

# NEVADA YOUTH LEGISLATURE: ANNUAL REPORT 2019–2020



## OVERVIEW

The current two-year term of the Nevada Youth Legislature (NYL) began on August 1, 2019, and expires on May 31, 2021. The 2019–2020 year of the NYL included a wide range of both hands-on experiences and virtual opportunities that engaged the new youth legislators at very high levels.

The first year of their two-year term was dedicated to interactive learning opportunities that prepared and equipped youth legislators to carry out their duties of representing the youth in their senatorial districts with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness. Among the requirements youth legislators swore to accomplish was the establishment of their senatorial district's own District Youth Advisory Council (DYAC). While fulfilling this requirement, youth legislators not only prepared plans for their DYAC meetings, but were also encouraged to regularly branch out to more students and more schools in an effort to increase outreach and exposure. Up to two students from each high school in the district can engage in the DYACs. Most youth legislators also successfully completed their respective Town Hall Meeting Plans; youth legislators, however, were not able to conduct their Town Hall Meetings because of state and national guidelines for COVID-19. Due to school closures, social distancing, and limited levels of technology available, youth legislators engaged with the students and officials in their districts and beyond via alternative methods.

The main focus of the 2019–2020 year was to train and educate youth legislators in communication skills, constituent engagement, and leadership. These trainings are effective measures meant to prepare youth legislators for the second year of their term, wherein they interact with their constituents more frequently and meaningfully to propose a bill draft request (BDR) that accurately addresses community issues affecting the youth of their district and Nevada.

In conclusion, the 2019–2020 year was marked by valuable learning experiences and a steady progression of responsibilities and accomplishments experienced by youth legislators. These individuals, through trainings, meetings, and concrete experiences, learned how the government is deeply integrated into their daily lives. Further, they have learned to understand and appreciate the civic engagement of thousands of youth who surround them. In many ways, the past year has helped youth legislators pursue their leadership visions.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanna Bieda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Joanna Bieda, Chair  
Nevada Youth Legislature  
2019–2020

## **2019 SUMMER TRAINING**

### **August 1–2, 2019**

On August 1, 2019, youth legislators from southern Nevada were flown to Reno to participate in a two-day training session in Carson City, Nevada, led by Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.), Chair, Board of Directors for Corporation for Public Benefit to Administer the Nevada Youth Legislature (NYL Board) (*Nevada Revised Statutes* [NRS] [219A.300](#)). The training educated youth legislators on how to perform the duties of their appointment to the NYL. After gathering at the Plaza Hotel, youth legislators were escorted to the Legislative Building by Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) personnel. At that time, youth legislators received photo IDs and training binders.

While getting to know each other in the Senate Caucus Room, youth legislators were assigned roles that they would complete throughout the two-day training, ranging from giving mock testimony on bills, chairing mock committees, speaking on the Senate floor, to participating in a mock town hall meeting. Youth legislators also received their photos identification cards and training binders. Accompanied by Senator Wiener and former NYL Chair, Zhan Okuda-Lim, the youth legislators then moved to the lobby of the Legislative Building to participate in icebreaker activities, which allowed them to get acquainted.

After this activity, youth legislators moved to the Senate Chamber for the official welcome, led by Senator Wiener, accompanied by Lieutenant Governor Kate Marshall<sup>1</sup>, and sworn in by Justice Lidia S. Stiglich<sup>2</sup>. Emily Espinosa and Vivek Yanamadula, former youth legislators, informed incoming youth legislators about their roles and responsibilities as representatives of the youth in their senatorial districts.

During lunch, panelists shared personal stories and experiences involving the role and impact of lobbyists during the legislative process. The panelists were: (1) Senator Wiener; (2) Alysia Peters, Lobbyist, and former NYL Program Facilitator; (3) Nathan Tea, former youth legislator; and (4) Zhan Okuda-Lim, Director of Policy and Analytical Leadership, Resident Fellow, Leadership Institute of Nevada, The Public Education Foundation, and member of the NYL Board.

In the afternoon, youth legislators learned about decorum, how a bill becomes a law, and the requirements of Nevada's Open Meeting Law (OML) from Jeff Loflin, Unit Chief, Broadcast and Production Services Administrative Division, LCB, and Senator Wiener.

