

The Advocate

A YAF & EdLaw Newsletter

FY2026, 1st Quarter
(July - September 2025)



Hello YAF friends and supporters -

Welcome to the Youth Advocacy Foundation's First Quarter Newsletter of Fiscal Year 2026. This year has gotten off to a great start and we are excited to share with you all our comings and goings and exciting new initiatives and accomplishments. Thank you for your interest in our mission to shut down the Cradle-to-Prison pipeline.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Goncalves'.

Duci Goncalves
Chair of the Board

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marlies Spanjaard'.

Marlies Spanjaard
YAF President & CEO

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michele Scavongelli'.

Michele Scavongelli
YAF Executive Director

Initiative Updates



YAF V.O.I.C.E.S.
Voices of Impacted Communities Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The VOICES program takes a break during the summer months but internal team met recently to discuss the program's future direction. They will reconvene in January with comprehensive data and outcomes from the previous cohort in order to identify opportunities for improvement and areas of success to build upon. Stay tuned—exciting developments are on the horizon!

[Learn More About V.O.I.C.E.S.](#)



[The Client Support Fund](#)

September was back-to-school season, a time that should be filled with excitement and possibility. Last month, as our clients prepared to return to school, we shared how challenging this time of year can be for many of the young people we serve. The cost of new clothes, school supplies, reliable transportation, and even basic technology can quickly become overwhelming. That's why we created the **Client Support Fund**, to ensure no student's education is disrupted because they lack the essentials needed to learn and thrive.

Thanks to your generosity after this appeal, this Fund made a real difference for our clients this fall and will continue to do so. One student received safe, reliable rides to school until the bus system started running, ensuring they didn't miss a single day of class. The Fund also recently provided a laptop for a hardworking student determined to complete their final high school credits. Following the client's release, their EdLaw team collaborated with the local school district to create a pathway for completing the final five credits needed to graduate by the end of the year. Based on their circumstances (age and recently released from the house of corrections) they were not eligible to receive a laptop through other programs that typically provide electronics to students. The fund stepped in to ensure they had the technology needed to stay on track and meet their academic goals. With the support of the Client Support Fund, the client is now on track to finish their remaining coursework—all while maintaining full-time employment—and is moving confidently toward earning their high school diploma.

These are just two examples of how your support fueled opportunity, stability, and hope for our clients during the critical back-to-school season.

From all of us at the **Youth Advocacy Foundation**, thank you for standing with us and for believing in the potential of every young person we serve.

YAF Happenings

The Youth Advocacy Foundation's 25th Silver Anniversary Spring Celebration is Coming!

We're thrilled to look ahead to **May 15, 2026**, when we'll celebrate **25 years of the Youth Advocacy Foundation** at our milestone Spring Celebration! This special anniversary is a moment to thank everyone who has supported us over the past 25 years.

If we haven't seen or heard from you in a while, we warmly invite you to attend, support, or sponsor the event and celebrate alongside our community of friends, advocates, and partners.

Looking forward, we are planning even more systemic ways to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and address structural racism in our schools, policing, courthouses, and detention facilities. We can't wait to update you on our progress and celebrate this special occasion together!

YOUTH ADVOCACY FOUNDATION
invites you to our
Milestone Anniversary Event!

25 Years of Standing Up With Students

Save the Date!

**FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026
6:00 - 9:00 PM
THE CHARLES HOTEL
CAMBRIDGE, MA**

**MAKE AN IMPACT AS A MILESTONE SPONSOR:
[YAF.EJOINME.ORG/SPONSOR2026](https://yaf.ejoinme.org/sponsor2026)**

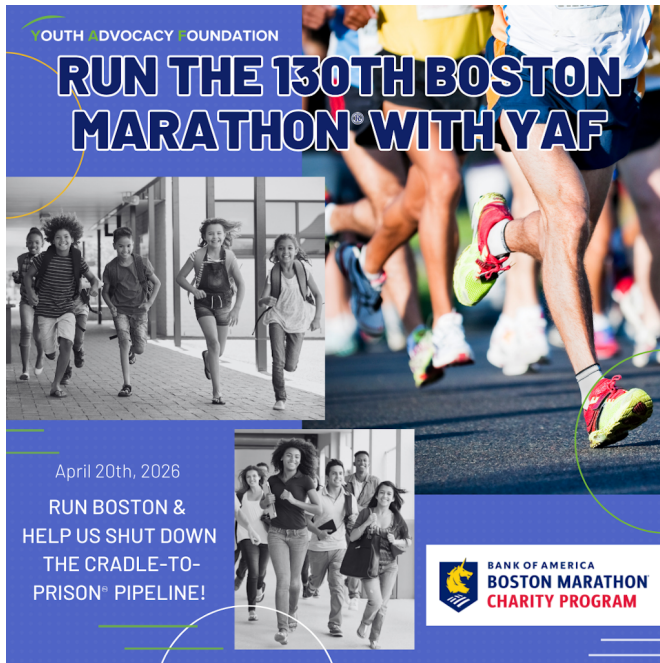
Inspiring Student Speakers
Music
Silent Auction
Raffle

Visit Our Event Website for More Details and to Support YAF



BANK OF AMERICA
BOSTON MARATHON®
CHARITY PROGRAM

YAF is an Official Charity of the 2026 Bank of America Boston Marathon Charity Program!



