



**GEORGETOWN LAW
JUVENILE JUSTICE
CLINIC & INITIATIVE**

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**Not yet barred in the District of Columbia*

November 17, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings from the Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative! **This year, we welcomed the 51st class of students into the JJC family. They come to a court we could not have imagined a half a century ago. Computers did not exist in the law schools back then. The internet, Zoom, and WebEx were merely dreams for the future. And Courts, always the slowest branch of government to change, were usually late to accept new ways of providing justice.** But even courts have been forced to catch up with our technological age, and COVID has changed the way we will do business in juvenile court forever. Even as more hearings occur in person in the courtroom, the virtual technology is now readily available, permitting clients and their families to appear remotely for some hearings. The virtual technology also allows JJC students to watch and support their classmates appearing in court no matter where they physically are!

Although many government officials have declared the pandemic “over,” the residual effects on children and families in D.C. are profound. Our clients are experiencing significant mental health challenges, great anxiety, persistent intra-family loss and trauma, and educational gaps. Their parents and guardians are grappling with economic hardship, housing instability, and mental health challenges of their own – even amid deep concern for their children. Across the city, agencies are understaffed, social services are limited, and fear of crime – both real and exaggerated – has put city leaders and law enforcement on high alert. As we have seen so many times in US history, false and harmful narratives implicitly and explicitly demonize Black and brown children who ultimately bear the brunt of civilian and law enforcement backlash. Instead of investing in resources and support that our children so desperately need and that would be more effective in reducing crime, our city officials have ramped up punitive responses to crime. Prosecutors and judges are increasingly reluctant to release children to the community, and detention facilities and

shelter houses are over-crowded. In many ways, the anti-youth messages have not been this bad since the 1990s, a period when the harsh rhetoric resulted in terrible harm to children of color.

Learning and innovating has always been a hallmark of the clinic. Our students continue the excellent work you did while you were here, and their clients continue to benefit from their zealously and competence. Indeed, what remains constant is the energy, passion, and commitment each new class brings to the JJC. The challenges we face today require JJC students, faculty, and staff to fight for justice on multiple fronts. We have been advocating for our clients in court, in school expulsion hearings, and in abuse and neglect proceedings. We have also been working to stave off our clients' evictions from public housing, and as you can imagine, we also spend a lot of time helping our clients informally navigate difficult relationships with their parents. Although the work feels hard—and harder than we have experienced in some time--our students continue to serve with passion, commitment, patience, and grace. Similarly, our clients continue to inspire us through their strength and resilience. We have all marveled at the grit and determination of one of our houseless clients who has managed to navigate local bureaucracies to secure temporary housing, connect with mental health services, and find a job. He did not stop fighting for a better life and we will not stop fighting for our clients. We will not stop fighting for justice.

Our permanent faculty and staff remain intact – at least for now, while our fellows continue to rotate. Katrechia Banks continues to hold down the fort as our fabulous Executive Assistant and Program Assistant. Kris Henning continues as Director of the Clinic, teaching, supervising students in court, speaking, training, writing, and fighting to shift the narrative. Wally Mlyniec still serves as Senior Counsel to the Clinic and mentor extraordinaire to so many! Eduardo Ferrer is still our Policy Director, teaching, supervising, writing, and leading our reform efforts for a smaller, better, and more just juvenile legal system. Rebba Omer continues as our wonderful Senior Staff Attorney and Lead Program Manager, coordinating our regional initiatives, particularly the efforts of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center. Alina Tulloch continues in the second year of her 2-year Youth Defense and Racial Justice Fellowship as we interview candidates for the 2024-26 Fellowship. Marquise Findley-Smith, last year's 2nd year Prettyman Fellow, has completed his fellowship and is now working with the Maryland Public Defender's Office. Kelsey Robinson, our 2nd year Prettyman Fellow, is now supervising students along with the faculty, and Eloisa Cleveland is the new 1st year Prettyman Fellow.

