



# Ambassadors for Racial Justice 2026

Georgetown Law Juvenile Justice Initiative  
The Gault Center: Defenders of Youth Rights



# Ambassadors for Racial Justice 2026

## **The Program**

Sponsored by the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative and The Gault Center, the Ambassadors for Racial Justice program is for defenders who are committed to challenging racial injustice in the juvenile legal system.

## **The Goal**

We seek to inspire and prepare dedicated frontline youth defenders and youth justice advocates throughout the nation to assume leadership roles and develop strategies to combat racial inequities in their respective jurisdictions, and throughout the country.

## **The Outcome**

The 12-month program will (1) encourage and support defenders and advocates as they challenge racial injustices through legal advocacy, (2) engage defenders and advocates in systemic and policy reform, and (3) equip defenders and advocates with the tools to initiate and navigate difficult conversations about race. By creating a robust community of youth defenders and advocates who will share their challenges and successes, the program also seeks to (4) grow and retain a cadre of attorneys of color in the fight for youth justice.

## Alex Bellow New Orleans, LA



Alex Bellow is the 9th of 11 children born to the late Mr. Aaron A. Bellow, Sr., and Mrs. Mary Theresa Bellow. He was raised in Lake Charles, LA. He has made Jefferson Parish, Louisiana his home for more than 30 years. Alex has been married to Dr. Shawan Bellow for over 29 years, and together they are the proud parents and guardians of three amazing young ladies: Jasmine Alexandria, Julianne Alexis, and Ja’Sani Miracle.

To better serve his community as a social justice advocate, Alex earned a Juris Doctor degree and a Certificate in Social Justice. He is a servant at heart. Alex has served as a Senior Pastor for over 27 years. He and his wife, Dr. Bellow, founded Hosanna Fellowship Church of Gretna in 2002 with an expressed mission to “Serve Christ by Serving His People.” Alex is a 2024 Gillis Long Public Service awardee and Louisiana State Bar Association Pro Bono Award recipient. Alex was also a proud recipient of the 2024 Spirit of Ignatius Award, which is the highest award conferred upon a graduating Juris Doctor candidate at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law.

"Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage: Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are."

– St. Augustine

## Amity Bjork Tacoma, WA



Amity Bjork is a criminal defense attorney in Tacoma, Washington. Her practice focuses on youth and young adults charged with serious violent crimes. Amity grew up in Maine. She realized that she wanted to be a public defender after doing a public defense clinic during her third year of law school in New Hampshire. She was a public defender in Seattle for eight years before going into private practice in 2006. Changing her practice to mainly represent youth and young adults has taken place over the past five or six years.

She attended YDAP Summer Academy in 2023 and has attended the annual Gault Center Summits. She works with a small group of Gault program attendees in Washington to create opportunities for youth defenders around the state to connect and share experiences and common concerns.

Her interest in policy work and advocating for youth outside of the courtroom has grown since the shift in her practice. She is active on committees in Washington, including one formed to create proposed legislation to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction and a subcommittee of the state Sentencing Guidelines Commission to expand youth sentencing alternatives.

"Until the killing of Black men, of Black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother's son, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until this happens."

– Ella Baker

## Madalyn Cohee Maryland



Madalyn Cohee is an assistant public defender at the Maryland Office of the Public Defender in the Mental Health Division. She represents children and adults facing involuntary civil commitment in private hospitals, as well as individuals at state forensic hospitals. She is a proud Maryland native and completed both her undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Maryland. While at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, she was a student attorney with the Youth, Education, and Justice Clinic where she represented students removed from schools and individuals serving life sentences for crimes committed when they were emerging adults. Madalyn was the recipient of the Anne Barlow Gallagher Prize for Service to Children and Youth and the William P. Cunningham Award for Exceptional Scholarship.

Madalyn is also an adjunct professor at Stevenson University in the undergraduate legal studies department.

“You can’t understand most of the important things from a distance . . . You have to get close.”

— Bryan Stevenson

## Adrian Dubose New Orleans, LA



Adrian Dubose is a staff attorney at the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights. He is proud and humbled to be able to practice law and represent children who grew up in the same neighborhoods and attended the same schools as he did as a kid. Adrian graduated from Warren Easton Charter High School and participated in the dual enrollment program at Delgado Community College, where he earned a Technician Certification as a Residential Electrician.

He graduated from Louisiana State University with a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications, concentrating in Political Communications, and a minor in Philosophy. Adrian then graduated from Southern University Law Center in May 2024 and passed the Louisiana bar in July 2024. The summer before attending law school, Adrian worked as a state legislature reporter.