We are excited to announce that we are again an official marathon charity and have received 5 charity bibs from the Bank of America Official Boston Marathon Charity Program.

We released our application starting with the recruitment date launch on September 29th and had a wonderful turn out of interest in joining TeamYAF and raising funds to support the work that we do.

After thoughtful consideration, we narrowed down the applications and invited 5 amazing runners to join us as our TeamYAF 2026 Boston Marathon team. We can't wait to introduce them to you! Stay tuned to our social media platforms for their introductions soon!

If you're not following us on social media, please do!

You can find us at:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/youthadvocacyfoundation/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/youthadvocacyfdn/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/youthadvocacyfoundation>
- Bluesky: <https://bsky.app/profile/youthadvfdn.bsky.social>

Student Success Stories

No Amount Too Small

This summer one of our EdLaw clients needed sunglasses because she has sensitive eyes and was trying to spend more time outdoors. Thanks to the Client Support Fund, she was able to get the sun protection she needed to enjoy the outdoors more. Not every need is big, but every donation of any size makes a big difference to each student we help. We make a difference in our clients lives, thanks to supporters like you, even in the summer, when school isn't in session.



*stock image used for client privacy

Talk of the Town

Exciting Update! State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Approves New Regulations about the Use of Seclusion and Time-out

In our last newsletter, we reported that DESE was considering these changes and we're happy to announce that in July, they approved new regulations that clarify and update how these practices can be used and ensure stronger protections for students.

- Time-out must now happen in spaces that are unlocked and allow students to leave freely. Seclusion is only allowed in emergencies involving an imminent risk of serious physical harm—and even then, only with strict safeguards in place.
- Schools will need to make sure any room used for time-out meets specific standards: it must be age-appropriate, safe, ventilated, and meet building and fire codes.
- Emergency seclusion will now require adult supervision, parental consent, and documentation from a licensed physician or mental health professional, along with clear communication to families and regular data reporting to DESE.



These updates will go into effect August 17, 2026, giving districts time to prepare and implement changes. These steps are intended that time-out and seclusion are used safely, appropriately, and only when absolutely necessary—with transparency and student well-being at the center. To read more about these updates please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/news/elementary-and-secondary-education-board-approves-changes-to-time-out-practices-in-schools>

The Protect Education Equity Bill PASSED!

EdLaw attorneys, in partnership with Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC), co-wrote a critical brief to the Education Committee detailing the legislative history of *manifestation determinations* in Massachusetts law helping to secure stronger protections for students with disabilities in the new Protect Education Equity Bill.

This is a major win for immigrant students and students with disabilities across the Commonwealth and a critical step in safeguarding education rights under threat at the federal level.

The new law:

- Protects students of *all immigration statuses*
- Ensures *trained interpreters* for families
- Safeguards *special education services* for English learners with disabilities
- Prevents *discriminatory discipline* of students with disabilities



Shortly after passing the Massachusetts legislature it was signed into law by Governor Maura Healey. Massachusetts law now clearly states, something that was always true, that every kid has the right to go to school without being discriminated against because of their immigration status or disability.

This law is a big deal! To summarize, it means students with disabilities are protected from unfair discipline, families must get trained interpreters when needed, special ed teams have to understand the needs of English learners, and schools can't push families to give up supports just to make the schedule work.

This happened because families spoke up, advocates pushed hard, and lawmakers stepped up. And now our state is setting an important example, even when things at the federal level feel shaky.

Huge thanks and congrats to everyone who made this happen. This win was made possible by the tireless work of advocates, families, and legislative champions across the state. We're proud to be part of the fight to protect education equity for *every* student in Massachusetts. Now we get to work making sure the law is put into action.

Where Do Students and Families Stand with the Threatened Closure of the US Department of Education

In July, a Senate report from Senator Warren's office was released detailing major changes to the U.S. Department of Education under the Trump administration, highlighting cuts to student aid, civil rights enforcement, and federal education data systems.

Key takeaways:

- Reduced access to federal student loans and grant programs
- Major staffing cuts at the Office for Civil Rights, limiting response to discrimination in schools
- Sharp reductions in national education data collection and research
- Proposals to transfer core education responsibilities to other federal agencies

According to the report, these actions could have long-term consequences for millions of students—particularly those from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities.

