

Nomination for 2026 Outstanding Legal Advocate Award - Lily Colby

May 29, 2026

Dear National Association of Counsel for Children Award Committee,

It is our joy and honor to nominate Lily Colby as the National Association of Counsel for Children's 2026 Outstanding Legal Advocate. Lily's extraordinary expertise - lived, advocacy and legal skills - her experience, as well as her deep track record of engaging lived experts in partnership and advocacy, make her the ideal candidate for this award.

It is honestly hard to know where to begin to outline Lily's many qualifications. Lily Colby is a nationally recognized advocate for youth and families impacted by the foster care system, drawing on both professional expertise and lived experience in foster care as a youth, foster parent and as a kinship caregiver to her brother. As a teenager, Lily and her three brothers spent years in foster care and were often separated across multiple homes. These experiences shaped her lifelong commitment to strengthening support for foster youth and preserving sibling connections.

Lily's commitment to public service began early. She had several different jobs and internships during her undergraduate career at Yale College, including at Connecticut CASA, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, the U.S. Congress (both Senate and House), and the Child Welfare League of America. While in college, she also served with AmeriCorps and became a kinship caregiver for her youngest brother.

While at Berkley Law School, this commitment continued. Lily was a Bergstrom Law Fellow and upon graduation received an Equal Justice Works Fellowship with the Youth Law Center and the National Center for Youth Law, where she focused on caregiver engagement and closing the foster youth educational gap. She went on to work at California CASA and the California Department of Social Services.

Lily's work and advocacy is always in true partnership with fellow lived experts. In April 2021 Lily co-founded Elis for Rachael at Yale University after the death of a student with mental health disabilities. Lily hosted community organizing events, gathered data, and helped support disability rights which helped to change dozens of policies in the most comprehensive mental health rights settlement with a University in U.S. History. Lily continues to serve the organization as a Volunteer Board Member.

In June 2021 Lily founded With Lived Experience which focuses on providing trainings, consultant services and technical assistance to state programs, nonprofits and federal agencies on lived experience engagement. With Lived Experience has launched projects supporting LGBTQAI+ rights, disability rights and the rights of children in foster care.

In December 2024 Lily founded the National Network for Fostering Sibling Connections and currently serves as its director. In this role Lily leads a national network of over 500 professionals and people with lived and professional experience committed to improving sibling connections for foster youth in the United States. The Network hosts trainings across the country on sibling connections for lawyers, judges, social workers, former foster youth, CASAs and advocates and conducts monthly community engagement and legal research meetings on sibling connections. What the Network has accomplished in just 17 months is truly extraordinary.

Lily's many accomplishments and the advocacy she has done on behalf of children and youth stand out, but even more is the way that Lily works. Lily ensures that lived experts are the majority in the rooms and organizations she leads. She is such an inclusive leader that she hosts open monthly meetings for the National Network for Fostering Sibling Connections where anyone interested in sibling connections is welcomed into the work. The way she engages colleagues, volunteers and anyone who comes into contact with the organizations she leads is unique and powerful. Lily's dedication and commitment to lived experience leadership has allowed the National Network to develop sample motions that lawyers have used to advocate for sibling groups in court, changed the way social workers write case plans to incorporate sibling connections into decision-making, and empowered a foster parent to successfully secure visitation for two siblings who had not previously had visitations. Lily's work and leadership have continuously provided the backbone for leaders across the country to continue organizing around sibling connections. Her leadership has successfully reunified at least one sibling set.

The four of us can attest to the way that Lily works as we are all part of the executive team that has helped to launch the National Network for Fostering Sibling Connections. We are proud to call her a friend and colleague and thrilled to nominate her for this award.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ivory Bennet

Erica Hickey

Cathy Krebs

Isabel Stasa



Children's Law Center of California

Excellence In Advocacy

*Serving Los Angeles, Placer, and
Sacramento Counties*

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

Re: Support for the Nomination for Outstanding Legal Advocate Award - Lily Colby

Dear Members of the Nomination Committee:

On behalf of Children's Law Center of California ("CLC"), we are honored to offer this letter in strong support of Lily Colby's nomination for the NACC's Outstanding Legal Advocate Award.

Lily Colby embodies the very best of child welfare advocacy: a leader whose work is informed not only by legal expertise and policy acumen, but also by profound lived experience, deep compassion, and an unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children and youth impacted by foster care.

While Lily's nomination materials thoughtfully detail her many accomplishments and leadership roles, we write to emphasize the extraordinary impact of the perspective she brings to this work and the way she has transformed personal experience into meaningful national advocacy. As a young person in foster care who experienced repeated sibling separation, Lily understands firsthand the lifelong consequences that disrupted family connections can have on identity, belonging, stability, and well-being. Rather than allowing those experiences to define her limitations, Lily has used them to fuel a career dedicated to ensuring that other children and youth experience greater connection, dignity, and support within child welfare systems.

Lily's advocacy is particularly powerful because it bridges systems reform with authentic lived expertise. Too often, child welfare policy is developed without meaningful partnership with those directly impacted by the system. Lily has consistently challenged that model. Through her work, she has created spaces where lived experts are not simply consulted, but genuinely empowered as leaders, collaborators, and decision-makers. Her approach reflects the kind of client-centered, equity-focused advocacy that is essential to advancing justice in child welfare practice.

CLC also recognizes Lily's remarkable ability to move seamlessly between direct advocacy, coalition-building, policy reform, and national systems change. Her academic achievements—including graduating from Yale University and earning her law degree from University of California, Berkeley School of Law—are impressive in their own right, but what is most striking is how Lily has used every opportunity and platform to remain deeply connected to community and service. Her work following law school, including her Equal Justice Works Fellowship focused on caregiver engagement and educational equity for foster youth, reflects a longstanding commitment to addressing the systemic barriers faced by vulnerable youth and families. More importantly, she produces results. Recently,

Placer County began providing foster caregivers with Educational Advocacy packets tailored to the individual needs of each child placed in their home based on a training Lily presented.

In founding the National Network for Fostering Sibling Connections, Lily has elevated sibling connection as a critical child welfare issue deserving national attention. At a time when systems are increasingly recognizing the importance of relational permanency and youth well-being, Lily's leadership has helped center sibling relationships as essential protective factors for children in care. Her work has already influenced professionals across disciplines—including attorneys, judges, social workers, legislators, advocates, and caregivers—and has strengthened national conversations around trauma-informed and relationship-centered child welfare practice.

Equally important is the manner in which Lily leads. She approaches advocacy with humility, collaboration, inclusivity, and a genuine belief in the value of every voice at the table. Those qualities have allowed her to build community across disciplines and lived experiences in ways that are both rare and deeply impactful.

CLC is proud to support Lily Colby's nomination for this well-deserved recognition. Her leadership has significantly advanced the legal rights, opportunities, and well-being of children and youth involved in the child welfare system, and her influence will undoubtedly continue shaping the field for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie McCormick, Senior Policy Attorney
Ann Quirk, Policy Attorney
Children's Law Center of California
mccormickj@clccal.org
quirka@clcccal.org