



COLORADO OFFICE OF  
THE CHILD'S  
REPRESENTATIVE



Office of the  
**Alternate  
Defense  
Counsel**



**12th Annual**

# **Excellence in Youth Defense Conference**

**April 11th & 12th, 2024**

**Thursday, April 11th, 2024**

*9:00 AM to 9:50 AM*

*We carry our histories with us: Reconciling with Colorado's Troubled Past* by Nicki Gonzales, Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, Professor | Department of History, Politics & Political Economy, Regis University.

Participants will learn about the history of colonization in Colorado, the impact that Indian Boarding Schools had on native populations, and the relevance and impact this history has on the systems we work in today.

*10:00 AM to 10:50 AM*

*Detention Hearing Advocacy: Creative and Collaborative Strategies for Getting Kids out of Custody* by Liz Upton, Attorney at Colorado State Public Defender, and Alex Forke, Juvenile Social Worker at Colorado State Public Defender.

This session will cover the legal framework of a detention hearing under Title 19 as a foundation for compelling arguments for releasing youth from detention. In addition, the presenters will discuss creative strategies for difficult situations, from lack of placement options to generalized risk arguments that create barriers to release. This session will also discuss opportunities to collaborate with partners both within and outside your legal team to facilitate your kids' release from custody.

11:00 AM to 11:50 AM

*Juvenile Competency Remediation is not for Everyone: Strategies for Litigation and a Look at Recent Data* by Kelli Nagel and Effie Seibold, Training Director, Office of the State Public Defender

This presentation explores the statutory framework granting the court authority to NOT order restoration services in every case where a youth is found incompetent but potentially restorable and provides strategies for litigation and specific case examples resulting in favorable court orders. Presenters will share data-driven arguments against prolonged periods of remediation or restoration when those services are ordered, current data trends in juvenile competency in Colorado and nationally, and some tips to challenge evaluations that fail to adequately address competency-related functional abilities.

12:00 PM to 1:00 PM - Lunch

1:00 PM to 1:50 PM

*Restorative Justice: A Defense Strategy of Healing & Compassion for Youth Clients* by liz porter-merrill, Restorative Justice Law & Practices Specialist with the state Public Defender's Office

Restorative justice (RJ) can be a powerful defense strategy throughout the criminal legal system. Whether negotiating for diversion, offering mitigation for plea discussions, arguing for the court to consider our client's willingness to participate in RJ at sentencing, or exploring post-conviction options, RJ can be used to obtain better legal outcomes for our youth clients. This session will focus on the nuts and bolts of RJ relevant to our client advocacy, including learnings derived from courageous, creative, and tenacious defense teams statewide. We'll talk about accessing RJ both for kids in delinquency court and those being tried as adults. The session will also cover resources available to help you navigate the RJ world and integrate it into your practice for clients.

2:00 PM to 2:50 PM

*Benefits Advocacy with Kelly Kropf from Benefits in Action* by Kelly Kropf, Manager of Adult and Families Program, Benefits in Action.

Education about eligibility, and enrollment in public assistance benefits in relation to children who are involved in the justice system.

3:00 PM to 3:50 PM

*Best Practices in The Representation of Children Facing Potential Life Sentences* by Tara Jorfald, Senior Associate at The Noble Law Firm.

This presentation will cover the ethical standards for effective representation of children facing prosecution as adults, including getting a team together; the mitigation gathering process; following guidelines promulgated by the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, the American Bar Association, and the Gault Center; what types of experts to consult with or hire; the dilemma surrounding disclosure of confidential or privileged information at the transfer or reverse transfer hearing; using data; and adequate advisement of your client.

## Friday, April 12th, 2024

9:00 AM to 9:50 AM

*Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder: Diagnoses That Say More about an Oppressive System than a Person* with Natalie Baddour, LPC, EMDR, Co-Founder at Fully Liberated Youth, Barbara Andrea Garza Guzman, MSW, SWC, Executive Director, Culture, Services & Programs at Transformative Justice Project, and Riley Cochran, MA, LPC, LAC, Resolute Youth Services

Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder: Undoubtedly you have seen these arise in the course of representing young folks facing the delinquency and criminal legal systems. This session will be a facilitated panel discussion amongst mental health professionals who specialize in working with young people and who will explain how these diagnoses are problematic, what they actually reveal, and how to advocate for a young person who has received these diagnoses.

