvements that she sees necessary to reduce issues with disproportionality and bias within the child welfare system. Although the Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc. employs numerous attorneys of which I have experience dealing with, I can honestly say none compare to Ms. Williams in the dedication she shows to providing excellent representation as well as advocating for positive changes within the system.

Thus, I unequivocally nominate Ms. Ashley Williams for consideration of this award in recognition of the fact that she truly is an Outstanding New Lawyer that I expect will remain working in the child welfare system and making positive changes for decades to come.

If you would like additional information about Ms. Williams, you can telephone me at (714) 458-7550.

Sincerely,

Heather K. Aihara

Heather K. Aihara
Deputy County Counsel
201 Centre Plaza Drive, Suite 1
Monterey Park, CA 91754
Email: haihara@counsel.lacounty.gov
Telephone: (714) 458-7550



Ashley Williams was born a product of rape and raised in the foster care system. She lived in 36 placements, with MacLaren Hall being the first of many, and attended 26 schools by the time she turned eighteen.

Ashley attended Dorsey High School, where she was enrolled in the Law Magnet Program. While at Dorsey, she participated in the Teen Court Diversion program, UCLA Street Law, and Young Lawyers. Upon graduating, she was honored with the dedication of the “*Ashley Williams Computer Center*” at Dorsey High School.

Ashley went on to attend UCLA, where she co-founded the Bruin Guardian Scholars Program, which assists former foster youth in navigating the university system. She was a UCLA Law Fellow, McNair Scholar, Jackie Robinson Foundation Scholar, and a Justice Corps Graduate Fellow.

She then attended Southwestern Law School, where she participated in the Associate for Corporate Counsel Diversity Pipeline Program, the Black Women Lawyers of Los Angeles Mentorship Program, Children & The Law, the Street Law and Children’s Rights Clinics, continuing her community activism and leadership work while honing her legal skills.

In law school she returned to the Teen Court Program and Street Law Clinic as a mentor, and served as a Dean’s Fellow and Chair of the Public Interest Law Committee. Due to Ashley’s commitment to public service and advocacy she has been recognized with a multitude of awards from Sidley Austin LLP, the Southwestern Public Interest Law Committee, the California Change Lawyers, the Langston Bar Association, the Black Women Lawyers of Los Angeles Foundation, the Los Angeles County Public Service Distinction Award, the Honorable Justice Vaino Hassan Spencer Scholarship, the Justice Arleigh Woods Scholarship, and many more.

Ashley spent her final summer and fall semester as a certified law clerk for the Children’s Law Center, advocating for foster youth at Children’s Court. In 2016, Ashley was honored to be the keynote alumni keynote speaker at the 28th Annual Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services’ Celebration Graduation Ceremony.

Professionally, Ashley served as a judicial extern with Judge Harry Pregerson in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and then as a Congressional Intern for Congresswoman Karen Bass. Inspired and informed by her own experiences in foster care, Ashley drafted a policy report and presented her results at a congressional briefing titled, “*Fostering a Culture of Silence: The Need to Improve Reporting of Sexual Abuse in Foster Care.*”

In April 2019, while Ashley was preparing to enter the legal field, her mother’s decades-long struggle with addiction ended her life. This motivated Ashley to use her lived expertise, work experience, and legal skills to represent parents like her own mother, many of whose children are in foster care just as Ashley was.

Since May 2019, she has worked at Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc. (LADL) as parents’ counsel. She has gained experience all over the courthouse and is currently assigned to DREAM (Dedicated to Restoration through Empowerment and Advocacy) Court, a specialized courtroom serving minors who are victims of CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children). Because of her lived experience, academic achievements, and professional qualifications, Ashley is able to provide a unique voice and insight into the child welfare system.

Recently, Ashley was selected to present as a Faculty Member at the 45th National Association of Counsel for Children National Child Welfare Law Conference. She was also nominated by Congresswoman Karen Bass as the 2022 CCAI Angel of the Year due to her extensive record of child welfare advocacy.

Ashley enjoys the area of dependency law because she considers herself a successful product of this system.

Her professional goal is to obtain a judgeship in the areas of juvenile dependency and delinquency law.

