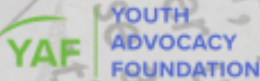


The Advocate

A YAF & EdLaw Newsletter

FY2026, 3rd Quarter
(January - March 2026)



Hello YAF friends and supporters-

What a quarter it has been! Looking back on January through March 2026, we are so proud of everything YAF and the EdLaw Project have been able to accomplish — and none of it would be possible without the incredible support of people like you. From a landmark legal victory fighting for students with disabilities to our incredible Team YAF runners pounding the pavement in preparation for the Boston Marathon — this quarter was a powerful reminder of just how much heart and dedication fuels everything we do.

And the best is yet to come! As we head into an exciting spring — including our 25th Anniversary Spring Celebration on May 15th — we couldn't be more grateful for each and every one of you who makes this work possible. We hope you enjoy this look back at an incredible first quarter, and we can't wait to share what's ahead!

Hope to see you May 15th!

Sincerely,

Duci Goncalves
Chair of the Board

Marlies Spanjaard
YAF President & CEO

Michele Scavongelli
YAF Executive Director

Initiative Updates



YAF V.O.I.C.E.S.

Voices of Impacted Communities Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline

VOICES New Year Gathering: Reflecting and Reimagining Our Impact

On January 28, 2026, VOICES hosted a New Year event at our Roxbury office, bringing together eight members from the previous cohort along with the VOICES planning team, including Director Marlies Spanjaard. This gathering was designed to reconnect with past participants and engage in meaningful dialogue about strengthening VOICES' mission and impact. The conversation centered on critical questions:

1. Is the school-to-prison pipeline still happening today, and what does it look like?
2. Why is VOICES important to you?
3. What should VOICES be doing moving forward?
4. Did VOICES help you address your concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline?

While exit interviews were conducted at the conclusion of the last cohort, this event provided a unique opportunity for candid, peer-driven discussions. Participants shared honest feedback and innovative ideas, reaffirming the importance of VOICES as a platform for advocacy and systemic change.

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

YAF Happenings

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

YOUTH ADVOCACY FOUNDATION
invites you to our
25th Anniversary Spring Celebration

INSPIRING STUDENT STORIES

MUSIC & FOOD

SILENT AUCTION

SPECIAL 25TH ANNIVERSARY
"WHERE ARE THEY NOW"
MESSAGES FROM FORMER CLIENTS

25 Years of Standing Up With Students

FEATURING



Emcee

DE'LON GRANT
Broadway Actor and
Berklee Professor



Poetry Performance

ALONDRA BOBADILLA
2020-2022 Boston
Youth Poet Laureate

HONORING

Commitment to Justice Award



DOUG & CATHY TREGO

Community Justice Award



CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER OF MASSACHUSETTS

Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award



LEXIE RUEKLE REYNOLDS

FRIDAY | MAY 15, 2026 | 5:30-9 PM

THE CHARLES HOTEL
1 BENNETT ST. | CAMBRIDGE, MA

bit.ly/YAF25Years

SCAN ME



If it seems like we've been busy behind the scenes this past quarter, it's because we have! A huge part of our January through March was spent hard at work planning what we know is going to be an incredible evening, and we are so excited to finally share it all now that May 15th is just around the corner! We could not be more thrilled to celebrate 25 years of impact with all of you.

We have an unforgettable evening planned featuring inspiring stories from the young people we serve, original poetry by 2020–2022 Boston Youth Poet Laureate and Board Member, Alondra Bobadilla, live youth musicians, our returning Emcee, Broadway star and Berklee professor, De'Lon Grant, plus food, signature cocktails and mocktails, dessert, a silent auction, photo booth and trivia fun throughout the night!

Tickets are on sale now at bit.ly/YAF25Years — but don't wait! Early bird pricing ends TONIGHT so grab your tickets before the price goes up!

Buy Your Tickets, Raffle Tickets and Donate HERE

And Don't Forget the Dream Vacation Raffle!

YOUTH ADVOCACY FOUNDATION
WIN YOUR CHOICE OF
THREE *DREAM VACATIONS!*

Each valued over \$6,000!

