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May 29, 2025

National Association of Counsel for Children

899 N. Logan Street

Suite 208

Denver, CO 80203

Dear Nominating Committee,

We are writing to nominate Howard Talenfeld for this year's Outstanding Legal Advocate award. Howard Talenfeld has been a leading advocate who has promoted quality children's representation in the state of Florida for decades. He is a Co-Founder and Lead Partner in his firm's Justice for Kids Division, Kelley Kronenberg's national practice dedicated to representing abused, disabled, and catastrophically injured children harmed in foster care, group homes and residential treatment centers, as well as all children harmed by the acts of others.

We have personally known Howard for well over 25 years. He has been a constant ally in the battle to give voice to foster youth in Florida and nationally. He not only has been protecting and defending children who have been harmed for almost 3 decades, but he has done everything in his power in the courtroom, in the legislature and in the community, to prevent that harm from coming to pass. His efforts this year to pass legislation to address one of the most urgent needs of youth aging out of care and to help keep those youth off the streets was inspired by his working relationship with Florida Youth SHINE, Florida's lived experience advocacy group. Howard helped create, nurture and grow Youth SHINE, and it is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

Youth Voice

Howard is the Founding President of Florida's Children First, Florida's premier child advocacy organization. The work of Florida's Children First is too far reaching to cover here, but their role in establishing Florida Youth SHINE, the youth-run and peer driven advocacy organization of former foster youth cannot be overstated. Florida Youth SHINE has positively impacted Florida law for Florida foster youth immensely and it all began with Howard's vision. Howard serves as President of Florida's Children First, as he has since it was founded in 2002. Florida's Children First continues to fight for children's representation in the largest state that still does not provide every dependent child an attorney. They have been involved in every battle waged over representation and have never stopped fighting for a child's right to independent legal representation.

Howard also wrote Florida's Foster Children Bill of Rights, a landmark piece of legislation that child advocates have relied on for decades.

Systemic Change

Holding systems accountable through litigation is a critical part of reforming the child welfare system. Howard is one of America's leading children's rights, injury, and child disability attorneys representing the needs of abused and neglected children, especially in cases of foster child abuse, child sexual abuse, and other harm and abuse of children in the child welfare system. His work has resulted in multimillion dollar damage awards and has created systemic change in how government agencies and private institutions care for those vulnerable individuals.

Howard has been a force for systemic reform that has changed the game for children in Florida's child welfare system. In 2014, he co-chaired Citizens for Broward's Children, the political action committee that successfully advocated for the permanent reauthorization of the Broward County Children's Services Council which funds over \$60 million dollars a year to protect Broward's children. He was also on the original steering committee that passed this initiative. In addition to funding millions of dollars in services for children, his advocacy ultimately helped the Broward Legal Aid Service create their excellent children's law offices, made possible by Children's Services Council funding.

Right to Counsel

Throughout his career, Howard has been a forceful advocate for change, **championing the need for high quality children's representation.** Howard chaired The Florida Bar Legal Needs of Children Committee three times in 2009-10, 2020-2021, and 2021-22 –more times than any other advocate. In this role, he led the fight for legislation that created the first mandatory appointment of attorneys for dependent children in Florida, providing for the representation of foster children in their own dependency cases including disabled children, medically fragile children, severely emotional disturbed children, and victims of human trafficking.

Race Equity

He was among the first to point out the racial inequities in Florida's child welfare system and created the Florida Bar sub-committee that examined the over-representation of black children in foster care.

Legislative Highlights

Howard has been incredibly effective at the Florida capital. Below are a few of his key legislative accomplishments:

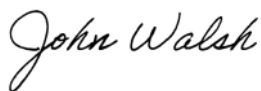
- Just this year, he has been instrumental in the passage of new legislation which will give children in care priority for university housing and work/study programs on university and college campuses and also require Florida's child welfare and housing authorities to work together to implement the Federal Foster Youth to Independence housing initiative. Working hand in hand with Youth SHINE, Florida's lived experience advocates, he has successfully addressed one of the most pressing issues foster youth in Florida face – the high cost of housing.