ASHLEY D. WILLIAMS

Phone: (323) 605-7475 · Email: ashleydwilliams320@gmail.com

EDUCATION & BAR ADMISSION

Southwestern Law School, Los Angeles, California

Class Ranking: Top 20%

Juris Doctor, December 2017; State Bar of California, May 2018; United States District Court, Central District of California, May 2018

Honors: Los Angeles County Public Service Distinction, 2017; Dean's List, 2015-16; Delta Theta Phi McComb Senate, 2018; John M. Langston Bar Association Scholarship 2017, 2014; Dean's Merit Scholarship 2016, 2017; Honorable Justice Vaino Hassan Spencer Scholarship; Justice Arleigh Woods Scholarship; California Change Lawyers Foundation 3L Diversity Scholarship, 2018; George and Katrina Woolverton Public Service Award, 2018; The Ashley Williams Computer Center, Dorsey High School, 2013

Activities: Public Interest Law Committee, 2013-17; Dean's Fellow Honors Program, 2014-17; Black Law Student Association, 2013-17; Women's Law Student Association, 2013-17; Teen Court – Dorsey High School, 2013-17

University of California, Los Angeles, California

Bachelor of Arts, Sociology, *Minor* - Education, June 2012

Honors: Sidley Austin LLP Diversity Scholar, 2012-13; Jackie Robinson Foundation Scholar, 2008-12; UCLA Law Fellows, 2011-12; Rishwain Social Justice Scholar 2011; McNair Scholars Research Program, 2010-11; UCLA Research Rookies Program, 2008-09, 2011; Los Angeles Urban League Scholar, 2008; Wasserman Foundation Scholar, 2008; United Friends of the Children Scholar 2008.

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

Staff Attorney, Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc., May 2019 – present Monterey Park, CA
Successfully manage and represent over 200 clients in dependency proceedings, conduct discovery, draft motions, present legal research, prepare witness testimony related to severe child abuse and neglect trials, negotiate settlement agreements in contentious proceedings, and conduct daily trials.

Certified Law Clerk, Children's Law Center, May – December 2016 Monterey Park, CA
Supported two supervising attorneys with trial, adjudication and detention hearing preparation in dependency proceedings by conducting client interviews, factual investigation and analysis of reports, correspondences, filings, transcripts and drafting case summaries of relevant findings.

Certified Law Clerk, Children's Rights Clinic - Southwestern Law School, August – December 2015 Los Angeles, CA
Provided direct legal services in special education advocacy for low-income minor clients and families in Individual Education Program (IEP) and discipline meetings involving children with disabilities; performed legal research, drafted complaints and related memoranda on Due Process violations by school district staff and representatives, conducted initial client intakes assessing potential legal action and case strategies, performed factual investigation and research relating to minor clients' disabilities, presented arguments challenging involuntary transfer of minor client.

Congressional Intern, Office of U.S. Representative Karen Bass, May – July 2015 Washington, DC
Conducted research and briefings on legislative issues for senior congressional staff, drafted memoranda and constituent letters, managed and responded to Representative's scheduling inquiries, drafted child welfare policy recommendations, and presented at congressional briefings.

Clinic Instructor, Street Law Clinic, Southwestern Law School, January – April 2015 Los Angeles, CA
Presented weekly ninety-minute legal education lessons for court-involved at-risk youth transitioning to adulthood with emphasis on criminal law and housing law issues entitlements, and assisted with Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC)-Diversity Pipeline Program.

Judicial Extern to Hon. Harry Pregerson, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, September 2013 – July 2014 Woodland Hills, CA
Researched and drafted bench memoranda; performed citation checks, created case management database and maintained case files.

Justice Corps Fellow, Los Angeles County Superior Court, August 2012 – August 2013 Los Angeles, CA
Assisted and educated *pro se* litigants on family law filings and judicial procedures related to probate, guardianship, domestic violence, and mediation; presented workshops on initiating dissolution cases, paternity judgments, ex parte filings and posting/publication.

Judicial Extern to Presiding Judge Michael Nash, Los Angeles County Superior Court, April– June 2011 Monterey Park, CA
Researched and summarized data on delivery and efficiencies of service in the Edelman Children's courthouse.

PUBLICATION

Ashley D. Williams, *Fostering a Culture of Silence: The Need to Improve Reporting of Sexual Abuse in Foster Care*, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, August 2015. <https://www.ccaainstitute.org/programs/view/foster-youth-internship-congressional-report>

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND CONFERENCES

ASHLEY D. WILLIAMS

Phone: (323) 605-7475 · Email: ashleydwilliams320@gmail.com

Panelist – Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families: Knowledge Is Power Summit: *Using Data to Advance Racial Equity for families and Communities* (2022)

Keynote Speaker – LAUSD's Pathways to College Celebration Graduation (2022)

Panelist – Black Women Lawyers of Los Angeles Foundation (BWL)- MCLE- Presentation Topic: *Domestic Violence awareness in general with sections on judges, parents and children, and healing. Working titles: "Protecting mind, body and soul" "Safe in your home"* (2020)

