

NEVADA YOUTH LEGISLATURE: ANNUAL REPORT 2020–2021



Prepared and Presented by:
Melekte Hailemeskel, Chair
Nevada Youth Legislature, 2020–2021

OVERVIEW

As the 2019–2021 Term of the Nevada Youth Legislature (NYL) comes to an end, reviewing the 2020–2021 year provides many opportunities for reflection. The Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic framed this experience as the most unique year in the NYL’s 14-year history. Through all of the uncertainties that came with the pandemic, the NYL continued to thrive and achieve a successful and productive year.

Year two started on September 2, 2020, with a comprehensive midterm training that provided invaluable insights about the bill draft request (BDR) development process. During the training, youth legislators learned how to utilize essential elements in crafting their own proposals, including: clear legislative intent, drafting language, germaneness, fiscal impacts, advocacy, and more.

Prior to the October 13, 2020, meeting, youth legislators submitted their individual proposals for the NYL’s one statutorily provided bill. During that meeting, each youth legislator presented their proposal and answered questions posed by their NYL colleagues. Initially, all 18 youth legislators¹ presented their measures to the NYL and answered questions from their NYL colleagues. The NYL then voted to narrow their possibilities to seven BDRs. After more questioning and discussion, the NYL then narrowed the BDRs to the top two for further consideration at the November meeting.

One of the final BDRs focused on annual mental health screenings for school-age children. The other addressed discriminatory inequities in the juvenile justice system. During the November 19, 2020, meeting, youth legislators eagerly learned more about these two BDRs during full legislative hearings. Five expert witnesses testified on each measure. After comprehensive testimonies and careful inquiry with the witnesses, the NYL selected the juvenile justice BDR, proposed by Youth Legislator Julianna Melendez.

On January 12, 2021, the NYL met and worked with the Legal Division of the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) to clarify any questions or concerns they had and to fine-tune the legislative language. [Senate Bill 108](#) was introduced in the Senate on February 9, 2021. After the introduction of SB 108, the NYL heard from a variety of interested parties who offered suggestions for refining the language of the bill; however, the NYL did not have the opportunity to meet to discuss or vote as a whole on anything beyond what was included in the original bill.

On March 16, 2021, Youth Legislator Melendez and Melekte Hailemeskel, Chair of the NYL, testified before the Senate Committee on Judiciary to present the history and perspective of how the NYL discussed and processed SB 108. This included providing an overview of the ideas and concerns that youth legislators shared during decision-making and language development of the bill. Both youth legislators clarified that they were not in the position to speak on behalf of the NYL regarding any proposed changes, though they did provide their own testimonies in

¹ *The positions of youth legislator for Senate Districts 2, 12, and 19 became vacant during the second year of the 2019–2021 Term of the NYL; however, no new youth legislators were appointed.*

support of SB 108, as well as answered questions and shared input as individual youth legislators.

More specifically, Chair Hailemeskel described how the NYL chose SB 108 for introduction and Youth Legislator Melendez explained SB 108 in depth, focusing on the need for the bill, intentions of the specific provisions, and benefits of passage. Five other youth legislators and a member of an NYL District Youth Advisory Council offered profound support for SB 108 through written testimony submitted to the committee. Following the hearing, Chair Hailemeskel and Youth Legislator Melendez participated in a conference call with the three proponents of amendments to SB 108, as well as other governmental affairs representatives. A powerful collaborative consensus amendment was crafted from this conversation and passed by the committee on April 2, 2021, resulting in SB 108, First Reprint. It was passed by the full Senate (20 Yeas, 1 Nay) on April 15, 2021.

Chair Hailemeskel and Youth Legislator Melendez also testified before the Assembly Committee on Judiciary on April 23, 2021. The committee passed SB 108, First Reprint, on May 7, 2021. From the Assembly floor, SB 108, First Reprint, was referred to Assembly Ways and Means on May 13, 2021.