- He helped write the law that required mandatory reporting of child-on-child sexual abuse and rape in community facilities.
- As mentioned above, he also advocated in 2014 for and helped encourage passage and the governor's signature on the first law in Florida to mandate representation for certain dependent children. That law ensures children who are victims of sexual abuse, sexual trafficking, are on psychotropic medications, or have been committed to a residential treatment facility, have attorneys.
- He helped draft legislation for Florida's very first pilot project children's law office, which was implemented by Gerry Glynn. This was a key first step towards improving legal representation for Florida's children.
- He helped pass Florida's interagency education bill for foster children, ensuring that children would not change schools needlessly when their foster placement changed.

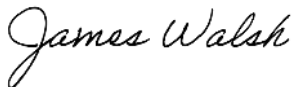
Howard has argued for systemic reform before many state and national groups, including the U.S. Congress, the National Association of State Mental Health Lawyers, the American Public Welfare Association and many Florida legislative committees. In 1996, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Youth Law Center (YLC), a national children's advocacy group and in 2024 he was invited to rejoin the YLC Board.

Howard has been recognized as one of the nation's best advocates time and time again. He has received numerous awards, but we are confident that the NACC's Outstanding Legal Advocate award would be the most meaningful to him. Howard has been a tireless advocate for Florida's foster children and for all system involved children through his national work. He championed youth voice long before it was recognized as a best practice in systemic reform. We can think of no other advocate more deserving of this year's Outstanding Legal Advocate award than Howard Talenfeld.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our nomination.



John Walsh, Esquire.



James Walsh, Esquire.

5/29/2025

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Geori Berman Seldine

P: 954.796.0860

Boca Raton, FL

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Dear Members of the Awards Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm and respect that I nominate Howard Talenfeld, Board President and founder of Florida's Children First, for the NACC Outstanding Legal Advocate Award. As Executive Director of Florida's Children First, I have had the privilege of working with Howard for over a decade and can say without hesitation that his advocacy, leadership, and unwavering commitment to vulnerable children in the child welfare system embody the very essence of this distinguished honor.

Howard Talenfeld is a nationally recognized children's rights attorney whose career has been defined by tireless efforts to protect and advance the rights of children in foster care and other state systems. As the founding Board President of Florida's Children First, Howard has been the driving force behind our organization's mission to effect systemic change and ensure every child has access to quality representation, education, healthcare, and a stable home.

Throughout his career, Howard has combined powerful litigation with legislative advocacy to bring about lasting reforms in Florida's child welfare system. His strategic lawsuits have led to groundbreaking legal precedents, while his policy work has resulted in significant legislative victories, including expanded legal protections and counsel for Florida's most vulnerable children. He is a force for sustainable, meaningful change. Howard's advocacy has always centered the voices and experiences of youth. Under his leadership, Florida's Children First created Florida Youth SHINE, a youth led organization.

I can think of no one more deserving of the NACC Outstanding Legal Advocate Award. Howard Talenfeld has not only shaped the child welfare landscape in Florida—he has inspired a generation of advocates nationwide to never stop fighting for justice on behalf of our most vulnerable children.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this nomination. Please feel free to contact me directly if you require any additional information or supporting documentation.

Sincerely,



Geori Seldine

Executive Director

Florida's Children First

Geori.Berman@floridaschildrenfirst.org 954-795-9860

May 27, 2025

Derrick Riggins
6775 Timber Land Lane
Sarasota, FL 34241

Re: Howard Talenfeld nomination support letter –
Outstanding Legal Advocate Award

Dear Nominating Committee,

It is with tremendous enthusiasm that I support honoring Howard Talenfeld for his extraordinary legal advocacy. For nearly 25 years he has fought to protect the most vulnerable population of our communities: children in or aging out of the foster care system who, through no choice of their own, were abandoned, abused, neglected, forced into welfare services, without an opportunity to earn the necessary skills to become a productive adult in the community.

Howard used his own money to establish and grow the FCF family. Year after year, his efforts now create an impact that ripples through the system leaving a legacy of hope and promise for future generations of youth.

I know this first-hand. I am one of the thousands of young people who have been touched by Florida's Children First and the youth organization Howard pioneered, Florida Youth SHINE which created a platform for the voices of youth in foster care to be heard and valued, and provided a family of mentors and supportive peers to young people like myself in foster care.