10:00 AM to 10:50 AM (\*)

*YOS Today: The So-Called "Middle Ground Option"* by Kim Dvorchak, Attorney/Expert, and Jeni Stinson, Attorney/Expert

Attendees will learn about the current policies, practices, and laws surrounding the Colorado Department of Corrections' Youth Offender Service program. They will also learn how to better advocate for their clients in YOS revocation proceedings.

*(\*) This session will not be recorded. Please plan to attend the live presentation if you wish to participate in this session.*

11:00 AM to 11:50 AM

*Transformative Justice Project: Who are we and what do we do?* by Barbara Andrea Garza Guzman, MSW, SWC, Culture, Services & Programs, and Erin Pier, Ed.S, Development, Marketing & Advocacy and Elie Zwiebel, Operations, Legal & Education First, Transformative Justice Project.

Colorado Juvenile Defender Center (CJDC) is now Transformative Justice Project of Colorado (TJP)! We are carrying the legacy of CJDC's excellent work forward and adding holistic, interdisciplinary, decolonized, and antiracist approaches and practices. This session will explain the reasoning behind our rebrand and revision as well as describe services and supports TJP and our staff can offer to defense practitioners, their teams, and their clients.

12:00 PM to 1:00 PM - Lunch

1:00 PM to 1:50 PM

*Free Man Walking: How Storytelling Saved My Life*, by Jeni Stinson, Attorney/Expert, Tally Zuckerman, Attorney, and Matthew Taylor, Make Stories Matter.

This is a presentation regarding George Vigil's direct file trial. He was acquitted of first-degree murder. The presentation will focus on using storytelling to strategically present the defense case, including preparing the client to testify. George Vigil will be present with the defense team.

2:00 PM to 2:50 PM

*Transforming Youth Justice: Frankie Guzman on Effective Advocacy, Centering Youth Voices, and Changing Outcomes for Youth Clients*, with Frankie Guzman, Senior Director of the Youth Justice at the National Center for Youth Law

Attendees will learn from legislative reform efforts and litigation strategies employed in California to transform the landscape of children tried as adults and be equipped to apply that knowledge to their own cases in Colorado. They will also learn how to be better advocates for their youth clients from the perspective of a former system-involved youth and family member of a system-involved individual.

3:00 PM to 3:50 PM

*The Case Against Direct File and Transfer of Youth with Neurodevelopmental Disorders: A Psycho-legal Perspective* by Dr. Paul Spragg, Clinical and Consulting Psychologist | School Psychologist | Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA-D)

Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) are a group of disorders of brain development that include Intellectual Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD, and other conditions such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. Youth with NDDs are over-represented in the youth justice system, and studies show that around half of all young adult violent offenders have one or more of these disorders, many previously undiagnosed. Recent Supreme Court rulings have explicitly acknowledged the important role of brain development as a major consideration in lessened culpability of both adults with intellectual disabilities and neurotypical youth with less than fully developed executive processes. Not yet addressed are youth with the added complication of impaired cognitive abilities resulting from biologically based disorders of brain formation.

This presentation will advance the argument that based on these decisions, related case law, and clinical neuroscience, given the even greater vulnerabilities of youth with NDDs, these youngsters should be afforded proportionately greater protections under the 8th Amendment, regardless of the alleged offense, based on the potential harms inflicted by prosecution in the adult criminal justice system. Factors relevant to direct file and transfer decisions as they apply to youth with NDDs will be discussed, including Colorado's statutory considerations, culpability of youth with NDDs, and potential 8th Amendment issues

relevant to cruel and unusual punishment and the right to meaningful rehabilitation. Dr. Spragg will close with a call for increased awareness and training on the intersection of criminal justice and youth with NDDs for forensic examiners and mitigation specialists alike, particularly in the context of their suitability for prosecution as adults.