In conclusion, experiencing the second year of the 2019–2021 NYL Term virtually was a big learning leap for all youth legislators. Nevertheless, youth legislators expressed that, even in the midst of a pandemic, the NYL allowed them to be both politically and socially active by communicating to senators, assembly members, other high-level decision-makers, and their constituents. The NYL program inspired youth legislators to work from a position of strength in their lives. It allowed them to make contributions to their communities and provide a powerful voice for youth even during a pandemic. Furthermore, the NYL provided a sense of community and alleviated feelings of stress during an extremely difficult and unsettling time.

The NYL is highly appreciative of and thankful for all senators, assembly members, NYL alumni mentor-trainers, LCB staff, Board of Directors for Corporation for Public Benefit to Administer the Nevada Youth Legislature (NYL Board) members, and others, who have dedicated time out of their immensely busy schedules to support the NYL. The NYL also greatly appreciates the Legislature’s Broadcast Production Services for working tirelessly to ensure that the NYL could meet and maximize their virtual meetings and trainings. Lastly, the NYL wants to express great gratitude to the Legal Division for their tireless assistance with the entire bill development process.

Submitted by:

Melekte Hailemeskel, Chair
Nevada Youth Legislature
2020–2021

2020–2021: CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW

Midterm Virtual Training—September 2, 2020

The NYL midterm virtual training was rescheduled from early August to September 2, 2020, due to COVID-19. All 18 youth legislators participated in a thorough midterm training during which youth legislators were educated about the development of a BDR.

Representatives from LCB reviewed the standards of behavior for holders of a public office. Then, Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.), Chair, NYL Board, presented an overview of the second year of the 2019–2021 NYL Term. Following this, the Legal Division informed youth legislators about the development of a BDR, answered several significant questions, and provided insights that would help youth legislators craft their BDRs as meticulously as possible.

The training continued with a presentation of the history of legislation proposed by the NYL, followed by a highly useful discussion between Senator Wiener and two NYL alumni mentor-trainers, who provided invaluable input about bill development. To conclude the training, Senator Wiener explained the BDR process to the youth legislators from beginning to end, including how to craft their ideas, draft their language, and maximize advocacy for their measures.

Deadline to Submit Individual BDR Proposals—September 17, 2020

All youth legislators were required to submit their BDR by September 17, 2020. Prior to submission, youth legislators had the ability to contact the Legal Division to ask questions about legality, wording, or any other concerns regarding their BDRs.

Narrowing BDR Choices From Eighteen to Two—October 13, 2020

At the start of the meeting, youth legislators were given an update concerning the nomination of a student member to the State Board of Education. Youth Legislator Alexia Carver explained that a student was selected from Eldorado High School as the student member to the State Board of Education by the Nevada Association of Student Councils (NASC).

Afterwards, Chair Hailemeskel called attention to the 2020–2021 list of BDRs for the NYL (See Attachment 1). The Legal Division had indicated the proposed subjects in BDRs 6 and 9 overlapped; therefore, Youth Legislator Tyler Fournier, sponsor of BDR 9, withdrew his proposal from the NYL's consideration and became the primary cosponsor of BDR 6. Chair Hailemeskel then explained the BDR presentation and selection process. All 18 youth legislators presented their BDRs thoroughly and explained how their measures would benefit Nevada youth.

After hearing the presentations, youth legislators were allowed the opportunity to co-sponsor one other measure. The following BDRs received co-sponsors:

- BDR 3—Youth Legislators Sahithi Chundu, Romana Dvoran, Tyler Fournier, Kamieko Goines, Rhythm Kincade, Julianna Melendez, and Alex Wong;
- BDR 10—Youth Legislator Kirstin Springer;

- BDR 11—Youth Legislator Leila Moassessi;
- BDR 12—Youth Legislator Jim Atwood;
- BDR 13—Youth Legislators Mahdote Abebe, Joanna Bieda, Adele Espinosa, Melekte Hailemeskel, and Shaunta Palmer;
- BDR 15—Youth Legislators Alexia Carver and Olivia Craig; and
- BDR 18—Youth Legislator Nicole Valenzuela.