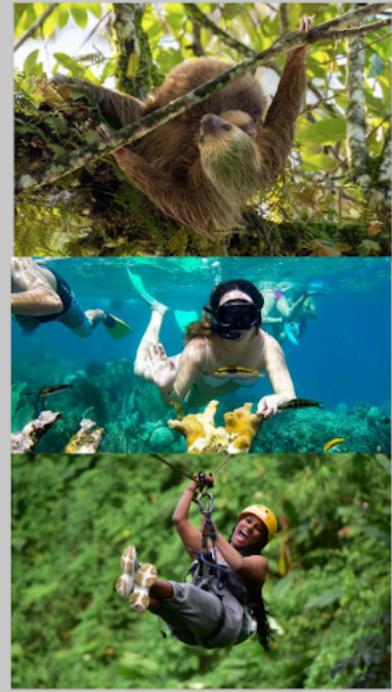
**GREEK ISLAND
GETAWAY**



**ICELAND: LAND OF
FIRE & ICE**



**COSTA RICA
FAMILY ADVENTURE**



ONLY 100 TICKETS WILL BE SOLD!

GET YOUR RAFFLE TIX AT: [BIT.LY/YAF25YEARS](https://bit.ly/yaf25years)

One lucky winner will walk away with the trip of a lifetime — and the best part is they get to choose from three incredible destination packages: a Greek Island Getaway, Iceland's Land of Fire and Ice, or a Costa Rica Family Adventure!

With only 100 tickets available at \$100 each, your odds are an incredible 1 in 100. These were just announced on Tuesday and already are a quarter sold! For more details about the raffle and incredible prize vacations, please visit: youthadvocacyfoundation.org/25yearsraffle

Stay tuned for Our Full Event Recap in the Q4 Newsletter!

Can't make it on May 15th? We completely understand, and we don't want you to miss a single moment! Be sure to tune in to our livestream at youthadvocacyfoundation.org/25years livestream where you can watch the evening unfold in real time including the live Dream Vacation Raffle drawing, so you'll want to be watching if you have a ticket!

And no matter how you experience the evening — in person or from your couch — look for our full event recap in our Q4 newsletter this summer. We'll be sharing highlights from the night, stories from the celebration, a look at how much we raised together for our mission, and so much more.

Twenty-five years of impact deserves to be celebrated in full, and we can't wait to share every moment with you. Stay tuned!

Thank you to our Major Sponsors

Presenters



Champions



Jeremy Cohn



Guardians



Lael & Charles Chester



Herlihy/Wilkins Family



Lia & Bill Poorvu

Advocates



Josh Dohan & Patty Garin



Michele & Peter Scavongelli



BANK OF AMERICA BOSTON MARATHON[®] CHARITY PROGRAM

All In for the Marathon — How YAF Showed Up This Training Season

Boston Marathon Training was in Full Swing January - March!

This past quarter, five incredibly dedicated individuals laced up their sneakers and committed themselves to one of the most challenging and rewarding journeys imaginable — training for the Boston Marathon as part of our team in the Bank of America Official Boston Marathon Charity Program. And we could not be more proud of and thankful for every single one of them.

Training for a marathon is no small feat on its own, but our Team YAF runners took it a step further — balancing grueling training schedules with the heart and dedication it takes to fundraise on behalf of our mission. Every mile they logged was a mile run in support of the young people YAF serves every day, and that means everything to us.



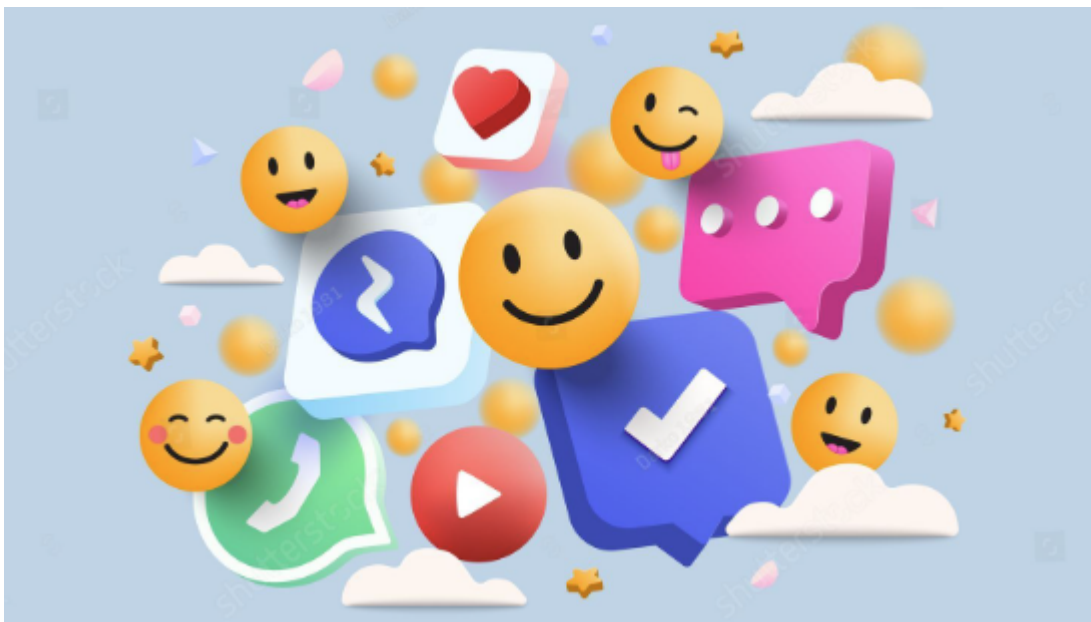
On March 12th, YAF's Executive Director and Operations & Development Coordinator had the privilege of attending the Bank of America Official Boston Marathon Charity Program Giving Day Celebration — and the energy in the room was electric! BAA CEO Jack Fleming issued an exciting challenge to all participating charities: go for the record and raise more on a single giving day than ever before. The Official Charity Program rose to the occasion in a big way, raising an incredible over \$2 million in just 24 hours for worthy causes right here in our community. We are so grateful to the BAA and Bank of America for creating such an extraordinary fundraising opportunity and for their continued commitment to supporting impactful organizations like ours. Thank you for making it possible for charities like YAF to do the work that matters.

