

NEVADA YOUTH LEGISLATURE



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

SUBMITTED BY
Youth Legislator Sebastian Rios, Chair
Nevada Youth Legislature, 2024-2025

**The
Student Voice
in State Government**

Introductory Remarks

The second year of the 2023–2025 Term of the Nevada Youth Legislature (NYL) began with an August 2024 Midterm Training in Carson City. This leadership opportunity focused on bill drafting, from idea to development to advocacy. Now, with the conclusion of our second year, the NYL Program has provided many valuable lessons, memories, and points of impact. We were able to apply everything we learned during our first year, which focused on skills-building and leadership trainings, to enrich the second year of our term through the legislative process. During our second year, we worked together utilizing our skills in listening, presentations, informed decision-making, negotiations, and more. Most importantly, Youth Legislators maximized our deliberation and collaboration skills to select a Bill Draft Request (BDR) to send to the 2025 Legislative Session.

The NYL's BDR represented the culmination of individual BDR presentations and cumulative consideration during monthly meetings held September 2024 through January 2025. Our final vote included additional amendments proposed by Youth Legislators. As a body, the NYL produced Senate Bill 254, which was introduced in the 2025 Legislative Session. This measure focuses on improving the lives of students who struggle with substance abuse. Youth Legislators engaged in the legislative process by advocating for and presenting SB 254 to the Senate Committee on Education on NYL Day at the Legislature held on March 5, 2025. As the session progressed, Youth Legislators continued to collaborate with Legislators to refine SB 254 for final passage.

Beyond official NYL meetings and trainings, Youth Legislators participated in—and led—powerful outside activities, including testifying before a public decision-making body and preparing outreach recruitment letters and videos to encourage the next group of youth leaders to join the NYL.

Put simply, the NYL has been an incredibly inspirational once-in-a-lifetime experience, which has provided an unparalleled look into representative government and what it means to be a public servant. The NYL has truly changed the lives of the youth who have had the opportunity to be involved in it. We look forward to continuing our work and supporting the journey of future Youth Legislators. The NYL has achieved and surpassed its goal of representing the youth voice in our State throughout these past two years, and the 2023–2025 cohort looks forward to contributing to the success of the NYL.

Meetings, Trainings, and Activities

August 6 and 7, 2024

Carson City Midterm Training: Legislative Processes and Bill Drafting

Throughout this two-day experience, Youth Legislators participated in a comprehensive and all-encompassing learning journey that guided us through the details of the legislative process, from creation to passage. The experience was led by Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.), Chair, NYL Board, and Tina Ashdown, NYL Program Facilitator, Research Division, LCB.

On the first day, Youth Legislators participated in the following sessions:

- “The Role of Lobbyists in the Legislative Process,” led by Lea Case, Vice President, Belz & Case Government Affairs; former Youth Legislator Dillon Moss, Director of Government Affairs, Associated Students of the University of Nevada, Reno; and Senator Wiener (Ret.);
- “Development of a BDR,” led by Asher Killian, Legislative Counsel, Legal Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB), and David Nauss, Senior Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division, LCB; and
- “Legislative Intent: The Relationship Between the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches,” led by Senator Wiener (Ret.). Speakers included Brendan Bucy, Secretary of the Senate, Nevada State Senate; Zach Conine, Nevada State Treasurer; and Justice Linda Marie Bell, Nevada Supreme Court. This event was held at the Governor’s Mansion, which provided Youth Legislators with a remarkable opportunity to learn in one of Nevada’s historical landmarks.

Outside of these sessions, Youth Legislators—working individually and in groups—learned about the bill drafting process from Legislators, including Assemblymembers Anderson, La Rue Hatch, and O’Neill, and Senator Wiener (Ret.). The first day ended with team-building activities.