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

– James Baldwin



“Our national reckoning with race and inequality must include disability. Race and disability have a complicated but interconnected history. Yet discussions of our most salient socio-political issues such as police violence, prison abolition, healthcare, poverty, and education continue to treat race and disability as distinct, largely biologically based distinctions justifying differential treatment in law and policy.”

– Jasmine E. Harris

## Natalie Hollabaugh Portland, OR

Natalie is a staff attorney at Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ) in Portland. Natalie first clerked for YRJ as a law student and returned as a lawyer in 2023. Prior to her work at YRJ, Natalie was a 2021 Equal Justice Works Fellow working in the juvenile justice system where she represented several youth who had been waived into adult court, helped launch a statewide juvenile record expunction clinic, and worked alongside the Gault Center to publish a guide to collateral consequences for practitioners and youth alike.

During law school she traveled across the state to youth prisons to deliver Know Your Rights presentations and to help youth file legal paperwork. She went to law school due to the systemic inequities she witnessed as a public school science teacher for several years. Her passion for working with teens and their families has translated into over a decade of advocacy.

She currently teaches juvenile justice at her alma mater, Lewis & Clark Law School. She is a member of the Gault Center Western Region Board, and a former Executive Committee member and officer for the Oregon State Bar Juvenile Law Section. She has organized several juvenile law CLEs for Oregon practitioners, specifically focused on access to justice and juvenile law.

## Helen M. Hoopes Crescent City, CA



Elly Hoopes is an attorney licensed to practice in California and Colorado. She is currently a solo practitioner working in Northern California. She is a contract panel attorney appointed on criminal and dependency matters in the Del Norte Superior Court of California where her focus is youth defense. Elly has represented youth, people under 18, in delinquency and dependency proceedings for almost twenty years. First in Colorado, where she worked as a deputy public defender for over a decade, eventually becoming the supervising attorney over the youth division in Douglas County, Colorado.

Elly left Colorado for California to work for the Yurok Tribe in Klamath, California. This was a natural segue for Elly moving from an adjunct academic position teaching Native American Law at her alma mater at the Sturm College of Law at the University of Denver to practice what she taught. Elly was Executive Director and Associate General Counsel for the Yurok Tribe, the largest Indian Tribe in California. In 2021 she embarked upon her solo practice to expand her efforts to include policy work with the goal to improve and impact the treatment of youths by courts throughout California and the United States. Elly currently represents the majority of youths facing delinquency proceedings in the Del Norte Superior Court of California.

Regarding sixteen-year-old Raymond Mattz, (*Mattz v. Arnett*, 412 U.S. 481, 488 (1973)), the 19th, and last time he was arrested for illegal fishing, after the wardens couldn't navigate the river:

“They handed Ray the drum and started singing an Indian song, with Ray drumming. It was a rhythmic, repetitive chant that grew stronger and stronger through the three times it was sung. The night was quiet, and the family’s voices projected off the wall of the eastern ridge to the hills surrounding the river, making it larger than life. The river joined in, singing in concert with its flow’s steady roar.”

– Amy Bowers Cordalis, *The Water Remembers*

## Wynn Horton Chesapeake, Virginia



Wynn is an Assistant Public Defender working for the Virginia Indigent Defense Commission in Chesapeake, Virginia. A graduate of the University of Cincinnati College of Law (JD '21) and Houghton University (BA '14), he is originally from western New York but has been in Virginia now for over a decade. At work he practices primarily in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, with a caseload that includes both adults and children. Over the past four years he has developed an emphasis and reputation for working with clients who have a serious mental illness diagnosis and/or who struggle with substance use disorders. He leads his office's Behavioral Health Docket team and is a member of the Recovery Court team. For about two years he also assisted in coordinating the local Restoration and Competency Docket, helping to arrange services and support for clients and their families.

Prior to working as an attorney, he served several organizations in the nonprofit world--including a workforce training position in which he helped survivors of abuse gain skills to work in professional bakeries (and he is a cupcake wizard as a result).

"Acting locally allows us to be inside the movement and flow of the system, participating in all those complex events occurring simultaneously. We are more likely to be sensitive to the dynamics of this system, and thus more effective. However, changes in small places also affect the global system, not through incrementalism, but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness."

– Grace Lee Boggs



“The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe.”

– James Baldwin

## Serena Hughley Atlanta, Georgia

Raised in McDonough and Columbus, Georgia, Serena Hughley is an Assistant Public Defender in the Fulton County Public Defender’s Office. She is a fifth-generation Georgia native and is committed to helping members of her community heal, grow, and be seen in their full humanity, especially the youngest among us.