Panel Moderator – BWL Young Lawyer's Committee: *How to Slay & Maximize Your Time for the September 2020 CA Bar Exam* (2020)

Keynote Speaker – Bruin Guardian Scholars Graduation Ceremony (2018)

Keynote Speaker – Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services Celebration Graduation (2016)

Keynote Speaker – Dorsey High School's Commencement (2013)

National Black Social Workers Conference – Presentation Topic: *Foster Care to College: Role of the Social Worker* (2012)

California Association of Youth Courts (CAYC) Youth Court Summit: *Teen Court Representative & Guest Speaker* (2011)

National Black Social Workers Conference – Presentation Topic: *Life After Foster Care: The Emancipation Process* (2011).

McNair Scholars Research Program – Research Topic: *The Invisible Struggle: A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding Transitional Strategies Among Academically Successful Foster Youth* (2011).

UCLA Research Rookies Program – Research Topic: *What is UCLA doing to ensure Academic Success and Support to Foster Youth here on Campus* (2009).

Keynote Speaker – UCLA's M.S.W. Graduation Ceremony (2010)

Student Speaker – U.C. Board of Regents Budget Meeting (2010)

Foster Youth Panelist – California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care (2007)

COMMUNITY & LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Black Women Lawyers of Los Angeles-Young Lawyers Committee Co-Chair; UCLA Bruin Guardian Scholars Program Co-Founder; First Star Bruin Guardian Summer Academy Co-Founder; Living Advantage, Inc.; UCLA VIP Scholars Program; Anti-Recidivism Program; Peace For Kids; Foster Nation Youth Collective; Foster Care Counts; ACC So-Cal and Dorsey High School Pipeline Program; Ease-In Foster Youth Program; West Adams Neighborhood Council; Homeless Prevention Law Project – CARES; One Justice – Justice Bus; A New Way Of Life Reentry Clinic; Council On Legal Education Opportunity's Program; Langston Bar Association Member, California Change Lawyers, Community Coalition; California Legislation Black Caucus; 2nd Call-Second Chance at Loving Life Program; Anti-Recidivism Program; National Foster Youth Institute; and Teen Court Diversion Program Mentor.

SELECTED MEDIA COVERAGE

https://www.swlaw.edu/alumni_students/ashley-williams

<https://www.marketplace.org/2017/05/24/for-students-in-foster-care-system-college-elusive-goal/>


[Success After Foster Care- Fox11 News Coverage-Ashley Williams 2015](#)

[Ashley Williams Bruin Guardian Scholars Co-Founder-JRF Scholar Recipient 2012](#)

<https://www.changelawyers.org/ashley-williams.html>

<https://www.swlaw.edu/swlawblog/201807/black-women-lawyers-association-los-angeles-foundation-43rd-annual-scholarship>

<https://dailybruin.com/2010/11/24/coming-together-for-thanksgiving>



Soaring To New Heights !

Hi my name is Ashley Williams and my principals name is Mrs. Scott. I will attend Dotson Middle School. in San Pedro. My hobbie is playing Basketball, because I like it and it is interesting.

Soaring To New Heights means to reach your goals and be successful. My goals are to be a Lawyer, a basketball player, or a pediatriitian, but in order to reach my goals I have to go to school and learn all I can while I can. While I am in school I will play basketball. Basketball helps me to exercize better and gives me strengthso I can focus.

5th grade has taught me how to really focus, not to give up, try my best, be very successful and most of all keep my head up and keep dreaming. Thats how 5th grade has taught me to Soar.

Soaring To New Heights will help me build a great future and inspire me to keep reaching for my goals. I would like to give a special thankyou to Mr. Williams, Mrs Scott, family, staff, and friends for showing me the starting line so I can Soar to the finish line.

Thank You,

By: Ashley Williams

June 20, 2001

Embracing Our Past, Empowering Their Future

Why Child Welfare Reform Matters



Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute
2015 Foster Youth Internship Program™ Report

Fostering a Culture of Silence: The Need to Improve Reporting of Sexual Abuse in Foster Care

Ashley D. Williams

Executive Summary

The United States child welfare system is designed to provide safety to children who have experienced maltreatment. Sometimes, the very children the country promised to protect experience abuse after entering foster care. Many youth who experience sexual abuse while in foster care do not report the abuse due to fear of placement repercussions, additional harm or because they are not aware of the avenues available for reporting the abuse. Congress should improve existing reporting options for foster youth in order to better provide for their safety.

Personal Reflection

Prior to entering the foster care system, my mother's numerous girlfriends and their sons sexually abused me. After I entered care, I believed I would be in a safe environment. This was not the case. I was sexually abused by various foster family members. When I reported the abuse to my caseworker, I was accused of wearing clothing that provoked my abusers to behave that way.

