



## GEORGETOWN LAW JUVENILE JUSTICE CLINIC & INITIATIVE

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**Karla Talley**  
*Racial Justice & Juvenile Defense Fellow*

*\*Not yet barred in the District of Columbia*

Dear JJCers,

Greetings from the Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative (GJJCI)! **This year, we welcomed the 53<sup>rd</sup> class of student attorneys into the JJC family. During a critical time in which the federal government's agenda is directly impacting youth, their families, and defenders in the District of Columbia and across the country, our students and staff remain at the frontlines defending youth in our nation's capital.**



*During orientation, the 53<sup>rd</sup> class of Georgetown Law's Juvenile Justice Clinic visited D.C. Superior Court — a meaningful start to their year of advocacy.*

In the District, there has been an undeniable increase in anxiety among youth who have very real fears of being stopped, harassed, separated from their families, or otherwise harmed by law enforcement. Amidst escalating pressures and a changing juvenile legal landscape, our Clinic and Initiative remain committed to zealous advocacy, fighting for the rights of our youth in and outside of the courtroom.

Contrary to false and hyperbolic rhetoric, violent crime in D.C. hit a 30-year low in 2024 and is down an additional 28% thus far this year. This dip includes a decrease in both carjackings and homicides and is consistent with national trends.

Yet, the administration's persistent mischaracterization of D.C. crime and mobilization of federal law enforcement in August 2025:

- puts undue pressure on police to make petty arrests;

- exacerbates tension between police and Black youth [who are more likely to be stopped and arrested in the District;](#)
- causes residents to unnecessarily fear youth of color;
- erodes public safety; and
- increases the risk of harmful police-civilian encounters.

Sadly, the people being labeled “dangerous” are often the most vulnerable members of our community—our youth, unhoused residents, Black and Brown community members, and undocumented neighbors. Equally distressing, federal agents tasked to patrol our youth lack training in adolescent development and de-escalation techniques—skills that are critical for slowing down encounters, meaningfully engaging with youth, and minimizing tensions

Through it all, we are continuously inspired and in awe of our students and clients, who, despite the ever-changing climate, have remained steadfast and committed in the fight for justice, while being flexible, adapting, and re-strategizing as called for in the moment. Indeed, this class has picked up right where the Class of 2025 – half of whom are now doing indigent defense work across the country – left off. Already this year, students have convinced prosecutors to dismiss cases, won school disciplinary hearings and community status review hearings, and successfully fought for their clients to get second chances in the community! In the face of adversity, our students and clients continue to uplift one another, honoring the heightened emotions we are all experiencing during this time while taking moments to pause, breathe, reflect, and then continue to make good trouble.



*Celebrating the Juvenile Justice Clinic's Class of 2025 at this year's annual end-of-year gathering.*

In the face of growing political turmoil, we are proud to see the outpouring of collective action from our colleagues, partners, and the D.C. community – tackling false narratives, leading vital trainings, representing clients in court, and advocating for evidence-based public health approaches that keep our communities safe for everyone. GJJCI's faculty and staff also remain on the frontlines of legislative advocacy, resisting proposed legislation that would drag us back to the failed and harmful approaches to youth behavior in the 1980s and 1990s and supporting community groups that are working to protect youth from the harms arising from the federal incursion. We will continue to fight for mental health services, quality education, job pathways, food access, safe and affordable housing, and mentorship for all youth in our city.

In addition, the GJJCI has deepened its engagement with system-involved youth through its work with the resident leadership council inside D.C.'s youth detention center. Our Racial Justice and Youth Defense Fellow, Karla Talley, partners with formerly system-involved youth leaders in the District to facilitate sessions with currently detained youth. Monthly discussions focus on leadership skills, conditions at the facility, and broader concerns about the juvenile legal system. Recently, this partnership secured over \$1,000 in book donations from the D.C. Public Library System for the local youth detention facility. These donations were responsive to the desires of youth at the facility to have more culturally relevant and engaging books.