# Speaker Biographies

## Listed alphabetically by last name

### **Natalie Baddour**

Natalie (she, her, hers) is the Co-founder of Fully Liberated Youth (FLY), LPC, EMDR and as a first-generation Palestinian, Natalie's story has been restored by the relationships of those deeply impacted by system involvement. These relationships allowed her to find truth and meaning within her own experiences and brought her back to her truest self. Natalie is a licensed professional counselor (LPC), trained in EMDR and MI and strongly believes in connecting experiences, trauma, and systems to our personal narratives. Through her own personal and professional history, she recognizes that systems of trauma such as epigenetics, racism, oppression, poverty, and unhealthy power, impact our mind, body, spirit, and larger collectiveness. Natalie is the Co-Founder of Fully Liberated Youth (FLY), a community nonprofit providing therapeutic, mentorship, and wraparound services to system-involved young people and those at risk of system involvement throughout the Denver-Metro Area. FLY specifically serves young people within the school, community, and incarceration sectors who are deeply impacted by systems of trauma that have birthed cycles of gang affiliation and violence. Natalie seeks to see a healthy, equitable, and liberated world.

### **Riley Cochran**

Executive Director, Therapist, Youth Advocate, LPC LAC CGP CTTPII

Riley (he, him, his) is the Executive Director of Resolute Counseling Center and has been working with Youth and Young people in a variety of different settings since 2012 and has had the privilege and honor of seeing people in their most vulnerable places. From high acuity inpatient crisis stabilization to detox to long-term residential care and the division of youth services Riley has developed a deep understanding of the often misunderstood and misrepresented behaviors that our youth and young people get labeled with, the behaviors that are most often an effort to feel safe and meet their own individual needs. As a certified trauma, grief, and attachment therapist Riley is passionate about helping people heal and grow while also working to deconstruct the barriers that people face in a way that uplifts and empowers those he has the privilege and honor of working with.

### **Kim Dvorchak**

Kim (she, her) joined the National Association of Counsel for Children team as Executive Director in May of 2017. Ms. Dvorchak is responsible for the overall leadership of policy, operations, programs, fundraising, and the strategic development of the organization. Ms. Dvorchak has more than 25 years of experience in direct representation, policy advocacy, and nonprofit management to advance the rights of children and youth. Under Ms. Dvorchak's leadership, the National Association of Counsel for Children vastly expanded its

programs and services, tripled its budget and staff, and was selected to receive a major multi-year grant to launch a national right-to-counsel campaign for children and youth in the child welfare system. Ms. Dvorchak has served in Executive Director roles since 2010. Previously, Ms. Dvorchak was the Executive Director of the National Juvenile Defender Center, where she led the launch of the Gault at 50 Campaign to commemorate the US Supreme Court case establishing children’s right to counsel. Prior to this position, Ms. Dvorchak was the founding Executive Director of the Colorado Juvenile Defender Center, an attorney training and policy center that accomplished monumental reforms to ensure children’s right to counsel, reduce the prosecution of youth in adult court, and build a community of lawyers committed to zealous advocacy for children.

### **Alex Forke**

Alex Forke (she, her) has been the juvenile social worker at OSPD’s Golden office since August 2022. Prior to her current role, Alex worked for the Jefferson County Department of Human Services for eight years (first as a caseworker primarily working with adolescents, and then as a family meeting facilitator). Alex also has experience as a mental health counselor at Third Way Center and working in schools and nonprofit settings. Alex graduated with her MSW from the University of Denver in 2014. In addition to her work and education as a social worker, Alex has volunteered teaching yoga to kids and teens for several years. In her free time, Alex enjoys hiking, cooking, reading, watching lowbrow reality TV, and spending time with her ridiculously cute new baby.

### **Barbara (Barbs) Andrea Garza Guzman**

Barbs (she, her, ella) is the TJP Executive Director | Culture, Programs & Services and has roots in both Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and Brownsville, TX. She moved to Colorado pursue her Master’s in Social Work at the University of Denver. Barbs has spent the last decade dedicating her work to advocating for youth of color in the child welfare, education, mental health, and criminal injustice systems. In addition to her direct advocacy, she has co-written articles on anti-racism and abolishing whiteness. Currently, she runs a private practice, promotes healing, and advocates for racial justice. When Barbs is not working she spends quality time with her fiancé and two tuxedo cats (to whom she is highly allergic).

### **Dr. Nicki Gonzales**

Born in Denver, Nicki Gonzales (she, hers) has deep roots in the coal mining and agricultural communities of Northern and Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Like so many Mexican Americans in this region, her grandparents moved to Denver during WWII for economic opportunities. She is the mom of two boys who are historians in their own right—Danny and Teddy. Nicki graduated from Yale University, with a BA in English literature, and CU-Boulder, with a PhD in American History. Currently, she serves as Professor of History and Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion at Regis University. She specializes in the history of the American West, and has written on the history of the Sangre de Cristo land grant and the San Luis community’s 160-year legal and cultural struggle to protect its

historic land rights. Nicki's most recent projects include a Historic Context Project—a collaborative project with the City of Denver—which will inform the City's historic preservation decisions—and an oral history of Chicano Vietnam Veterans. She served as the first Latina State Historian from 2021-22, and she currently chairs the Colorado Governor's Naming Advisory Board.