While amplifying youth voices is a popular concept today, it was truly groundbreaking when Howard founded Florida's Children First. In fact, youth were not even allowed to attend critical court proceedings impacting their lives, let alone have their voices heard. Howard changed that, and so many other things that have gone on to improve the lives of children in Broward, in Florida, and across the nation.

In Florida Youth SHINE I met other young people who were experiencing the same things I was. Many, like myself, were called "cocaine babies" at birth, had parents with addiction problems, lived in abusive, often dangerous environments and lacked positive role models. Once removed from our homes and placed in the system, many of us were moved around frequently and had little stability or educational continuity, and no one we could share our fears, concerns, and needs with.

Florida Youth SHINE provided that space at a time when few other outlets were available. They nurtured our ability to speak up and to share our stories with others so that they could better understand what we needed to succeed when we were on our own. While other organizations were housing youth, feeding them, providing basic needs – we needed the ability to go to college. To learn to drive. To participate in sleepovers, band, sports and other normal childhood activities that youth in

care rarely had access to. Howard, and the team at Florida's Children First dedicated their efforts to listening to us, and to fighting to ensure we – the thousands of youth in care in your community - had more access to the supports, services and opportunities that would help them ensure their past did not define their future.

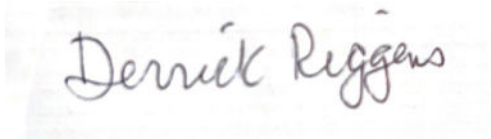
I became a leader in Florida Youth SHINE. I found people I could trust, people I wanted to emulate. I saw their passion. I watched Howard and the FCF leadership volunteer their time, day and night, to help me and my peers. I found wonderful role models. I was able to attend college because of the advocacy work that FCF did. Inspired to follow a similar career path as Howard and others at Florida's Children First, I am proud to also say I am now a law school graduate! I am sitting for the Florida Bar exam shortly and am dedicating my career to helping children facing challenging childhoods, just as Howard has done.

Thousands of young people like myself who *could* have become another statistic instead, gained the confidence, leadership skills, and opportunities to pursue their dreams because of Howard's vision and volunteer efforts - which have produced real results year after year.

Howard saw a gap in the child welfare system. He has devoted himself to *filling* that gap by gathering groups of child advocates together to tackle tough issues – and they are still at it. He self-funded this work to get FCF launched, and he continues to give in dollars and sweat equity every single year.

Howard has devoted his professional practice to fighting for the rights of the most vulnerable among us, but he is also a true philanthropist, and an outstanding legal advocate without compare. I sincerely hope we can celebrate his achievements.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Derrick Riggins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Derrick Riggins,
Dept of Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Probation Officer

Gerry Glynn

503 Florida Street

Orlando, FL 32806

Gerardfglynn63@gmail.com

May 29, 2025

Dear NACC Nominating Committee:

I write to wholeheartedly support Jim and John Walsh's nomination of Howard Talenfeld for this award. Howard's daytime job is not one normally honored by the NACC. This alone deserves recognition. However, he has done so much more than decades of representing injured children.

His work as a leader in child welfare reform in Florida deserves recognition by the NACC. Although we have not reached our goal of every foster child in Florida getting legal representation, we would have no state funded lawyers if it wasn't for Howard's leadership. His work in his own county of Broward significantly increased the availability of lawyers there. However, his statewide work has made it possible for by last count almost 3000 children to get representation every year.

Although Howard and his advocacy is well known, his success is in what he does outside the public. I have always been extraordinarily impressed with his ability to accomplish things behind the scenes. Through relationships he has developed and maintained over decades and through nonstop phone calls, he has dramatically changed the positions of the legislature and the Florida Bar. His soft power is incredible.

Howard is also one of the most energetic people I know. He could have used that energy in many ways but he has directed so much of that energy for the last thirty or more years to helping the children of Florida especially those with disabilities or in foster care. The State of Florida and the children of Florida have benefited from his dedication.

I am honored to have had the pleasure to work with Howard and am honored to recommend he receive this award from the NACC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gerry Glynn", enclosed within a thin blue rectangular border.

Gerard F. Glynn