On the second day, Youth Legislators learned more details about the intricacies of the complex legislative process through the following experiences:

- “Mock Committee, Meeting I with Nevada Legislators,” which included Senator Wiener (Ret.), Assemblymembers Anderson and O’Neill, and LCB staff. Witnesses for the mock meeting included Youth Legislator Toren Wolf (Senate District [SD] 5), Youth Legislator Tyler Breeden (SD 4), and former Youth Legislator Rose Asaf, 2013–2015 (Chair, 2014–2015);

- “Mock Committee, Meeting II with Youth Legislators,” led by Vice Chair Ethan Cohen (SD 9) and I (SD 18). Witnesses for the mock meeting included: Youth Legislator Eric Conyers (SD 21); Youth Legislator Mackenzie Coughlin (SD 1); Youth Legislator Daniel Obstgarten (SD 20); Youth Legislator G’Yanna Perry (SD 10); former Youth Legislator Evan Gong, 2014–2015; former Youth Legislator Julianna Melendez, 2019–2021; former Senator Joyce Woodhouse, NYL Board Member; and Brigid Duffy, Director of the Juvenile Division, Clark County District Attorney;
- “Nevada Youth Legislature Floor Session,” facilitated by Senator Wiener (Ret.). Secretary of the Senate, Brendan Bucy and Annette Biamonte, History Clerk, Nevada State Senate contributed to this unique learning opportunity. Youth Legislator Hannah Villatoro (SD 7) served as Floor Leader as Youth Legislators navigated bills through introduction to the final voting process for passage; and
- “Exhibition of the Legislative Research Library,” hosted by Stephanie Heyroth Wilcox, Legislative Librarian, Research Division, LCB.

Others who lent their expertise to the success of this training included former Youth Legislator Zhan Okuda-Lim, 2009–2011 (Chair, 2010–2011) and NYL Board Member; Karly O’Krent, Senior Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division, LCB; and Erin Sturdivant, Senior Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division, LCB.

The Midterm Training ended with sessions, led by Senator Wiener (Ret.), that focused on several important topics including: “Reconnecting with Your Legislators,” “History of the NYL Legislation,” and “Understanding the BDR Process: From Idea to Action and... Beyond,” as well as the traditional NYL carrot cake celebration. Many Youth Legislators felt this training not only prepared them for the work to come but served as a point of excitement for the advocacy and collaboration that was to be accomplished in the coming months.

Youth Legislator Matthew Chen (SD 11) shared his reflection:

One of my favorite moments of my term was the Midterm Training in Carson City. We met, as a team, in the State Legislative Building, the Governor’s Mansion, and other historic spots. Sitting in the chambers—where lawmakers engage in the legislative process—firsthand was surreal and empowering. It made me realize just how much change we can make as Youth Legislators.

Youth Legislator Phillip Rosas (SD 17) shared how he was impacted by the training:

One specific experience that enlightened me was when we had our Midterm Training in Carson City, which involved all the Youth Legislators. I thought that was a wonderful moment that helped everyone get to know each other. The NYL has helped me gain a deeper understanding of the law-making process and what can be done to help the youth in Nevada.

August 31, 2024

Assignment Deadline: BDR Proposal

Building on what we learned about the legislative process during the Midterm Training, Youth Legislators submitted BDR proposals. The BDRs were created based on the Youth Legislator's constituent outreach and research completed over the course of our term. Each Youth Legislator submitted BDR proposals to Senator Wiener (Ret.), Tina Ashdown, and our district's Legislators. The LCB compiled the submitted BDR proposals into a list of the BDR proposals to be considered at the September 26, 2024, meeting (attached below). Creating BDRs proved to be a valuable learning experience for Youth Legislators. It provided us with the opportunity to exercise the skills we learned throughout the first year of the Program as well as the Midterm Training.

September 26, 2024

Meeting: Presenting and Narrowing BDRs

During this meeting, all Youth Legislators had an opportunity to present their BDR proposal to their colleagues for consideration. Following the presentations, the NYL selected seven proposals for further consideration at the next NYL meeting held on October 22, 2024. From the collection of 21 proposals, those authored by Youth Legislators Kyle Allen (SD 16), Sophie Cain (SD 8), Jordan Chong (SD 13), Kathleen McCarthy (SD 6), Sitara Reganti (SD 15), Sebastian Rios (SD 18), and Alexa Walsh (SD 12) were selected to move forward.