They also were briefed on communications accountability through a forum with Asher A. Killian, Senior Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel, and Amanda Marincic, Deputy Legislative Counsel, of the Legal Division, LCB.

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Marshall became Lieutenant Governor on January 7, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ms. Stiglich became an Associate Justice on November 10, 2016.

Youth legislators then participated in their first experience of the legislative process with mock committee hearings. The mock committee membership included Senator Dallas Harris, Senator Joyce Woodhouse, Assemblywoman Connie Munk, Assemblywoman Selena Torres, and Senator Wiener. The three bills heard in the mock committee were:

1. [Senate Bill 108](#) (Chapter 204, *Statutes of Nevada 2019*);
2. [Senate Bill 414](#) (Chapter 338, *Statutes of Nevada 2013*); and
3. [Senate Bill 464](#) (Chapter 288, *Statutes of Nevada 2015*).

After the mock committee meeting, youth legislators returned to the Plaza Hotel. Shortly thereafter, the Legislative Police drove them to the Governor's Mansion where they had dinner and lively discussions with Senator Wiener, Associate Justice Stiglich, Lieutenant Governor Marshall, and Assemblywoman Teresa Benitez-Thompson. Also in attendance were all legislators of the NYL Board, including Senator Woodhouse, Senator Harris, Assemblywoman Munk, and Assemblywoman Torres. Youth legislators also received an official presentation of their certificates of appointment. Following dinner, youth legislators had the opportunity to relax during a bowling and bonding activity at the Gold Dust West Bowling Center.

During the second day of training, youth legislators took the lead in their own mock committee meeting. They heard [Senate Bill 249](#) (Chapter 456, *Statutes of Nevada 2017*) for which Evan Gong, former youth legislator, testified by telephone from France. Mr. Gong proposed SB 249 as his BDR during his NYL experience. Youth legislators also heard [Senate Bill 97](#) (Chapter 44, *Statutes of Nevada 2019*), which was the NYL's 2019 Legislative Session bill. Its author, former NYL Chair Olivia Yamamoto, testified by telephone from Las Vegas.

Later in the afternoon, youth legislators were briefed about the bill drafting process. In addition, they learned how to narrow down issues to determine particular bill draft ideas. They gathered as small groups to brainstorm issues and later presented their ideas to the entire group. In this second step of the issue-narrowing process, youth legislators determined their top issues.

Following the issue-narrowing exercise, youth legislators returned to the Senate Chamber to participate in a mock floor session. During this time, the five measures heard in the two mock committee meetings were debated and voted upon by all youth legislators, who voted at the desks of their appointing senators. Lieutenant Governor Marshall presided over the floor session.

Youth legislators then walked to Red's Old 395 Grill for lunch and distribution of engraved miniature legal pads and business cards. Following lunch, youth legislators returned to the Legislative Building, where three youth legislators participated in a mock town hall meeting. The aforementioned legislators of the NYL Board acted as the panel, and youth legislators served as hosts and audience participants. Soon thereafter, current Youth Legislator Tyler Fournier and former Youth Legislator Vivek Yanamadula spoke to the logistics of DYACs.

Prior to departing the Legislative Building to return to their homes, youth legislators reflected on their experiences and new duties. As per tradition, they were treated to carrot cake—a thoughtful gesture from Senator Wiener.

## **MEETINGS/TRAINING SESSIONS**

### **September 10, 2019**

After the meeting was called to order and public comment was made available, the youth legislators elected their 2019–2020 officers in compliance with the OML. After nominations, one-minute speeches by candidates, and a period of questioning, Youth Legislator Joanna Bieda was elected chair and Youth Legislator Alex Wong was elected vice chair. Senator Wiener provided comments and overview regarding the NYL for 2019–2020. No one provided public comment at the beginning or conclusion of the meeting.