### **Frankie Guzman**

Frankie (he, his) is the Senior Director of Youth Justice at the National Center for Youth Law and leads a team of attorneys, policy advocates, and community organizers to transform youth justice systems in California and Colorado. Frankie's work is focused on eliminating the practice of prosecuting and incarcerating children in the adult criminal system, reducing youth's involvement with the juvenile justice system, increasing developmentally appropriate services and opportunities for youth and young adults, and eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system. As a youth, Frankie was sentenced to serve 15 years in the California Youth Authority for armed robbery. Released on parole after serving six years, Frankie attended UC Berkeley and UCLA School of Law, and became an expert in youth law and policy, focused on ending harsh punishments of youth and expanding health-based alternatives to achieve public health and safety. Originally from Oxnard, California, located within the traditional homelands of the Chumash people, Frankie spends his free time working with Native American and "Latino" communities to combat the genocide and erasure of indigenous communities in North America.

### **Tara Jorfald**

Tara Jorfald is a senior associate at The Noble Law Firm and has 10 years of experience advocating for clients on appeal and in postconviction proceedings. She has argued many criminal and juvenile cases before the Colorado Supreme Court and the Colorado Court of Appeals and has litigated postconviction claims in district courts throughout the state of Colorado. Most of Tara's cases involve juveniles and young adults, serious felony convictions, lengthy prison sentences, and complex procedural histories. Tara went to law school at the University of Denver, Sturm College of Law, and received an MPhil in the theory and practice of human rights from the University of Oslo, Faculty of Law.

### **Kelly Kropf**

Benefits in Action is a non-profit organization, started in 2015 with a goal to increase equitable access to benefits. Kelly (she, hers) started at Benefits in Action as a Benefit Navigator in January 2019, from a background in nursing. She was asked to take her work into the community at a nearby halfway house, where she assisted clients with benefits like Medicaid, SNAP, and other public assistance programs. It has always been a passion of Kelly's to help clients who are leaving incarceration re-enter society and minimize the risk of recidivism. She helped build and now oversees the Justice Involved Program within Benefits in Action as the Manager of Adult and Family Programs.



### **Kelli Nagel**

Kelli Nagel (she, her) is a supervising attorney in the Denver office of the Colorado State Public Defender (OSPD). Through her work, Kelli leads the office paralegal and social work teams, in addition, she manages a caseload of adults charged with homicide and youth facing transfer or direct file to adult court. Kelli's primary focus is expanding holistic representation for all clients by promoting and encouraging attorneys to work with paralegals and social workers as part of an advocacy team on behalf of clients. Kelli began her career with the OSPD in January 2014 when she was placed in the Alamosa regional office, and she has been practicing in Denver since October 2016. Kelli has a passion for working with refugee and immigrant clients. Kelli speaks Spanish and prior to joining the OSPD, she completed internships with both the State Department at the United States' Embassy in Mexico City, and Colorado Legal Services Migrant Farm Worker Division. She is a former board member of the Colorado Juvenile Defender Center, now Transformative Justice Project, and she continues to serve that organization in a volunteer capacity. Outside of work, Kelli is a community garden mentor for Denver Urban Gardens, the largest network of community-based gardens in the country. Kelli and her husband are also host home volunteers for Lutheran Family Services of the Rocky Mountain Region and the African Community Center. As host home volunteers, they host refugee families in their homes until the families' permanent housing can be secured. Kelli was recently admitted to Metro State University's Master of Social Work program, and she will begin classes this Fall.