October 22, 2024

Meeting: Narrowing BDR Proposals

Each year of the term, the Vice Chair leads at least one meeting and training during their tenure as Vice Chair, regardless of the attendance of the Chair. Vice Chair Ethan Cohen (SD 9) chaired the meeting and training proceedings.

Youth Legislators heard more thorough presentations from the authors of the seven BDR proposals selected in September. After asking questions and deliberating, Youth Legislators voted to narrow their BDR consideration down to two final proposals. The BDR proposals from Youth Legislator Kathleen McCarthy (SD 6) regarding substance abuse and Youth Legislator Alexa Walsh (SD 12) regarding firearm safety were selected to move forward.

Training: Public Testimony and Outreach Recruitment

Youth Legislators participated in a training focused on public testimony and outreach recruitment in preparation for outside activities we would be required to complete. Senator Wiener (Ret.) led

a powerful presentation on both topics. She shared essential information about the importance of being prepared for testifying, determining purpose and intention, refining remarks, and ensuring one is well informed for questions after testimony.

After the presentation, Youth Legislators participated in discussion groups with Legislators including Senators Harris and Pazina, Assemblymember Hansen, and Senator Wiener (Ret.). Group reporters included Youth Legislators Owen Chang (SD 14), Matthew Chen (SD 11), Jolie Nguyen (SD 3), and Alexa Walsh, (SD 12). Their highlights included meaningful suggestions from Legislators, who have vital experience in delivering public testimonies before legislative committees.

November 16, 2024

Assignment Deadline: Testimony Before a Public Decision-Making Body Plan

Youth Legislators submitted individual plans, including information about which decision-making body they chose for their public testimonies and what they were preparing to address with their remarks. The plans were submitted to Senator Wiener (Ret.), Tina Ashdown, and the Legislators in their district.

November 20, 2024

Meeting: Selection of the NYL 2025 BDR

Youth Legislators heard in-depth presentations of the two final BDR proposals. Youth Legislator Kathleen McCarthy (SD 6) and Youth Legislator Alexa Walsh (SD 12) provided detailed presentations on each of their BDRs, which included handouts on the measures, implications of the legislation, and why they believed their proposal would inspire a positive impact on Nevada youth. Following their presentations, additional witnesses provided brief testimony on each of the BDR proposals to ensure Youth Legislators were completely educated on the impacts of the proposals.

Witnesses addressing Youth Legislator Kathleen McCarthy's BDR on substance abuse included: Christy McGill, Deputy Superintendent for Educator Effectiveness and Family Engagement, Nevada's Department of Education; Ryan Tyler, Clark County Firefighters Local 1908; Jennifer Fraser, Chief Public Defender, Juvenile Division, Clark County Public Defender's Office; and John Piro, Assistant Public Defender, Clark County Public Defender's Office.

Witnesses addressing Youth Legislator Alexa Walsh's BDR on firearm safety included: Michael Watson, Chief Deputy District Attorney, Juvenile Division, Clark County District Attorney's Office; and John Piro, Assistant Public Defender, Clark County Public Defender's Office.

After all presentations were completed, Youth Legislators spent a short period individually deliberating before voting. The BDR authored by Youth Legislator Kathleen McCarthy was selected as the NYL bill to be introduced in the 2025 Legislative Session.

After this selection, Youth Legislators had the opportunity to propose amendments to the BDR proposal. This was a new opportunity for Youth Legislators to engage more thoroughly in our “ownership” of the NYL BDR. This level of participation directly and collaboratively allowed each Youth Legislator to influence the language of the NYL bill. Of the seven amendments proposed and considered by Youth Legislators, three were approved by the NYL to be added to the NYL bill language.

In reflection on the amendment portion of the meeting, Vice Chair Ethan Cohen (SD 9) shared the following statement:

Voting on amendments to the BDR was a continuation of the democratic process. Even though the bill was selected, the work wasn’t done, and we wouldn’t stop until it was. This work ethic on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of youth who live in the Silver State was incredibly powerful, and I knew that the voices of Nevada youth were unquestionably being heard.