Prior to a roll call vote to determine the seven semifinal BDRs, Chair Hailemeskel explained that each youth legislator could vote for three BDRs. After a second roll call vote to break a tie between BDR 12 and 18, Chair Hailemeskel announced that BDRs 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15 would proceed for further consideration by youth legislators.

Youth legislators participated in a second presentation and discussion period for the seven selected BDRs. During a subsequent roll call vote, youth legislators could vote for one BDR among the seven. After the vote, Chair Hailemeskel announced BDRs 6 and 13 would be considered at the November 19, 2020, NYL meeting.

Following the selection of the top two BDRs, Senator Wiener provided training and documents designed to assist youth legislators with their upcoming testimony before a public decision-making body. As for the BDRs not selected by the NYL as the 2021 NYL bill, Senator Wiener urged youth legislators to reach out to their state legislators to encourage them to consider introducing and advocating for their BDR.

NYL Hearings on Top Two BDRs; Selection of One NYL BDR—November 19, 2020

Chair Hailemeskel briefly reviewed the two BDRs selected by the NYL during the October 13, 2020, meeting.

Starting with BDR 6, Chair Hailemeskel stated it would require a school counselor, school nurse, or resource officer, depending on the availability of resources, to annually screen each pupil in a public school for major depressive disorder, anxiety, and substance use. Additionally, it would authorize a counselor to refer a pupil to a mental health professional as a result of the annual screening.

Youth Legislator Craig disclosed that parental consent would be needed for the proposed screenings. She also provided information regarding the different tests that could be used to screen students for major depressive disorder, anxiety, and substance use. Finally, she shared statistics regarding youth mental health.

The following presenters provided testimony regarding BDR 6:

- Katherine A. Dockweiler, Ed.D., Nationally Certified School Psychologist;
- Susan L. Fisher, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs and Advocacy, McDonald Carano LLP;

- Keeli Killian, School Counselor, Washoe County School District;
- Christina (Christy) McGill, Director, Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment, Department of Education;
- Nick Shepack, Policy Fellow, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Nevada; and
- Misty Vaughan Allen, M.A., Coordinator of the Statewide Program for Suicide Prevention, Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Human Services.

Moving on to BDR 13, Chair Hailemeskel stated it would require all workers in the juvenile justice system, including, without limitation, judges, probation staff, prosecutors, public defenders, and school resource officers, to take training on implicit bias and cultural competency. It would also require the race of a juvenile to be redacted on the police report and not otherwise made available to a prosecutor when making a charging decision regarding a juvenile.

Youth Legislator Melendez provided an overview of BDR 13 and shared statistics of juveniles in the Nevada justice system and information on how to implement training for employees within the juvenile justice system.

The following presenters provided testimony regarding BDR 13:

- Brigid Duffy, Director, Juvenile Division, Department of the Clark County District Attorney;
- Saba Gebeyehu, Nevada student;
- Kelley R. Jones, Law Clerk, United States Court of Appeals, and Member, National Juvenile Defender Center, on behalf of the Juvenile Division of the Clark County Public Defender’s Office;
- Nick Shepack, Policy Fellow, ACLU of Nevada; and
- Michael Whelihan, Assistant Director, Department of Juvenile Justice Services, Clark County.

Finally, a roll call vote determined that BDR 13 would be the NYL’s BDR for 2021. Senator Wiener praised youth legislators for their profound engagement in the process of choosing the NYL’s BDR for 2021.

Deadline to Testify Before a Public Decision-Making Body—December 5, 2020

Youth legislators were required to submit a report on their experience of testifying before a public decision-making body by December 5, 2020; however, due to COVID-19 pandemic, circumstances were different from prior years. Youth legislators were instead encouraged to submit a written testimony to a public decision-making body. The report included youth legislators’ reflections about their testimony, the highlights of their interaction with public decision-makers, and their primary learning experience. Overall, given the circumstances of

quarantine, the NYL was still able to construct a path through which youth legislators could participate in providing testimony.