*YDAP Summer Academy 2025, hosted in partnership with The Gault Center at Georgetown Law.*

The rights of youth are under attack, not just in D.C. but across the nation, and our continued training and support for youth defenders locally, regionally, and nationally is as important as ever. GJJCI continues to support youth defenders in our region through the **Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center (MARGC)**, which is housed within our Initiative. We received a record number (over ninety) applications for our week-long **Youth Defender Advocacy Program (YDAP) Summer Academy**, which we hosted again this June in partnership with the Gault Center. We convened forty-two front-line defenders from

"I have been using the research and skills from YDAP to push myself (and my colleagues) to challenge client admissions more frequently. In most of my cases (like 90%), my clients have made an admission of some kind, post-Miranda. Before YDAP, I didn't challenge those confessions nearly as much as I do now. The development research, combined with the practice and the support from YDAP helped me do that, and it has helped my clients."

across the country to learn from leading youth defense experts.

New and experienced

defenders learned innovative strategies that incorporate the unique aspects of representing youth in delinquency cases and increase their racial justice advocacy skills. Defenders returned home with information and resources they can share with local colleagues.

"You've changed my life and changed the lives of my clients as a result. My clients have a great attorney thanks to what I learned during Summer Academy – thank you!!"

**This year, the Initiative continued to nurture and support our Ambassadors for Racial Justice (ARJ) community**, in partnership with the Gault Center. ARJ equips youth defenders with the resources, training, and support needed to raise race in their advocacy and advance systemic reform through a yearlong program and a lasting professional network.

We intentionally transitioned ARJ into a biannual program, alternating with our Summer

Academy, which allowed us to pause in 2025 to reflect and deepen our investment in our alumni community.

During this time, we focused on sustaining connections through initiatives like our ARJ Community Hub (connecting Ambassadors across years) and

Ambassador Spotlights (highlighting the racial

justice wins from our Ambassadors), while providing ongoing mentorship and strategic support to alumni navigating new challenges in youth defense.



*Excerpt from our Ambassador Spotlight Newsletter, featuring Alumni Ambassador Keiler Beer and his leadership on the Multnomah County Restorative Justice Pathway initiative.*

In May 2025, we celebrated the program's impact with our Five-Year Reunion Virtual Gala, *Reflections, Resilience, and Reimagining Racial Justice: Five Years of Impact in Youth Defense*, bringing together 26 Ambassadors to share wins, strategies, and tools for advancing racial justice. The reunion highlighted the Ambassadors' capstone projects, including their efforts to reduce disparities among tribal youth in Wisconsin's juvenile legal system and provide state-wide trainings on litigating race for youth defenders. This work embodies the transformative leadership ARJ fosters across the country. We look forward to welcoming a new cohort of Ambassadors in January 2026 at Georgetown Law for an in-person orientation and the start of another year of learning, mentorship, and community building in pursuit of racial justice through youth defense. Our **"Racial Justice for Youth: A Toolkit for Defenders"** (<https://defendracialjustice.org/>), created in partnership with the Gault Center, continues to equip defenders with tools and resources to support their advocacy. Our team regularly expands the toolkit by adding new case law summaries, expert reports, and sample motions and pleadings. We are now building new training, resources, and curricula to help youth defenders better serve youth with disabilities. In partnership with the Gault Center, we hosted a training on **"Defending Youth at the Intersection of Disability and Race,"** which drew approximately 200 attendees who learned about concrete litigation strategies for defending youth with a range of disabilities. The juvenile legal system disproportionately harms youth with disabilities, who are more likely to be arrested, removed from their home, and placed in a juvenile facility, and forced to navigate a system that criminalizes behaviors often stemming from their disability and adolescence. This cycle of harm heavily burdens youth of color, especially Black, Native/Indigenous, and Latine youth, who are overrepresented in the juvenile legal system. Our commitment to this issue stems from both GJJCI's advancement of scholarship related to this topic (Kristin N. Henning & Rebba D. Omer, *The Making of a Juvenile Record: The Insidious Consequences of Criminalizing Race, Adolescence, Disability, and Trauma*, 103 N.C. L. Rev. 1373 (2025) and conversations with the board of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center.