December 14, 2024

Assignment Deadline: Outreach Recruitment Letter or Video

Based on the training and their personal experiences, Youth Legislators created letters or recorded videos to recruit young people to apply for the 2025–2027 NYL Term. In their submissions, Youth Legislators highlighted the uniqueness of the NYL, including the impactful experiences in the Program and the benefits a student could achieve from being part of the NYL. Recruitment letters and videos were submitted to Senator Wiener (Ret.), Tina Ashdown, the Legislators in their district, and different community groups and organizations to promote the NYL and increase the number of applicants across the State.

January 8 and 9, 2025

NYL Gathering/Training

During the gatherings in Carson City and Las Vegas, Youth Legislators, NYL alumni, and Legislators gathered to participate in the “Mastering Social Conversation: NYL Bill Advocacy” training activity. This highly interactive experience helped us prepare for our forthcoming advocacy work with the NYL bill. We practiced advocating with Legislators, participated in helpful exchanges and relationship building, and received invaluable feedback.

January 14, 2025

Meeting: Finalize BDR Language

Youth Legislators met to finalize the language of the NYL bill before introduction during the 2025 Legislative Session. Nevada Youth Legislature counsel, David Nauss, provided Youth Legislators with an overview of the BDR language. Youth Legislators proposed and considered essential refinements and/or clarifications of the BDR language. The NYL bill proposal, as amended, was approved by the NYL for introduction in the 2025 Legislative Session.

We also selected a Youth Legislator to represent the body to consult with the Nevada Association of Student Councils regarding the nomination of a student member to the Nevada State Board of Education (pursuant to *Nevada Revised Statutes* 385.021). After nominations and brief presentations from interested Members, Youth Legislator Sitara Reganti (SD 15) was selected to represent the NYL. After this selection, Youth Legislators provided key considerations for Youth Legislator Reganti as she fulfills her work in this new representative capacity.

Training: Advocating for the NYL Bill

Youth Legislators learned essential skills about advocating for the NYL bill, especially in preparation for NYL Day at the Legislature. Senator Wiener (Ret.) led a presentation on “Maximizing Outcomes for the NYL Bill.” She shared important considerations, including relating the topic to the audience, highlighting benefits to constituents, and remaining focused and attentive when Legislators have questions about the measure.

After this presentation, Youth Legislators were joined by two NYL alumni mentor-trainers, Evan Gong, 2014–2015 and Stella Thornton, 2021–2023. They provided valuable information about how to maximize participation during NYL Day at the Legislature and how Youth Legislators can maximize our efforts through advocacy and responding to questions.

February 8, 2025

Assignment Deadline: Testimony Before a Public Decision-Making Body Report

Upon completion of their public testimony, Youth Legislators submitted reports on the entirety of the process, including information about how the testimony went, what information they presented, what reactions they inspired, and how the experience impacted them. The reports were submitted to Senator Wiener (Ret.), Tina Ashdown, and the Legislators in their district.

March 1, 2025

Activity: Written Testimony Supporting the NYL Bill

Prior to NYL Day at the Legislature in Carson City, Youth Legislators were invited to submit written testimony in support of SB 254.

March 5, 2025

NYL Day at the Legislature

Northern and Southern Nevada Youth Legislators met in Carson City to participate in NYL Day at the Legislature. A principle focus of our energy was the presentation of the NYL bill to the Senate Committee on Education. Following Senator Wiener (Ret.)’s presentation of the history and impact of the NYL Program, Youth Legislator Kathleen McCarthy (SD 6) presented SB 254 to the Committee. Throughout the day, Youth Legislators met with Nevada Legislators to advocate for SB 254. Other highlights of the day included Youth Legislators joining our Senator during Senate Floor Session during which we were individually introduced, recognized, and presented with commencement cords. The eventful day ended with the traditional NYL carrot cake celebration to mark the completion of this final in-person gathering of the 2023–2025 cohort of the NYL.