### **Erin Pier**

Erin's (she, her) passion for systemic change was ignited through her career in education, which began in 2008. As both a special education teacher and a school psychologist, Erin was entrusted with countless stories from young people over the years. These young people have been pivotal in shaping her dedication to abolishing the school-to-prison pipeline. At TJP, Erin's role as an Executive Director in a shared leadership model leverages her background in education and mental health, as well as strengths in grant writing and communication. She supports essential functions such as court advocacy and education navigation while overseeing fundraising, marketing and development. Erin resonates deeply with activist Valarie Kaur's words that "wonder is where love begins," and believes that by humanizing young people and addressing the root causes of youth behavior, we can transform schools, the legal system, and beyond. She has been a frequent contributor to local newspapers and journals on inequities in both the education and legal systems, and is an advocate for keeping youth in school and out of incarceration. Erin balances her intense professional world with family adventures, and enjoys travel, cooking, playing music & camping with her husband, three kids, and two dogs.

### **liz porter-merrill**

liz porter-merrill (she/they) grew up on Colorado's Western Slope, graduated as a double Buff from the University of Colorado undergrad and Colorado Law, and clerked for a Colorado trial court judge and appellate court judge before becoming a public defender. After ten years of advocating for her incarcerated clients in the appellate courts, liz transitioned into a position focusing on restorative justice at the Office of the Colorado State Public Defender. She supports defense attorneys, prosecutors, victim advocates, and judges navigate restorative justice law and practices. liz also serves as the public defender representative on the Colorado Restorative Justice Council, an organization that guides statewide restorative justice policy, and the state's Adult Diversion Funding Committee. liz aspires to create structures for and to practice compassionate accountability, healing, and transformation for all. She regularly facilitates high-impact dialogues (aka victim-offender dialogues) and circle process to support people impacted by the criminal legal system – both harmed people and people responsible for harm. liz loves to teach about RJ and transformative justice, including how to facilitate, and is often called upon by community-based and system agencies to guide the implementation or expansion of RJ programs. Her passion project is Project: Elevate!, working to empower people with lived experience of incarceration revision community corrections and lead a restorative way forward for re-entry. However, liz's greatest inspiration for cultivating RJ and TJ is her imaginative, adventure-loving daughter, a budding circle keeper herself.

### **Effie Siebold**

Effie Seibold (she, her) earned a Masters Degree in Journalism from the University of Colorado in 2003, and during the course of that program taught undergraduate students about critical thinking and writing and co-authored a study of the history of Colorado's death penalty. She very quickly realized she did not want to write about the amazing work of public defenders, she wanted to be one. She received her JD in 2007 from the University of Colorado, interning at the Colorado State Public Defender's Office her 1L, 2L, and 3L years and very happily becoming a deputy public defender in the Golden trial office in 2007. Effie spent 11 very fulfilling years in the Golden office and was the county court supervisor when she joined the training team in the state office in 2018. As a training director, Effie spends her time divided between training youth defenders, interns, county court lawyers, and district court lawyers. She also serves as the public defender representative on the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council, the juvenile code review subcommittee, the Division of Youth Services Policy Review Committee, and attends a variety of juvenile policy meetings.

### **Dr. Paul Spragg**

Dr. Spragg (he, him) is a psychologist and behavior analyst in private practice. He specializes in clinical, school, and forensic psychology and applied behavior analysis for children and adults with neurodevelopmental disorders, including Intellectual Disabilities, ADHD, and Autism Spectrum Disorders. Dr. Spragg is licensed in Colorado in both clinical and school psychology and is board-certified as a behavior analyst at the doctoral level (BCBA-D). As such, he is one of only a handful of clinicians credentialed in all three disciplines.

Dr. Spragg is the former Director of Adolescent and Adult Services at the JFK Center for Developmental Disabilities in Denver (now JFK Partners UCE) and held a clinical faculty position in the CU Health Sciences Center Department of Psychiatry. Then he founded Developmental Disability Consultants, PC, a highly regarded behavioral health group that operated continuously under my direction for nearly 30 years. In 2022, he joined the adjunct faculty at the University of Denver.

As a clinical and consulting psychologist, his work primarily revolves around the diagnosis and treatment of persons with developmental disabilities who have co-occurring psychiatric-behavioral disorders. As a school psychologist, he conducts Independent Educational Evaluations (IEEs), and he consults with IEP teams on issues relating to behavior plans, manifestation determination reviews, and threat assessments. As a forensic practitioner, I have extensive experience in both civil and criminal matters and provide a variety of forensic psychological services consistent with my training and experience. On the criminal side, he works with both victims and offenders with neurobehavioral disorders in a variety of roles such as forensic examiner, trial consultant, treatment provider, and expert witness. On the civil side, Dr. Spragg provides evaluations of mental capacity for adults (e.g., guardianship, conservatorship, informed consent, parenting) and expert testimony in matters relating to special education. He is qualified as an expert witness in two Federal District Courts (Districts of Colorado and Wyoming) and over two dozen Colorado judicial districts.