NYL Gatherings in Las Vegas and Carson City—January 7 and 8, 2021

(Cancelled due to COVID-19.)

Finalize NYL BDR—January 12, 2021

Working with the Legal Division, youth legislators finalized the language of the NYL 2021 BDR. They also selected Youth Legislator Carver to consult with NASC concerning the nomination of a student member to the State Board of Education. Youth legislators participated in a live discussion about what and how the student representative should engage in this role of responsibility.

Deadline for Outreach Recruitment Letter—January 23, 2021

January 23, 2021, was the due date for youth legislators to submit an outreach recruitment letter, which they were encouraged to send to at least one youth leadership organization. These letters provide essential support for NYL recruitment because youth legislators are the most powerful voices for the NYL program.

NYL Day at the Legislature/ Present NYL Bill to the Senate Committee on Judiciary—March 16, 2021

Youth Legislator Melendez, the original sponsor of the NYL measure, and Chair Hailemeskel provided the Senate Committee on Judiciary with the perspective of how the NYL discussed and processed SB 108. This included the ideas and concerns that youth legislators shared during decision making and language development of this bill.

During the committee hearing, Chair Hailemeskel described how the NYL chose SB 108 for introduction, and Youth Legislator Melendez explained the NYL bill in depth, including the legislative intent and the benefits for Nevada youth. In addition, five other youth legislators and one District Youth Advisory Council member submitted powerful written testimonies to support the passage of SB 108.

Following the hearing, Chair Hailemeskel and Youth Legislator Melendez participated in a conference call with the three proponents of amendments to SB 108, as well as other governmental affairs representatives. A powerful collaborative consensus amendment was crafted from this conversation and passed by the committee on April 2, 2021, resulting in SB 108, First Reprint. It was then passed by the full Senate (20 Yeas, 1 Nay) on April 15, 2021.

Present NYL Bill to the Assembly Committee on Judiciary—April 23, 2021

Youth Legislator Melendez and Chair Hailemeskel provided the Assembly Committee on Judiciary with the perspective of how the NYL discussed and processed SB 108. On May 7, 2021, the Committee on Judiciary passed SB 108, First Reprint. On May 12, 2021, SB 108, First Reprint, was referred to the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means. On May 30, 2021, the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means heard the bill, and on May 31, 2021, they passed it. It was then passed by the full Assembly (34 Yeas, 8 Nays) on May 31, 2021. The

action of passage was reconsidered, the bill was amended, and SB 108, Second Reprint was passed as amended by the Assembly (26 Yeas, 16 Nays) and the senate concurred in the Assembly amendment to the bill. On June 2, 2021, SB 108 was enrolled and delivered to the Governor, who approved it on June 4, 2021.

ATTACHMENT 1

Bill Draft Requests for the Nevada Youth Legislature 2020



Legislative Counsel Bureau

Legal Division

October 13, 2020

BDR No. Requester

BDR 1 Youth Legislator Mahdote Abebe

This bill would require certain larger local governments to acquire and renovate one or more empty buildings into shelters for homeless youth that would provide clothing, aid, support groups, and courses and information regarding sex trafficking, substance use and other common issues related to homelessness.

BDR 2 Youth Legislator Jim Atwood

This bill would require the board of trustees of each school district to provide an explicit and easy to use method for pupils or parents to report harassment, misconduct or inadequacy of teaching by a teacher or administrator to the school or school district. Administrators or school officials who fail to respond to or follow up on an official report within 30 days of the filing of the report may be fined.

BDR 3 Youth Legislator Joanna Bieda

Existing law authorizes a person under 18 years of age to be certified for criminal proceedings as an adult in certain circumstances. (NRS 62B.390, 62B.400) This bill would prohibit a person under 18 years of age from being certified for criminal proceedings as an adult unless the person is: (1) 17 years of age or older and charged with a sex crime; or (2) 16 years of age or older and charged with murder or attempted murder.

BDR 4 Youth Legislator Alexia Carver

This bill would prohibit the sale of semiautomatic firearms and require the registration of all firearms bought in the future.