During my eight years in foster care, I bounced between 36 different homes and I was molested throughout my time in care. The system designed to protect me from sexual abuse failed to provide me with ways to report the further sexual abuse in foster care.

Recommendations

- *Improve existing avenues for reporting sexual abuse of foster youth*
- *Require that every foster youth, upon entry, receive age-appropriate training on sexual education and available reporting options*

The Problem

Staggering statistics illustrate the rampant abuse of children in the child welfare system. In “2013 alone, 144,012 children placed in foster care were victims of one or more types of maltreatment, including sexual abuse. Additionally, 2,752 children reported having been sexually abused while in foster care” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families [HHS], 2015). Forty-nine states reported that 3,022 children were reported to have been victims of one or more forms of maltreatment by a foster parent, legal guardian, or group home,



or polyvictimized (HHS, 2015). According to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health study, polyvictimization is “the study of the impact of multiple types of victimization” (Collin-Vezina, Daigeneault, & Herbert, 2013, p.5). Polyvictimization has an enormous impact, both on the abused individual as well as on society, with “cumulative experiences of victimizations being more detrimental to the child’s well-being than are any single experiences” (Collin-Vezina et al., 2013).

The failure to recognize the need for reporting sexual abuse of foster youth continues to place kids at risk of continued abuse. The people that are supposed to protect foster youth, such as caseworkers, foster parents or residential staff, sometimes intimidate foster youth from reporting abuse. The National Child Trauma Stress Network has found that children do not report sexual abuse because of the fear of being removed from the home, the fear of not being believed, threats of bodily harm if they report, and feelings of shame or guilt (The National Child Trauma Stress Network, 2009).

The barrier to reporting sexual abuse in the foster care system needs to be removed to ensure the safety of foster youth. Knowing when and where abuse is occurring is necessary to provide safe homes and to protect these already vulnerable youth. If consistent data is not tracked on reported abuse, or easily accessible options are not made available, how can foster children, who have already experienced the trauma of being removed from their homes because of maltreatment, be protected from experiencing further abuse in foster care?

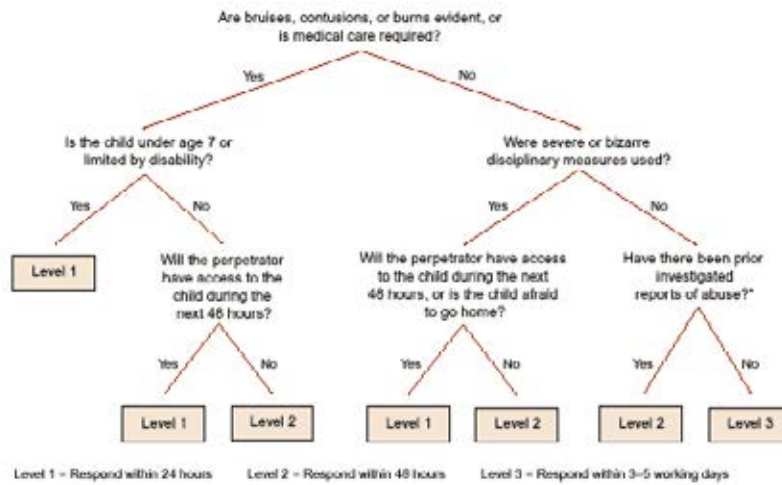
Current Law

The *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)*, provides funds to states in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution and treatment activities for child abuse and neglect. CAPTA was most recently reauthorized and amended in 2010 to add the requirement of data collection (42 U.S.C. §5106a).

Although CAPTA requires data collection, there is no national standard for what is reported. In addition, the data that is reported by the states is done voluntarily, which contributes to a misunderstanding of the true scope of abuse. Each of the 50 states has a different definition of “maltreatment” as well as a different process for documenting child sexual abuse. For example, in 20 states, once a mandated reporter submits an oral report, the reporter must document it in writing. In contrast, eight states require written documentation only when requested (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

The initial screening decisions that determine the criteria for a “substantiated” and “non-substantiated” report are also part of the problem. The lack of consistent evaluation criteria leads to inconsistent reporting of and responses to sexual abuse allegations. This means that not every allegation of abuse is being thoroughly documented or investigated (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

The chart below provides one example of a chart used to determine the response to sexual abuse allegations of a foster youth.