A graduate of Spelman College and Harvard Law School, Serena began her path in youth advocacy by volunteering weekly at M. Agnes Jones Elementary School and at the Fulton County Juvenile Justice Center’s weekend diversion program. She has also worked with the Southern Center for Human Rights, Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Center for Children’s Law and Policy.

As a 2023 Equal Justice Works Fellow at the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights, Serena represented young people aged 13 to 20 in youth and adult detention facilities across Louisiana, advocating for their safety, education, medical care, and release. She later participated in the 2025 Youth Defender Advocacy Program’s Summer Academy with the Gault Center and Georgetown Law’s Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative. Serena now works to bring racial-justice-centered and developmentally-informed advocacy to youth appearing in the earliest stages of adult felony proceedings in Atlanta. She is excited to be a part of the 2026 Ambassadors for Racial Justice.

## Matthew Swiontek Minneapolis, MN



Matthew Swiontek is an Assistant Public Defender in the Juvenile Division of the Hennepin County Public Defender’s Office in Minneapolis, MN. He graduated from Purdue University with a B.S. in Economics in 2012 and from the University of St. Thomas with a J.D. in 2015. Matthew clerked for trial court judges in Minnesota and Michigan before becoming a public defender in 2019. Matthew returned to Minneapolis in 2020 and has been representing youth since 2024. During law school, he had a special interest in representing youth and has enthusiastically made the transition. He currently represents youth in delinquency cases and in child protection matters.

Matthew is also an avid movie buff and runner. He sits on the board of directors for the Minneapolis-based nonprofit, Mile in My Shoes, and co-hosts a monthly running crew, Threebird.

“I feel that if we don't take seriously the ways in which racism is embedded in structures of institutions, if we assume that there must be an identifiable racist who is the perpetrator, then we won't ever succeed in eradicating racism.”

– Angela Y. Davis,  
*Freedom is a Constant Struggle:  
Ferguson, Palestine and the Foundations  
of a Movement*

## Charles White Indianapolis, IN



“Racial justice is not only a legal pursuit—it is a moral calling. It demands that we see every child, every family, and every community not through the lens of their struggle, but through the promise of their potential.”

– Charles White

Charles White is an attorney admitted to practice in Indiana state and federal courts with more than two decades of experience in youth defense, civil rights, and community advocacy. He currently serves as a Conflict Attorney with the Marion County Juvenile Public Defender Agency, where he provides legal representation to youth facing delinquency charges. Since founding the Law Office of Charles White in 2004, he has also provided civil litigation, business consultation, and general legal counsel to clients across Indiana.

Earlier in his career, Mr. White served as a Civil Rights Specialist with the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, investigating and litigating discrimination claims. His legal foundation includes work as a bailiff, law clerk, and public defender in the drug and domestic violence divisions.

Beyond the courtroom, Charles has dedicated over 40 years as a preacher and community activist. He has led grassroots racial justice efforts, chaired nonprofit boards, and mentored young men through faith-based and civic programs. A graduate of the Indiana University School of Law, he also holds an M.B.A. and a B.S. from Indiana State University. Driven by both faith and justice, Charles views his life’s work as a mission to defend, uplift, and empower youth and families affected by systemic inequities.



“It is more important than ever to remain relentless in the face of injustice—especially as our political leaders try to roll back the gains we have made in youth justice reform over the last decade. Our work must be persistent, strategic, and fueled by the hope we have for our children!”

– Kristin Henning

## Kristin Henning

### Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative

Kristin Henning is a nationally recognized advocate, author, trainer, and consultant on the intersection of race, adolescence, and the policing of Black youth. She is the Blume Professor of Law and Director of the Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative at Georgetown Law, and was previously the Lead Attorney of the Juvenile Unit at the D.C. Public Defender Service.

Kris has been representing children accused of crimes for more than 26 years, and is the co-founder of a number of initiatives to combat racial injustice in the juvenile and criminal legal systems, including the Ambassadors for Racial Justice program and a Racial Justice Toolkit for youth defenders. Kris trains state actors across the country on the impact of racial bias and the traumatic effects of policing on youth of color.

Kris worked closely with the McArthur Foundation’s Juvenile Indigent Defense Action Network to develop a 41-volume national training curriculum, the Youth Defense Advocacy Program. She now co-hosts, with the Gault Center, a week-long summer academy for youth defenders.