GOOD NEWS! As we head into our 51st year of the Juvenile Justice Clinic, we have set the date for the 50th anniversary celebration. Please mark *June 1, 2024*, as the date you will join us in-person in DC to celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments you have helped us achieve during the half-century of our existence, and to gain insights about where we hope to go in the next half-century.

BITTERSWEET NEWS! At the 50th anniversary celebration, Wally will be formally announcing his intention to retire. The final date is not set but he has informed Dean Treanor that no one over 80 years old should be teaching the lawyers of the future. 😊 More on this will be forthcoming after the New Year.

As we enter a new era, the Georgetown Clinic and Initiative has much to celebrate!! On November 9, 2023, Kris was awarded a 2023 **“Embracing the Legacy Award”** from the RFK Community Alliance in Boston for her positive impact on the lives of young people and for fighting against social injustice. Kris was excited to see JJC alums from Massachusetts at the event! On December 6, 2023, the Clinic & Initiative will receive the 2023 **Community Human Rights Award from the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area (UNA-NCA)**. The award will be given in recognition of our outstanding contributions in the field of human rights in our local community. All of you who have worked in or contributed to the work of the GJJCI are a part of our legacy and “co-recipients” of this award.

The GJJCI continues to advance racial justice locally, regionally, and nationally. In 2023 we continued our partnership with the Gault Center (formerly the National Juvenile Defender Center), hosting both the week-long **Youth Defender Advocacy Program Summer Academy** on campus and regular racial justice training webinars for youth defenders and other advocates. We compile and create a wealth of resources for our webinars, including bibliographies and sample pleadings, such as a sample motion for release from detention which highlighted research on the importance of “play” in healthy adolescent development. Kris and Eduardo are still flying across the country to train defenders, prosecutors, judges, pediatricians, school nurses, journalists, and more! This year, Kris has educated advocates in Alabama, California, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New York, Philadelphia, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin (among other states) on the criminalization of normal adolescent behaviors and the traumatic effects of policing on youth of color. She recently facilitated a state-wide, day-long training for New Hampshire public defenders on using this research to enhance litigation. In the days after the training, defenders offered examples of how they were already working to incorporate what they learned into their motions practice.

Our team also remains hard at work, providing defenders with tools and resources to support their advocacy through our **"Racial Justice for Youth: A Toolkit for Defenders"** (<https://defendracialjustice.org/>), which now has over 2142 registered members. Launched in partnership with the Gault Center in October 2019, we regularly update its offerings with sample motions and pleadings, legislative testimony, and case law summaries. In the last year, we added and updated annotated bibliographies on topics like closing the school to prison pipeline, decriminalizing race pride, and promoting adolescent resilience. The Toolkit also provides an important opportunity for Georgetown Law students to collaborate on our racial justice work by conducting research and writing sample pleadings during their summer internships.

In January 2023, the Initiative welcomed the fourth cohort of our year-long Ambassadors for Racial Justice program (ARJ), again in partnership with the Gault Center. Through ARJ, a select group of defenders receive the resources, training, and support they need to raise race in their advocacy in both individual cases and broader systemic reform. We were thrilled to resume our in-person orientation after Covid forced us online in 2021 and early 2022. Ambassadors joined us at the law school for an inspiring and productive three-day training followed by a trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. After orientation, Ambassadors maintain the program’s momentum by participating in monthly webinars on topics

like grassroots organizing, grant-writing, over-medication, and appellate advocacy. The Ambassadors returned to campus in July for a Train-the-Trainer workshop that prepares them to spread the work of the program to other defenders. Our 2023 Ambassadors hail from Florida, Nebraska, New York, Louisiana, Ohio, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Texas, and Wisconsin and are already hard at work on their capstone projects. For example, one Ambassador is developing a template for creating powerful mitigation videos that can be used in court to impact sentencing outcomes. Our alumni across all cohorts continue to use what they learn in ARJ as they go on to lead defender organizations, become key advocates in legislative reform, and even join the judicial bench.