Worth a read for anyone concerned about the future of public education, download the full report here: <https://www.youthadvocacyfoundation.org/post/new-report-from-sen-elizabeth-warren-s-office-education-at-risk>

What to Read this Week...

With attempts to weaken the Department of Education and the growing political battles over what students can and cannot learn, Trump has turned our classrooms into something that directly reflects the country's deeper struggles and shortcomings with equity, truth and power.

In a recent article, Hon. Jay Blitzman, a retired Massachusetts Juvenile Court Judge and former Executive Director of Massachusetts Advocates for Children, details how public education is being reshaped by policy decisions that could impact generations to come. It's not just about schools. It's about who gets access to knowledge, who gets heard, and what kind of nation we're building together. From executive orders to changing department structures, this article will walk through the steps Trump has taken in order to disarm and dismantle the American education system.

Please take the time to read the full article at: <https://thefulcrum.us/governance-legislation/public-education>

Grant Updates

In addition to money raised through our annual appeal, the Boston Marathon and our annual event, we rely on grants from Charitable Foundations to support the work we do. Here is a summary of the grant funding we received in the 1st quarter of FY26:



In July of 2025, YAF received \$20,000 from the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation. The Shaw Foundation was one of the EdLaw Project's first supporters and we are grateful for the continued support as we have explored new ways to support the EdLaw Project.



In September, we received \$20,000 from the Frank Reed and Margaret Jane Peters Memorial Fund at Bank of America in support of our general operating costs. We appreciate their continued support!

Pro Bono Spotlight

Each quarter pro bono attorneys work hard to greatly improve educational services for their clients. The following highlight is just one of the many terrific outcomes the attorneys on YAF's pro bono panel are securing for their clients.

Morgan Lewis

Stephanie Faraci and Laurie Burlingame, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP

This quarter we would like to highlight the successful results that Stephanie Faraci and Laurie Burlingame of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP achieved for an 11 year-old student with double deficit dyslexia.

The team secured a high quality summer tutoring program for her as well as placement at a private school for students with learning disabilities. The student loves her new school and is thriving there.

Staff & Board Spotlight

First Board Meeting of FY26

The Youth Advocacy Foundation's Board of Directors held its first meeting of Fiscal Year 2026 on September 16th at the offices of Kotin, Crabtree & Strong. The meeting focused on setting priorities for the year ahead, strengthening board engagement, and ensuring that YAF's programs and advocacy efforts continue to advance our mission.

Board members reviewed organizational updates, discussed upcoming fundraising and outreach opportunities, and approved several actions to support YAF's growth and sustainability—including new committee structures and planning for the year's major events and strategic initiatives. We're grateful to our hosts and to all board members for their thoughtful guidance and dedication as we begin another impactful year together.

Welcome to our Newest (and Littlest) YAF and EdLaw Member!

Yes we have ANOTHER EdLaw baby! Please join us in wishing a huge congrats to EdLaw Counsel, Kayla Pulliam, on the birth of her son!



Meet the Fall Interns

Every semester and summer, YAF is fortunate to attract talented legal interns to support the attorneys of the EdLaw Project, as well as an undergraduate intern to support YAF development and

operations staff. We have a great group working with us now that we're excited to shout out!

Thank you, Miranda, Molly and Perpetua for all your hard work so far this fall and helping us in our mission to shut down the school-to-prison pipeline!



Miranda Costigan -

(she/her)

2L, Harvard Law School

EdLaw Legal Intern

Miranda grew up in Northern California and attended undergrad and lived in Los Angeles before law school. She was inspired to attend law school after volunteering as a CASA in LA County, and spent last summer working at Children's Law Center of California. All of these experiences are why she was interested in working at EdLaw and she says "I have been enjoying my fall internship!"

Fun Fact: "In my free time, I love to cook!"



Molly Hayes -

(she/her)

2L, Harvard Law School

EdLaw Legal Intern

Molly is a 2L at Harvard Law School. She is passionate about de-carceration and criminal defense.

Fun Fact: She has played the violin since before she could read!



Perpetua Santine -

(she/they)

Senior, Boston University

YAF Operations & Development Intern

Perpetua is currently a senior at Boston University. My major is Education and Human development, with a specialization in Youth Development and Justice. "Working with YAF has allowed me to gain direct insight and knowledge of what it means to be an advocate for educational equity in Boston and what it looks like to be working towards ending the school-to-prison pipeline."

Fun Fact: "I speak 4 languages; Spanish, English, French, and Haitian Creole."

EdLaw Training Updates

This fall we launched our training series, "Get Schooled with EdLaw" for court appointed attorneys and social workers. This ten-part series will cover education law generally as well as many of the specific issues that are unique to children involved with the juvenile court. So far we have done two sessions, an introduction session and one focused on how to read IEPs. We had over 100 attendees and look forward to future sessions!

More Info, Updates & Resources on Our Website
youthadvocacyfoundation.org

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"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." - Nelson Mandela



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