Then on March 28th, YAF staff had the honor of showing up for our runners in a very special way — manning a water stop for the Marathon Coalition's charity runners as they tackled their longest training run of the season: an incredible 20 miles! Before the runners headed out, our President & CEO, Marlies Spanjaard, took a moment to speak to the group about YAF's mission and the young people whose lives they are helping change with every step they take. It was an emotional and energizing moment for everyone involved.



We are so deeply grateful for our five Team YAF runners and all of the Marathon Coalition charity runners who gave so much of themselves this quarter — in training, in fundraising, and in heart.

And as for how it all came together on race day? Well, that's a story for our Q4 newsletter — so stay tuned!



If you missed any of these stories earlier because 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>

Talk of the Town

Big News for Educational Justice in MA!

In 2024, the EdLaw Project, along with Latham & Watkins LLP, and the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee, filed a lawsuit against the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for their failure to educate young people in Houses of Corrections. At the time of filing, only 12 incarcerated students across the state were receiving special education services, even though many more qualified. DESE attempted to avoid the case through a motion to dismiss, but on March 25, a Massachusetts Superior Court judge denied the motion in a sharply worded decision, finding that DESE has been improperly delegating its core responsibility to provide these services and allowing the claims to continue.



We look forward to and are hopeful for a resolution that allows students with disabilities in the HOCs to get the services to which they are entitled. We will keep you posted as this case moves forward but we wanted to share this positive news with you. The decision is attached for your reading pleasure!

At YAF, we are proud to support the EdLaw Project's tireless work to ensure that every student — no matter where they are — has access to the education and rights they deserve.

[Read the Full Decision Here](#)

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 3rd quarter of FY26.

John W. Alden Trust

YAF received \$20,000 from the John W. Alden Trust as well as a commitment to another \$20,000 grant next year. The Alden Trust provides support to organizations serving children and youth (ages 0-24) with physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities; and to organizations engaged in research focused on the prevention or cure of diseases and disabilities affecting children. We are so grateful for this type of sustained funding!



We also received \$25,000 from our long-term grant partner, the Nord Family Foundation. The Nord Family Foundation grants support general operations, program related activities and capital projects in the areas of Arts and Culture, Civic Affairs, Education, and Health & Social Services. We thank the Nord Family Foundation for over ten years of funding!



YAF also received \$50,000 from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in support of YAD's Emerging Adult Pilot Program in Lowell and Lawrence.

Pro Bono Spotlight

Each quarter pro bono attorneys work hard to greatly improve educational services for their clients. We are very excited to honor and recognize Lexie Reukle Reynolds of Proskauer as our 2026 Pro Bono Attorney of the Year at this year's Spring Celebration.

Lexie Reynolds is an associate in the firm's Labor & Employment Law Department. Her practice covers a range of employment matters with a focus on internal employment and government investigations. Lexie has represented private and public companies, boards of directors and their committees, and individuals across many industries, including entertainment, financial services, non-profit, and technology.