Following the meeting, youth legislators met for their monthly training. An important part of the NYL program involves Senators and Assembly members, who serve as group discussion leaders during each monthly training session. They talk about the particular training topics and answer questions developed by Senator Wiener, as well as other related questions raised by youth legislators during the group discussions. Following these group break-outs, a group reporter, sitting with the elected official at the witness table, presents a summary of what that group learned. The focus of September’s training was “Constituent Outreach and the Role of Advisory Groups in Legislative Districts.” Legislators who led discussion groups were Senator James Ohrenschall, Senator James A. Settelmeyer, Assemblyman Gregory T. Hafen II, and Assemblywoman Rochelle T. Nguyen.

Participating by telephone, Grant Gabriel, former NYL Chair, and Elliandra Bemoll, former youth legislator, shared their experiences to highlight effective ways to recruit DYAC members, how to operate a DYAC, the importance of making interconnections and helping each other, and the value of listening. Senator Wiener then spoke to the organization and implementation of DYACs.

Following this, youth legislators conducted mock DYAC meetings in separate offices.

The training concluded with Senator Wiener giving remarks about the upcoming NYL 2019-2021 Term.

### **October 16, 2019**

At the beginning of the training, youth legislators introduced DYAC members present, shared experiences about their DYAC recruitment efforts, and were reminded about the deadlines for both appointing their DYAC members and holding their first DYAC meetings.

Senator Wiener provided instruction and insights about “Message Accountability Skills,” which was the focus of the training. Legislators who led discussion groups included Senator Nicole J. Cannizzaro, Senator Joseph (Joe) P. Hardy, Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen, and Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno. Participating by telephone were former youth legislators, Savanna Strott, Jonathan Oglesby, and Nikki Tatalovich, who shared their own experiences and perspectives about message accountability. All youth legislators then had the opportunity to engage in a paired interview activity. After this activity, nine youth legislators (three in the north and six in the south) participated in three role-playing scenarios related to interacting with student advisers.

It is worth noting that prior to this meeting, Youth Legislator Sahi Chundu and Youth Legislator Kirk Davis II went beyond what was expected of them and created recruitment videos to maximize the amount of students joining their DYACs.

### **November 14, 2019**

The NYL convened for a training session about “Effective Listening Skills.” At the beginning of the training, youth legislators introduced their DYAC members and discussed their progress with their DYAC appointments and meeting plans.

Senator Wiener led the training on “Effective Listening Skills,” which was followed by discussion groups led by Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Senator Pete Goicoechea, Assemblywoman Melissa Hardy, and Assemblyman Howard Watts III. After this, each group reporter and legislator presented summaries of their discussions from the witness table.

Participating by telephone, Emily Espinosa and Leaf Kaboli, former youth legislators, shared their ideas about effective listening skills. Then, youth legislators and guest DYAC members engaged in a paired activity about attending and questioning a speaker for deeper revelation, which was followed by three interactive listening scenarios (roles played by two youth legislators in the north and four youth legislators in the south).

### **January 9/10, 2020 (Gathering/Training)**

The NYL celebrated the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the program at gatherings of current and alumni members, as well as legislators, LCB staff, and training presenters. For the first time, this event included a highly interactive training regarding conversation skills. Youth legislators learned and practiced their conversation skills alongside former youth legislators and current legislators. These celebrations were held at the Grant Sawyer Building in Las Vegas on January 9 and the Legislative Building in Carson City on January 10. In the south, a total of 21 people participated; in the north, a total of 17 people participated. Senator Wiener and Tina Ashdown, NYL Program Facilitator, attended both events.

### **January 14, 2020**

Following the convening of the training, youth legislators shared experiences about their DYAC meetings. Senator Wiener provided training involving experiences and teaching moments about delivering effective “Power Presentations.”

Youth legislators participated in discussion groups led by Senator Harris, Senator Woodhouse, (3) Assemblywoman Munk, (4) Assemblywoman Robin Titus, and (5) Assemblywoman Torres. Youth legislators summarized the group discussions at the witness table. Following this, Alex Bybee, former NYL Chair, and Evan Gong, former youth legislator, shared their experiences and suggestions about the importance of effective presentation skills at the witness table in Las Vegas.

Youth legislators and guest DYAC members then participated in paired activities regarding vocal detours and other communication barriers during presentation delivery. Three youth legislators provided mock presentations at the witness table.