Professor Henning writes extensively about race and the criminalization of adolescence. Her book, *The Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth*, was featured on the front page of the New York Times Book Review. Professor Henning serves on the Board of Directors for the Public Welfare Foundation and is the Director of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center. She has received many awards, including the Leadership Prize from the Juvenile Law Center and the Robert E. Shepherd, Jr. Award for Excellence in Juvenile Defense by the Gault Center. Kris earned her B.A. from Duke University, her J.D. from Yale Law School, and her LLM in Advocacy from Georgetown Law.



“The Ambassadors for Racial Justice program is our opportunity as a youth defense community to engage in transformative practices that pull at the roots of racial injustice in the juvenile legal system.”

– Mary Ann Scali

## Mary Ann Scali

### The Gault Center: Defenders of Youth Rights

Mary Ann Scali serves as the executive director of The Gault Center where she works with youth defenders and advocates dedicated to promoting justice for all children by ensuring excellence in youth defense. After working as a summer law clerk for The Gault Center in 1996, Mary Ann became the Deputy Director in 2000 and the Executive Director in 2017.

In partnership with The Gault Center team and youth defense leaders, Mary Ann delivers youth defense training and technical assistance, conducts state-level youth defense assessments, and facilitates cross-disciplinary reform efforts aimed at developing resources and policies to strengthen youth defense and access to justice for all youth.

Prior to joining The Gault Center, Mary Ann defended youth in the juvenile division of the Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore City, MD; spent two years teaching high school in Pohnpei, Micronesia; served in the Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome, Italy; and taught Baltimore City boys at the Baraka School in Nanyuki, Kenya.

Mary Ann holds a JD and MSW from Loyola University Chicago where she was a CIVITAS ChildLaw Fellow.



“The Ambassadors for Racial Justice program reflects the beauty and power of true leadership in youth defense. That leadership embodies the courage to confront injustice even when it is ordinary, accepted, and quiet in its harm of our children, and the commitment to stand between powers of oppression and the people most vulnerable to its harm.”

– Jimmonique Rodgers

## **Jimmonique Rodgers** The Gault Center: Defenders of Youth Rights

Jimmonique is the Director of Operations for The Gault Center. In this role, she manages the organization’s operations, including all remote operations, finance, and human resources, to ensure The Gault Center maintains effective and efficient financial and operational systems.

Before joining The Gault Center, Jimmonique served as interim director and deputy director for the State of Georgia’s indigent defense agency, the Georgia Public Defender Council (GPDC). The agency has more than 900 state employees and contracted private attorneys representing clients in 43 of the state’s 49 judicial circuits. Prior to working at the agency executive level, Jimmonique led its statewide appellate division, working with staff and contract appellate attorneys to zealously represent both adult and youth clients in post-conviction proceedings.

Jimmonique is a proud graduate of Fayetteville State University and North Carolina Central School of Law. She holds a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice and Criminology from Georgia State University, focusing on youth justice, correlates of delinquency, and justice system policy.



"History has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own." – Michelle Obama

"I am honored to stand with the 2026 Ambassadors for Racial Justice who courageously continue the collective fight for racial justice."

– Sarah Johnson

## Sarah Johnson

### The Gault Center

Sarah Johnson is a Senior Youth Defense Counsel at the Gault Center, where she manages a national portfolio of training and technical assistance to advance zealous youth defense representation and strengthen youth rights.

Prior to joining the Gault Center, Sarah was the Director of Specialty Practices, Director of Youth Defense, and head of the Children's Defense Team (CDT) for the Missouri State Public Defender System. Sarah began her work as a public defender in 2009, representing both children and adults in the St. Louis Area. In 2017, Sarah became the Director of Youth Defense and Policy, and in 2019, Sarah was the first to lead CDT, a specialized group of attorneys, mitigation specialists, and support staff that represent children in delinquency proceedings across the state.

In her role at the Gault Center, Sarah has led efforts across the country to create statewide specialized youth defense systems, including intensive site work in Kansas to create bridges across youth leaders, community partners, decisionmakers, and defense attorneys to build a sustainable youth defense system model so that all children and youth can access specialized youth defense representation.



“Grace Lee Boggs famously asked this question: “What time is it on the clock of the world?” The Ambassadors for Racial Justice program gives us the time to build and experiment toward a “more human humanity.” For me, the fight for racial justice is rooted in an interdependence that thrives through our differences, and I am grateful for this moment in time where we can, together, build toward an equitable humanity where all children have the freedom to flourish.”