### **Jeni Stinson**

Jeni (she, her) practices criminal defense in Colorado, specializing in juvenile defense and direct file/transfer litigation. Following four years of working for the Colorado State Public Defender, Jeni has worked as an Alternate Defense Counsel contractor for the past 16 years, including working as an expert and consultant in direct file and transfer cases. Jeni's practice includes mentoring and training law students and young attorneys in youth defense. Jeni has taught legal courses and guest lectured for Colorado State University, University of Denver, Metropolitan State University, Westwood College, Holmes Paralegal College, the Office of the State Public Defender, The Colorado Juvenile Defender Center, and the Office of Alternate Defense Counsel.

### **Matthew Taylor**

Matthew (he, him) is an award-winning author, professional actor, storyteller, and humorist who has been entertaining audiences throughout the United States and internationally for the last twenty-five years. Transplanted to Colorado from the small sailing village of Itchenor, England, Matthew is a partner of A.C.E. Entertainment, which has written and produced over fifty original shows and is currently touring their smash hit, *Girls Only – The Secret Comedy of Women*. Matthew has a long history of coaching theater, storytelling, and the art of improvisation. He formed Persuasion through Narrative in 2010 to coach individuals and teams on the elements of persuasion through narrative and story and has quickly gained a strong reputation, especially within the legal profession. In addition to coach, Matthew's storytelling is utilized for wit at corporate and private events nationwide. He was recognized as the Grand Slam Champion of *The Moth* in 2018.

### **Liz Upton**

Liz Upton (she, her) is a Supervising Attorney at the OSPD's Golden Regional Office. Liz started with the Colorado Public Defender's system in 2011 after graduating from the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. While Liz has handled adult misdemeanors and felonies, her exposure to working with kids in juvenile court cemented her passion for public defense work. For the past seven years, Liz has carried an (almost) exclusively juvenile caseload and loves the opportunity to advocate for youth. Liz has given numerous trainings on Detention Advocacy and has participated in a variety of committees to promote juvenile justice reform in Colorado. Liz enjoys exploring Colorado with her daughter (and her less-than-well-behaved pup Charlie), spending time with family and friends, and traveling.

### **Tally Zuckerman**

Tally (she, her) is a Colorado native and a principal at Zuckerman Law, LLC. Prior to forming the firm, Ms. Zuckerman was an attorney in the Denver Trial Office of the Colorado State Public Defender. Ms. Zuckerman spent several years as a Deputy State Public Defender practicing solely in the area of indigent criminal defense. While at the Public Defender's Office, Ms. Zuckerman represented thousands of clients in county court, juvenile court, drug court, and district court. She has handled cases ranging from misdemeanor domestic violence assault and DUI to sexual assault and homicide. Ms. Zuckerman also has extensive experience in juvenile law as well as handling cases in Colorado's drug courts. Ms. Zuckerman has been in private practice since 2013 practicing solely in the area of criminal defense. Ms. Zuckerman is currently the co-chair of the non-profit LYRIC ("Learn Your Rights in Colorado") and she is the private criminal defense attorney representative on the Domestic Violence Offender Management Board.

## **Elie Zwiebel**

Prior to attending law school, Elie Zwiebel (he, him) taught in the Detroit Area, Chicago, Portland, Shenzhen, and Nanjing. Through these experiences, Elie developed a passion for student and family advocacy--specifically for fighting the school-to-prison pipeline. Elie is thrilled to now provide legal representation to students and families in Colorado school discipline, discrimination, and special education matters. Elie has represented students, parents, and guardians in educational and juvenile justice matters through his solo practice since September 2017 and as Colorado Juvenile Defender Center's Education First Program Director. Elie is now Executive Director of Transformative Justice Project of Colorado (formerly known as CJDC). Elie sits on the Board of LYRIC (Learn Your Rights in Colorado) and Chairs the Colorado Bar Association's Juvenile Law Section. Elie currently co-chairs the Disproportionate School Discipline Task Force, which will make recommendations to the legislature around how to address inequitable school discipline practices around the state.