### **February 11, 2020**

The NYL convened a public meeting in compliance with the OML to determine the appointment of a youth legislator to represent the NYL during the nomination process by the Nevada Association of Student Councils (NASC) for the student member on the State Board of Education. Youth Legislator Alexia Carver volunteered to represent the NYL, and youth legislators voted unanimously to support this. No one provided public comment at the beginning or conclusion of the meeting.

As per NYL Board recommendation, the vice chair facilitates at least one meeting in the chair position. Vice Chair Alex Wong was given the opportunity to facilitate both the NASC State Board of Education process and the following training's activities.

Youth legislators participated in a training session on how to organize and conduct effective town hall meetings. Senator Wiener led the training, which included instruction, experiences, and suggestions. Youth legislators then participated in discussion groups led by Senator Moises (Mo) Denis, Assemblywoman Michelle Gorelow, Assemblyman Glen Leavitt, and Marsheilah D. Lyons, Deputy Research Director, Research Division, LCB. Group reporters, along with legislators, summarized the group activity at the witness table. In addition, Kenneth Brooke and Ethan Foster, former youth legislators, offered suggestions about how to prepare and conduct effective town hall meetings via telephone.

Youth legislators and guest DYAC members participated in paired activities regarding their town hall meeting plans. Then, three youth legislators (one in the north and two in the south), led mock town hall meetings.

This was the first meeting in which Youth Legislator Benjamin Platt<sup>3</sup> participated.

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<sup>3</sup> *Youth Legislator Benjamin Platt was appointed on January 21, 2020, to represent Senate District 12.*

## **April 16, 2020**

The NYL April training was canceled on March 13, in an effort to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and adhere to social distancing recommendations. Senator Wiener, in coordination with LCB staff, informed all youth legislators of this change via email the same day. Guest speaker Jeanette K. Belz, meant to lead the training on “Effective Negotiation Skills,” was informed, as well.

Youth legislators were, instead, encouraged to watch the recorded 2018 April training, in which the importance of inquiries, mindset, and demeanor were discussed in “Effective Negotiation Skills.”

The NYL, in compliance with the OML, historically has elected its second-year chair and vice chair during the April training. Due to the less-than-ideal situation, the election has been postponed until the [August 5, 2020, meeting](#)/full-day training. Until then, Chair Bieda and Vice Chair Wong retain their leadership positions.

## **May 7, 2020 (Optional Zoom Conversation)**

Though an optional activity, the newly scheduled statewide conversation on Zoom welcomed impressive participation. All 20 youth legislators were encouraged to participate in the virtual conference call during the quarantine period to discuss their year-long experiences with the NYL, along with areas of improvement. Of the 20 youth legislators, 19 participated in the two-hour call. Chair Bieda facilitated the discussion. Youth legislators were vocal about their opinions and articulated their concerns and commendations well.

This was the first meeting in which Youth Legislator Mahdote Abebe<sup>4</sup> participated.

## **Additional Activities/Involvement by Youth Legislators**

Youth Legislator Alexia Carver represented the NYL as a consulting member, to work with the NASC to nominate a student member of the State Board of Education on March 14, 2020.

Youth Legislator Kamieko Goines was recognized as one of two student member finalists to the Nevada Board of Education on March 17, 2020.

In response to COVID-19, Senator Wiener proposed a list of NYL engagement activities to youth legislators via email. Offered on March 19, Senator Wiener’s suggestions for enrichment included sharing moments to write about something positive that a youth legislator has learned, how the youth legislator feels about it, and what the youth legislator can do with the knowledge to make a positive contribution to the community and/or state. Several youth legislators discussed their experiences with Senator Wiener.

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<sup>4</sup> *Youth Legislator Mahdote Abebe was appointed on February 28, 2020, to represent Senate District 11.*



Vice Chair Alex Wong wrote an article for the *Las Vegas Sun* regarding public education plans for School Year 2020–2021. It was published on May 5, 2020, and was well-received by the youth legislators.

Chair Bieda was elected to become the Nevada Chair of High School Democrats of America on May 18, 2020.

**June 3, 2020**

Pursuant to [NRS 219A.210](#), the NYL Annual Report 2019–2020 is submitted to the Governor, the NYL Board, the Legislative Committee on Education, and to the 2021 Session of the Nevada Legislature.