BDR 5 Youth Legislator Sahi Chudu

This bill would prohibit local governments from making it a crime for a person who is under 18 years of age to sleep outdoors, including, without limitation, on the side of a street.

BDR 6 Youth Legislator Olivia Craig

(Some overlap with BDR 9)
This bill would require a school counselor, or school nurse or resource officer depending on the availability of resources, to annually screen each pupil in a public school for major depressive disorder, anxiety, and substance use. This bill would authorize a counselor to refer a pupil to a mental health professional as a result of the annual screening.

BDR 7 Youth Legislator Romana Dvoran

This bill would authorize pupils to be excused from one or more days of school for mental health purposes without affecting the pupil's attendance record. If the period of missed school is more than 3 days, a pupil or parent or guardian of a pupil must provide a note from a mental health professional to the school at which the pupil is enrolled.

BDR 8 Youth Legislator Adele Espinosa

This bill would require local governments to ensure that there is a pedestrian crossing light at every major street adjacent to a public school. This bill would authorize collaboration between the state and local governments to ensure the placement and adequate funding of the pedestrian crossing lights.

BDR 9 Youth Legislator Tyler Fournier

(Some overlap with BDR 6)

This bill would require school counselors and teachers to take a yearly online class that will help them recognize symptoms of self-harm, depression, anxiety, substance use, sexual assault, post-traumatic stress disorder, abuse and suicidal tendencies in pupils and offer resources on managing stress. This bill would require school counselors or teachers to meet with every pupil once each semester for a mental health check-up.

BDR 10 Youth Legislator Kamieko Goines

This bill would require the board of trustees of each school district to end the use of polystyrene (styrofoam) lunch trays and containers and replace them with compostable or more sustainable trays, plates or containers.

BDR 11 Youth Legislator Melekte Hailemeskel

This bill would require the board of trustees of each school district to adopt a preparation unit on standardized testing (e.g., ACT, SAT) for sophomores and juniors as part of a required course or as an elective course.

BDR 12 Youth Legislator Rhythm Kincade

This bill would generally reduce the costs of college for students. Specifically, this bill would require: (1) the Nevada System of Higher Education to reduce the price of registration fees and tuition for public four-year universities and offer more financial aid; (2) that state financial aid be based on factors other than the income of the parents of a person applying for college; and (3) banks headquartered within the state to establish a college savings program designed to help youth 16 years of age or older in the state save money for college.

BDR 13 Youth Legislator Julianna Melendez

This bill would require all workers in the juvenile justice system, including, without limitation, judges, probation staff, prosecutors, public defenders and school resource officers, to take trainings on implicit bias and cultural competency. This bill would also require the race of a juvenile to be redacted on the police report and not otherwise made available to a prosecutor when making a charging decision regarding a juvenile.

BDR 14 Youth Legislator Leila Moassessi

Existing law requires the Department of Education to develop a pamphlet with information regarding bullying and cyber-bullying, to the extent that money is available. (NRS 388.1341) This bill would require the Department to collaborate with school districts to develop such a pamphlet in both English and Spanish, and share that pamphlet with each school district.

BDR 15 Youth Legislator Shaunta Palmer

This bill would amend the definition of “bullying” to include “microaggression,” which would be defined as a “statement, action or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.” This bill would also require school staff to be trained on microaggressions, including, without limitation, identifying and avoiding microaggressions.

BDR 16 Youth Legislator Kirstin Springer

This bill would require the board of trustees of each school district to provide learning tools, school supplies and resources, including, without limitation, technology, Internet connectivity and resources for special-needs pupils, to low-income families and families of pupils with special needs to address equity gaps during or resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

BDR 17 Youth Legislator Nicole Valenzuela

This bill would require public schools to hire additional school counselors.

BDR 18 Youth Legislator Alex Wong

This bill would establish a framework to require state agencies to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This bill would require state agencies to achieve 50 percent fewer emissions than in 1990 by 2030, 75 percent fewer emissions by 2040, and net zero emissions by 2050.