Source: (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001)

In addition to inconsistent reporting criteria, the victims are also falling silent. As illustrated in the latest Child Maltreatment Report, the number of self-reporting cases by alleged victims decreased by roughly 4,000 allegations from the previous year (Children’s Bureau, 2013). However, the overall number of professionals reporting sexual abuse increased between 2009 and 2013. Although it should not be the victim’s responsibility to report sexual abuse, children should feel able to report abuse and trust that appropriate action will be taken.

There are a number of states making progress in improving reporting methods, but there is still much to be done. As of 2013, “twenty states require that a centralized telephone line remain open 24 hours a day, seven days a week specifically for the reporting of child maltreatment” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, p. 2). There are also 36 states that have a “Foster Youth Ombudsman” available for reporting, whose duty is to “create an avenue for foster children...to file complaints regarding their placement, care and services without fear of retribution from those who provide their care and services” (California Department of Social Services, n.d.). There are also organizations that assist with reporting child sexual abuse via websites, but many foster youth do not know these reporting avenues exist. The reporting options that do exist tend to vary between states.

Recommendations

- **Improve existing avenues for reporting sexual abuse of foster youth**

Foster youth should have easy access to report sexual abuse. There are three things Congress should address in order to improve existing reporting avenues. First, youth must have access to an autonomous “Foster Youth Ombudsman.” Second, youth must be aware of all available 24/7 hotlines and anonymous reporting options. Finally, we must create standardized reporting and criteria for review of sexual abuse allegations.



As of 2014, “approximately twenty-two states have established a Children’s Ombudsman or Office of the Child Advocate with duties and purposes specifically related to children’s services. Another five states have a statewide Ombudsman program, which address the concerns of all governmental agencies, including children’s services. Nine states have related Ombudsman services, program specific services, or county run programs” (Nowak, 2014). This only accounts for 36 states, so it is unknown whether the other 14 states are providing any Ombudsman services. Furthermore, these services vary as “the office may be run by the government, or a non-profit organization under government contract” (Bedard, 2015). Children must have the ability and knowledge that they can report abuse to an individual outside the system in which the abuse is occurring.

Having another dedicated anonymous reporting avenue, such as a phone line or website, could also help. Only a handful of states have the option available of a 24/7 hotline and the opportunity to report the abuse anonymously. Despite being available in some states, this hotline should be available to every child in every state. If youth were aware of the options for reporting sexual abuse, without being identified and without repercussions by foster parents and caseworkers, self-reporting would likely increase.

Congress can further create safe and effective avenues for foster youth to report sexual abuse by requiring states to standardize reporting. Congress should mandate standardized sexual abuse reporting for foster youth by tying CAPTA funding to existing reporting requirements and to how that data is being collected. All 50 states could also be provided with standardized criteria to establish baseline procedures concerning child sexual abuse reports.

- ***Require that every foster youth, upon entry, receive age-appropriate training on sexual education and available reporting options***

Age-appropriate sexual education is important because it gives children the tools they need to understand what abuse is and how to protect themselves. Congress has already acknowledged sexual education importance through H.R. 3067, the *Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Act* (2015), which amends and includes provisions requiring local education agencies and schools to carry out child sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs or activities. Studies have shown that elementary school prevention programs are effective at building children’s knowledge about sexual abuse and their preventive skills (Collin-Vezina et al., 2013). Providing sexual abuse awareness programs or activities to foster youth, upon entry, could help raise awareness of their reporting options.

Although there are improvements to reporting abuse, much more can be done at the federal level. Congress must be proactive in addressing foster youth maltreatment data collection, reporting and sexual education in order to better protect foster youth from further trauma.

ABOUT THE INTERNS



Angelique Salizan

Hometown: Brentwood, NY

Age: 23

School: Binghamton University

Major: Psychology

Graduation: December 2014

Years in care: 16 years

Status: Kinship

Favorite quote: “There are two kinds of people in this world the givers and the takers. The takers may eat better but the givers sleep better!”

Aspirations: Be an influential advocate of Social Justice/Child Welfare and Education Reform.



Cierrena Spataro-Haynes

Hometown: Madison, WI

Age: 24

School: University of Wisconsin Madison

Major: Masters in Social Work

Graduation: May 2015

Years in care: 14 years

Status: Adopted

Favorite quote: “Affirm a world of moral seriousness where everyday things are sacred to you.” - John Gatto

Aspirations: Child Welfare Policy Reform, possibly a member of Congress one day, but still a social worker at heart for life!



Ashley Williams

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

Age: 25

School: Southwestern Law School

Major: Law Student

Graduation: May 2017

Years in care: 8 years

Status: Emancipated

Favorite quote: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, but that we are powerful beyond measure.”

Aspirations: To become a judge for juvenile dependency court.