– HyeJi Kim

## HyeJi Kim The Gault Center

HyeJi Kim (she, her) is a Senior Youth Defense Counsel at the Gault Center, where she works to strengthen youth rights by upholding the fundamental right to counsel for all youth who come into contact with the juvenile legal system. HyeJi dreams of one day living in a world where all children are free to thrive in communities of care and is driven by the belief that our humanity is interdependent—that in the words of Desmond Tutu, “my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.” HyeJi’s work focuses on probation and system transformation as she works alongside the youth defense community to transform systems of harm and punishment from the inside.

HyeJi first worked as a fellow at the Gault Center, followed by the Legal Aid Society in New York City, where she represented children and youth caught between the family regulation and delinquency systems. HyeJi returned to the Gault Center in 2022 and finds joy being in community with youth defenders to uphold and strengthen youth rights together. HyeJi graduated cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and summa cum laude from the George Washington University. HyeJi is a lifelong student of emergence, wholeness, and interdependence.



“The 2026 Ambassadors for Racial Justice are the revolutionary youth defenders we need at this moment! I am thrilled to support them as we work together to abolish the white supremacy embedded in our legal system and create a world where Black and Brown youth are free to fully enjoy their rights as children.”

– Rebba Omer

## Rebba Omer

### Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative

Rebba Omer serves as Senior Staff Attorney and Lead Program Manager for Georgetown Law’s Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative, where she works to advance racial justice and protect the rights of youth accused of crimes. Rebba trains and supports defenders across the country, helping to develop litigation strategies and engaging in policy advocacy. An avid writer, she has co-authored three academic journal articles on the intersection of race, adolescence, and the juvenile legal system.

Prior to coming to Georgetown, Rebba served for four years as an Assistant Public Defender at the Community Law Office in Knoxville, TN where she represented both youth and adults accused of crime. An expert in holistic, client-centered youth defense, Rebba is an alumna of both Gideon’s Promise Core 101 three-year training program and the Youth Defender Advocacy Program Summer Academy.

Rebba graduated *cum laude* from Northwestern University School of Law in 2014, receiving its Wigmore Scholarship and Pritzker Fellowship. While a student attorney in the Northwestern Bluhm Legal Clinic’s Children and Family Justice Center, Rebba represented youth impacted by the juvenile legal system and collaborated with professors on policy advocacy. In her final year of law school, Rebba completed a senior research project in Bangladesh where she assisted an NGO with a country-requested audit of the criminal and juvenile legal systems.

Prior to law school, Rebba was an AmeriCorps volunteer, serving unhoused people in Oakland, CA. She graduated *summa cum laude* from DePaul University with a B.A. in English literature and a minor in public policy.

## Karla Talley

### Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative



“Radical simply means ‘grasping things’ at the root.” –Angela Y. Davis.

“I am proud to support a group of inspiring youth defenders who challenge us all to look deeper, question systems, and pursue justice at its root.”

– Karla Talley

Karla Talley is the Racial Justice and Youth Defense Law Fellow at Georgetown Law’s Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative. Karla received her J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School as a Toll Public Interest Scholar. She participated in the Interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Clinic, representing youth in dependency proceedings and in petitions for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. She served as the Advocacy Co-Chair for the Black Law Students Association and served as a Senior Editor for the Journal of Law and Social Change. She also participated in the Youth Advocacy Pro Bono Project in partnership with the Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project, where she drafted strength-based mitigation reports supporting the decertification of youth from adult criminal court to juvenile court.

During law school summers, Karla interned at the Abolitionist Law Center and at the Civil Rights Corps. In addition, she interned at the Juvenile Law Center during one semester of law school. After graduating from law school, Karla clerked for the Honorable Catharine F. Easterly for the D.C. Court of Appeals.

Karla proudly hails from Prince George’s County, Maryland. Prior to law school, Karla worked as a Legal Assistant in the Housing Law Unit at Legal Aid DC, where she worked directly with clients navigating civil legal matters to help prevent low-income tenants from being evicted and to ensure safe housing. Karla attended Lafayette College as a Posse Foundation Scholar. She graduated magna cum laude from Lafayette College in 2018 with a B.A., double-majoring in English and Government & Law.

# Ambassadors for Racial Justice

For more information about the Ambassadors for Racial Justice Program and the Juvenile Justice Initiative at Georgetown Law, please visit <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/experiential-learning/clinics/our-clinics/juvenile-justice-clinic/juvenile-justice-initiative/> or email [lawjjc@georgetown.edu](mailto:lawjjc@georgetown.edu). For more information about The Gault Center and to find a toolkit for youth defenders, please visit [defendyouthrights.org](http://defendyouthrights.org).