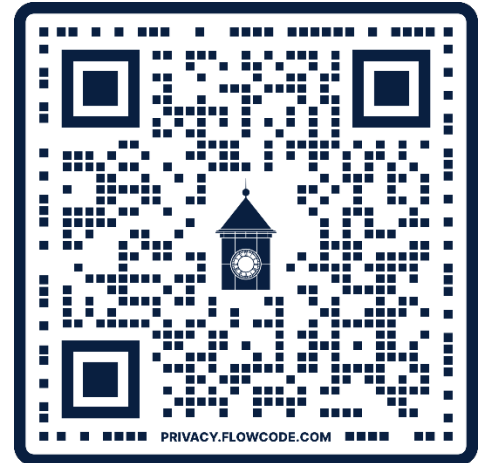
Racial Justice Toolkit now includes a **Disability and Race Resource Page**, an extensive list of resources for youth defenders, including a language guide, interview checklist, sample motions, research and law review articles, summaries of relevant legal authority, policy reports, and other resources (<https://www.defendyouthrights.org/resources/youth-with-disabilities/>). We appreciate the help of our Georgetown Law students and the interns from the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center, from various law schools across the country, who work with us to develop these resources during their summer internships. This collaboration allows law students to gain experience in research and advocacy through an intersectional, racial-justice lens.

Our wonderful staff continues to support and mentor students, serve clients, and collaborate with community partners near and far. Kris Henning continues as Director of the Clinic and Initiative, supervising students in court, training defenders across the country, writing books and law review articles, and shifting the false narrative told about our Black children in this country – all while never hesitating to mentor and pour into those around her. Eduardo Ferrer serves as the Policy Director, co-teaching and supervising students in the Clinic while fiercely advocating for policy changes to support youth in the district. Katrecia Banks continues to help students, staff, and clients in the Juvenile Justice Clinic, providing many moments of laughter in the JJC suite, and now also provides support to the Criminal Defense & Prisoner Advocacy Clinic. Rebba Omer continues to work tirelessly as our Senior Staff Attorney and Lead Program Manager, coordinating our regional initiatives, particularly those of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center. This year, she gave birth to her first child, her beautiful daughter Zahana, who is now an honorary JJC baby. Karla Talley is now in her 2nd year as our Racial Justice and Youth Defense Fellow, supporting our racial justice programming and efforts. Alijah Futterman, our second year Prettyman Fellow, is now supervising students alongside the faculty, and Devon Johnson is the new first-year Prettyman Fellow.

We said goodbye this past summer to our amazing fellow, Eloisa Cleveland, who served as last year's 2nd-year Prettyman Fellow and is now working with the Maryland Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore.

We also officially said goodbye in June to our founder and longtime mentor, Wallace J. Mlyniec. We are grateful that he still occasionally comes into the office while finishing his forthcoming book on clinical pedagogy, which gives us the opportunity to spend time with him and pick his brain about a host of topics. To honor his incredible contributions to the JJC, the law center, and youth defense, we are proud to announce the renaming of the Gault Juvenile Justice Clinic Endowed Fund to the *Wallace J. Mlyniec Juvenile Justice Clinic Endowed Fund*. We would like to extend a special thank you to Phil Ingle (C'84, L'88, P'27) and Liz Weiser (C'86, L'92, P'27) for championing Wally's legacy with their founding gift and leadership, and we also thank each of you who have already contributed to this endowed fund.

Civil Rights leader John Lewis once said we should all “get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America.” We are immensely proud of the work our JJC family does every day. We cannot express enough how much your support means as we continue to do such vital work in our communities. Your generosity makes a world of difference and signals to youth across our nation that every child deserves a healthy, happy, and fulfilling life. Please give to JJC to help further our mission of defending D.C.’s youth, training law students and attorneys, and fighting for racial justice in the juvenile and criminal legal systems. You can donate using the enclosed envelope, scanning the QR code, or by visiting: [give.georgetown.edu/juvenile-justice](https://give.georgetown.edu/juvenile-justice).



Sincerely,

*Kris Henning*  
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