April 16, 2025

Virtual Conversation: Reflections of the Second Year

During this virtual discussion, Youth Legislators reflected on the second year, as well as our entire two-year NYL experience. We discussed which meetings and trainings impacted us most, what skills and lessons we learned, and how we will utilize our experiences in the future. All participating Youth Legislators shared a deep sense of gratitude for everyone who has contributed to making this Program possible.

May 30, 2025

Deadline: NYL Annual Report

Northern Nevada Youth Legislators Owen Chang, Jordan Chong, and Sitara Reganti meet with Governor Joe Lombardo’s Chief of Staff, Ryan Cherry, to present the *Nevada Youth Legislature: Annual Report, 2024–2025*.

Closing Remarks

In summary, this second and final year of the 2023–2025 NYL Term was filled with educational experiences, collaboration and advocacy adventures, and Nevada youth-focused service opportunities. Throughout its 18-year history, the NYL has promoted youth representation in our great State of Nevada, and this cohort of the Program exemplified the continuation of this tradition. From bill proposal presentations to amendment deliberation to gatherings and more, Youth Legislators thrived because of the countless opportunities to implement the skills they learned throughout this two-year leadership adventure.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all the individuals who played a role in guiding and building this NYL experience, most especially, Senator Wiener (Ret.), Tina Ashdown, and Seana McManus. Without their leadership, initiative, planning, and mentorship, the work and success of the NYL would not have been possible. Along with their work, I would like to thank all the Nevada Legislators and NYL alumni mentor-trainers, who shared their insights with us throughout the year. I am humbled to thank the countless LCB staff in Carson City and Las Vegas who made our meetings, trainings, and the bill drafting process possible.

Legislative knowledge was such a key aspect of the second year of our term. The individual and ongoing efforts of Youth Legislators to advocate for ideas is proof of the Program's effectiveness and inspiration. An outstanding demonstration of engagement is evidenced by the Youth Legislators whose BDRs were not selected as the NYL bill. They were encouraged to collaborate with Legislators to introduce their measures. Youth Legislators took advantage of this opportunity, and a couple of their ideas were introduced as legislation this session. One example is:

- Assembly Bill 167 was sponsored by Assemblymember Hansen on behalf of Youth Legislator Sitara Reganti (SD 15). This measure revises provisions relating to the use of corrective room restriction involving juveniles.

Another Youth Legislator worked with a Senator on a bill for an issue different from the one he proposed to the NYL.

- Senate Bill 179 was sponsored by Senators Ohrenschall, Buck, Stone, Krasner, and Cannizzaro, et al. on behalf of Youth Legislator Ethan Cohen (SD 9). This measure revises provisions relating to discrimination.

In reviewing the entire two-year experience, Youth Legislator Sitara Reganti (SD 15) shared:

The NYL experience completely shifted my view of the world. I never realized the effect youth can have on the legislative process before getting involved with [the] NYL. I had the opportunity to inspire a bill outside the NYL bill, and I wouldn't have been prepared at all without the NYL.

Youth Legislator Matthew Chen (SD 11) shared:

The NYL has shown me that making a difference isn't just a dream—it's something we can all do, at any age. Looking back, my time representing Senate District 11 in the NYL has better prepared me to engage my community, build my leadership and professional skills, and allow me to comfortably engage in the legislative process in the future.

Vice Chair Ethan Cohen (SD 9) shared:

The NYL is perhaps the greatest experience a teenager could go through. Working in the community, on the ground, and then making change on behalf of those you represent is something that can be done only in Nevada and only in the NYL. I have loved every moment of it.

As of the submission of this report, SB 254 was amended and passed as amended in the Senate Committee on Education and was rereferred to the Senate Committee on Finance. Through the NYL bill and beyond, Youth Legislators have elevated their level of involvement and advocacy for the youth community. Through observation and leadership during this second year, I am enthusiastic and grateful to report that the NYL has accomplished its mission of representing the youth voice in Nevada at all levels of essential policymaking.

Respectfully submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Rios". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Sebastian G. Rios, Chair
Nevada Youth Legislature, 2024–2025

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