



May 28, 2025

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

Re: Nomination of the Child Advocacy Unit at the Defender Association of Philadelphia for NACC's Outstanding Children's Law Office/Agency Award

Dear Awards Committee,

I am pleased to nominate the Child Advocacy Unit (CAU) of the Defender Association of Philadelphia for the Outstanding Children's Law Office/Agency Award. Over the past several years, the CAU has emerged as a dynamic, client-focused office that is increasingly setting a standard for excellence in the field of children's legal advocacy.

Strengthened Practice and Multidisciplinary Representation

The CAU's shift toward a more holistic, family-centered model of representation has been both intentional and impactful. Multidisciplinary teams—including attorneys, social workers, and peer advocates—now approach each case with an understanding that preserving family integrity is fundamental to the well-being of the children they serve. While the unit has long played a critical role in the city's child welfare system, this emphasis on client-directed and trauma-informed advocacy has had a growing and marked impact on the experiences of families in Philadelphia.

Youth Engagement and Best Practices

The CAU is taking meaningful steps to integrate the voices of young people with lived experience into its work. Their peer advocates are valued team members, and the launch of their Youth Action Board is a promising development that will continue to shape their advocacy from the perspective of those most directly impacted. These efforts reflect a commitment to the best practices outlined in the Children's Law Office Handbook, and they demonstrate a practice focused on collaborative and youth-centered advocacy.



Collaboration and Systemic Impact

Our team at Community Legal Services has had the opportunity to partner with the CAU on important appellate work to protect the rights of children and parents to be free from unnecessary government intervention. This collaboration has strengthened both offices' legal strategies and deepened our shared commitment to keeping families together. The CAU's recent partnership with Drexel University's law school to launch a legal clinic also reflects a forward-thinking approach to community engagement and professional development. They have also developed a partnership with Children's Rights to promote family preservation and ensure the provision of reasonable efforts for every family.

Commitment to Race Equity and Cultural Change

The CAU has made notable strides in recent years to integrate race equity into its practices and advocacy strategies. From internal training to appellate advocacy positions, this focus is becoming a more central part of their identity and approach. For instance, the CAU co-authored a successful amicus brief in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court with Community Legal Services that opposed granting standing to foster parents in child welfare cases, highlighting the way that foster parent standing has entrenched and exacerbated existing racial biases in the child welfare system. The CAU also co-authored an amicus brief with CLS to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court challenging the way that overuse of termination of parental rights harms Black and other marginalized families.

New Leadership and Renewed Vision

Over the past few years, the appointment of Mimi Laver as Chief of the CAU has brought strong national perspective and thoughtful leadership. Mimi's focus on client-directed representation, family integrity, and organizational accountability is helping to shape the office's work in powerful and lasting ways. Her leadership is a catalyst for change, and the results are visible in Philadelphia Family Court every day.

The Child Advocacy Unit shows what a children's law office can achieve with the right vision, commitment, and community partnerships. I strongly recommend them for the NACC's Outstanding Children's Law Office/Agency Award and appreciate your consideration of this nomination.



Sincerely,



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