GJJCI also supports youth defenders through the **Mid-Atlantic Region of the Gault Center (MARGC)**, which is housed in our Initiative. Over seventy-five attorneys from DC, Maryland, and Virginia, joined MARGC in late August for a region-wide conversation about the strategies defenders can use to resist the re-emergence of harmful, racist narratives akin to the discredited juvenile super-predator myth. Two clinic alumni helped lead the discussion: Eduardo Ferrer, who advised on effective ways to engage with media, and Lauren Dollar, who shared her experiences with community organizing as a youth defender in Baltimore. MARGC also continued to invest in the future of youth defense leadership by hosting the second annual Racial Justice and Youth Defense Internship Program. Supervised by a Maryland-based youth defender (who also happens to be an alumni of our Ambassadors for Racial Justice program), a law student completed a full-time summer internship at the Prince George's County public defender office. The intern was immersed in the world of racial-justice-focused youth defense as she assisted her supervisor with both traditional casework and a research project aimed at overcoming racial disparities in the charging of young people in juvenile and adult courts.

Locally, Kris and Eduardo are working hard to combat the harmful, false narratives about our youth. The GJJCI continues to co-convene a number of coalitions in the District, and we are all more actively engaged in public communications strategies. With our coalition colleagues, we continue to advocate against the District's expansion of its pretrial detention statute and for more direct investment in youth and families. Despite the challenges posed by the current political environment, we will continue advocating for our youth on the individual and systemic levels in hopes of moving even closer to a world where all of our children – and particularly those who have been most marginalized – are treated as *our* children.

Much of our work cannot continue without your support. Your generosity is even more important as we continue to expand our activities to help more children. While Georgetown Law supports many of our Clinic and Initiative efforts and some local foundations occasionally support some of the Initiative's work, foundations do not always support projects that are part of our core mission, thus reducing our ability to tap into those resources. Thank you to those of you who were able to provide extra funds during our Giving Days, and we appreciate the gifts from those of you who made and continue to fulfill your multi-year pledges. We are incredibly grateful for that level of support and welcome new multi-year gifts. We continue to use all of those gifts to support a staff position in the Initiative. Your help, especially at this time of year, is crucial for us to continue that work.

With new opportunities and great needs before us, we invite you to partner with us again. By making a gift to JJC in honor of its 50th Anniversary, you can help to further our mission of defending DC'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 or by visiting: give.georgetown.edu/juvenile-justice.

As 2023 draws to a close, we reflect again on our work and its effect throughout the entire United States. As Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of the planet seem to spin out of control, we are even more acutely aware of the unprecedented suffering that people in America and all over the world have endured again this year. Although our scope is necessarily limited, these world-wide challenges serve to redouble our resolve to fight on, even as hate and violence, domestic terrorism, illegitimate restrictions on voting, racial and ethnic discrimination, environmental devastation, and world-wide attacks on democratic principles increase. We understand that this existential uncertainty places a strain on our students as they try to do our important work. As they help their clients navigate the crises they face at home, school, and in their community, the students worry about their own health and welfare and that of their families and friends around the country. As our students grieve for the tragedies they witness, we try to bring new strategies to help them face their challenges with resilience and hope. We hope you and your family and friends are finding some strategies as well.

We are thankful for the opportunity to serve youth in the District and the nation and appreciate that this important work is what binds together the JJC family, a family preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The enduring concern that you show for us and our work is the pillar that supports that family. Our influence has grown dramatically in 50 years because the concern we share for each other and for the rest of humanity. We have joined in a sacred pledge to leave the world a better place than we found it. The experiences we shared in Clinic, with their emotional highs and lows, tears and laughter, have made us strong and united us across graduating classes, across decades, across generations, and across a half century. We hope that those experiences will help us ameliorate our continued local and world crises and lead to a more unified city, country, and world in our next half-century.

We wish you the best for the holidays and for the future. **We also look forward to seeing you on June 1, 2024, in DC for the JJC 50th Anniversary.**

Sincerely,

Kris

Wally

Eduardo

Katrechia

P.S. – In an effort to keep in greater touch in an increasingly technological age, **we have expanded our web and our social media presence. We would love to connect.** You can find us at @GeorgetownJJI on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and view us on our website.