Lexie is dedicated to pro bono work, particularly helping children. For the last six years, Lexie has been grateful to be able to dedicate her pro bono work to the realm of education law through the firm's partnership with the EdLaw Project. Since volunteering as a member of the EdLaw Project's pro bono panel, she has successfully represented three elementary and middle school students with significant learning disabilities. These students, two of whom are siblings, were languishing in their public school programs, falling further and further behind each year in their ability to read and write. As a result of Lexie's advocacy, one of the students was placed at the Landmark School in Beverly, MA, where she is thriving. She then helped a young man in middle school secure a placement at Windham Woods where he is excelling. Just recently she helped this young man's younger sister secure a placement at Landmark.

Thanks to Lexie's hard work and dedication, these students will have the tools they need to succeed in school and after. Please join us on May 15th to celebrate Lexie as our Pro Bono Attorney of the Year.

bit.ly/YAF25Years

Staff & Board Spotlight

Welcome New Board Member, Vinesha Sow!



We are so thrilled to welcome Vineesha Sow as our newest board member and we know she is going to be an incredible addition to the YAF family!

Vineesha brings a wealth of legal expertise and a genuine passion for empowering communities to her role on our board. As Senior Corporate Counsel at the LEGO Group, she navigates complex employment law across the U.S. and Canada — but what truly makes her such a perfect fit for YAF is the heart behind her work.

Throughout her career, Vineesha has represented children in special education matters, advocated for mental health access for families in need, and dedicated herself to making the law more accessible and equitable for everyone.

A committed community leader, Vineesha has served on numerous committees including the Massachusetts Bar Association's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee — and her dedication to justice, education, and youth empowerment aligns beautifully with everything YAF stands for. We are so grateful to have her alongside us as we head into our next 25 years of impact. Welcome, Vineesha!

YAF Board Hits the Ground Running at Our Annual Board Offsite Meeting



On Sunday, February 1st, the YAF board gathered in person for a productive and inspiring full-day offsite at the Department of Youth Services (DYS) facility in Dorchester — and with the Patriots set to take on the Seahawks in the Super Bowl just a week away, we couldn't resist leaning into the football spirit for the day!

The board dove deep into some important conversations across several key areas, including board development, fundraising, finance, and of course, planning for our upcoming 25th Anniversary Spring Celebration.

The Nominating & Governance Committee led an energizing brainstorm around strengthening and growing our board, generating an exciting pipeline of potential new members who share our passion for educational equity and youth advocacy. The Development Committee explored creative new fundraising ideas beyond our traditional initiatives, and the Event Committee got to work strategizing on how to make our 25th anniversary celebration truly unforgettable.

One of the most meaningful parts of the day came during our lunch break, when the board had the opportunity to tour the DYS facility and connect with a few of the young people there. It was a

powerful and grounding reminder of exactly why YAF and the EdLaw Project do this work every single day — and the kind of moment that leaves you more inspired and committed than ever.

We are so grateful to our incredible board for the time, energy, and heart they pour into this



EdLaw Training Updates

In Q3, we continued our “Get Schooled with EdLaw” series focused on providing hands on practical advocacy skills to court-appointed attorneys and social workers working directly with young people impacted by the juvenile court system. In this quarter we covered specific education advocacy needs for young people in DCF custody as well as conflict resolution options in special education and school discipline matters. Further, in March, five members of EdLaw staff had the opportunity to present at the national Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates conference outside of DC. This conference brings together education attorneys, advocates, parents and students from across the country to learn together. We were thrilled to have so many of our presentations chosen to present! Overall, in Q3, we offered seven trainings to 329 participants.

EdLaw Attorneys Attend and Present at the 2026 COPAA Annual Meeting

In early March, four EdLaw attorneys (and one retired EdLaw attorney), presented together at the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) conference. COPAA is a national peer-to-peer network whose mission is to protect and enforce the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families.

Marlies Spanjaard, Michele Scavongelli, Wheatly Gulmi, Kayla Mateo and Tim Sindelar presented to a national audience on the education rights of foster youth, disability-related attendance issues, vocational education, and exhaustion and ADA / 504 claims.



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

YAF Board of Directors

Duci Goncalves, Chair

Directors

Edith Bazile

Laura Bickel, Clerk

Allyson Black-Foley

Alondra Bobadilla

Jeremy Cohn, Emeritus

Josh Dohan, Emeritus

Ami Fatula, Treasurer

Katherine Hall Page, Emeritus

Dave Nevins

Steven J. Pacini

Eliza Presson

Vineesha Sow

Bridget Treco-Bettez, Vice President

Darnell T. Williams

Marlies Spanjaard, President & CEO
Michele Scavongelli, Executive Director

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



75 Federal St, 6th Floor
Boston, MA 02110
US

If you would no longer like to receive email from us, [click here](#) to unsubscribe