NEVADA YOUTH LEGISLATURE

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024

SUBMITTED BY
Youth Legislator Alexa Walsh, Chair
Nevada Youth Legislature, 2023–2024

The Student Voice in State Government

OVERVIEW

The current term of the Nevada Youth Legislature (NYL) began on June 1, 2023, and concludes on May 31, 2025. The 2023–2024 year of the NYL included many thought-provoking opportunities for Youth Legislators to learn about the many facets required to build character and lifelong skills. This 2023–2025 NYL term, when completed, will be the first fully in-person term (versus an in-person/virtual hybrid) since the 2017–2019 term. These in-person meetings and trainings definitely provide Youth Legislators with a greater opportunity to engage with one another in more significant ways.

The first year of the NYL two-year term was focused on cultivating what it means to be a voice for our State's youth. Monthly trainings prompted both discussion and elevated engagement. We learned valuable skills-building lessons from State Senators and Assembly Members during breakout discussion groups, as well as conversing with NYL alumni mentor-trainers through live and virtual conversations. During monthly breakout groups, Youth Legislators also participated in scenarios with one another. These activities helped simulate possible situations Youth Legislators would encounter as youth representatives in their communities. Every training helped prepare Youth Legislators with the knowledge to complete assigned activities while also providing them with life-long skills.

Youth Legislators had the opportunity to reach out to their constituents using the skills learned in the monthly training sessions. Youth Legislators completed a town hall meeting with students in their Senate districts. Many Youth Legislators attended each other's meetings as they built essential collaborations that were fostered through monthly paired activities. The connections developed by Youth Legislators inspired thoughtful discussions, which will grow substantially during the second year of this NYL term.

This first year nurtured Youth Legislators' leadership development and public service consciousness, which will provide a foundation for the second year that focuses on the legislative process, from ideas to bill draft proposals to the selection of—and advocacy for—the one NYL bill that will be introduced in the 2025 Legislative Session.

MEETINGS AND TRAININGS

August 1, 2023

Training: Inaugural Training

On August 1, 2023, Youth Legislators statewide met in-person for the first time for the Inaugural NYL Training. This training introduced Youth Legislators to the NYL's history and their new role in it. Along with learning about logistics and protocols, decorum, statutory requirements, roles, and responsibilities, Youth Legislators were also equipped with the essentials needed to maximize their performance during their NYL term.

Youth Legislators were elevated by words of wisdom from two distinguished NYL alumni-mentor trainers: Alex Bybee, Youth Legislator, 2010–2012, NYL Chair, 2011–2012, NYL Board member, 2013–2019; and Zhan Okuda-Lim, Youth Legislator, 2009–2011, NYL Chair, 2010–2011, NYL Board member, 2013 to present.

Speaker of the Nevada State Assembly Steve Yeager swore Youth Legislators into office and explained their essential roles as youth representatives. They also received their first assignment, which involved emailing their State Senate and Assembly Members to introduce themselves and schedule a possible meeting.

September 7, 2023

Meeting: Election of Chair and Vice Chair

During their first meeting, Youth Legislators were tasked with electing their Chair and Vice Chair for the 2023–2024 year of the two-year NYL term. Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.), Chair, NYL Board, facilitated the elections. She asked the candidates to provide a one-minute speech that accurately explained why they should be considered. Youth Legislator Alexa Walsh was elected Chair, and Youth Legislator Jolie Nyugen was elected Vice Chair.

Training: Message Accountability Skills

Senator Wiener (Ret.) instructed Youth Legislators in "Message Accountability Skills" which provided the tools for maximizing messages and responses. As with every monthly training, Youth Legislators also benefitted from hearing valuable insights from several State Legislators and NYL alumni mentor-trainers. The Legislators, who contributed to this training, included: Senator Roberta Lange; Senator Skip Daly; Assemblywoman Danielle Gallant; and Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.). The alumni mentor-trainers, who provided their perspectives and answered Youth Legislators' questions, were Jon Oglesby, Youth Legislator and NYL Vice Chair, 2008–2009, and Madeleine Welch, Youth Legislator, 2013–2015.

Prior to the training, several Youth Legislators were selected to participate in three role-playing scenarios which demonstrated the importance of message accountability. Each scenario was both unique and relevant to the subject of the training.

Senator Wiener (Ret.) introduced the paired activity for the training. Youth Legislators were tasked with connecting virtually between trainings to discuss the assigned paired activity. All monthly paired activities throughout the year focused on practicing the skills covered in the previous training, as well as providing opportunities to expand bonds among Youth Legislators.

At the conclusion of this training, Youth Legislators were able to share questions or comments about the entire training experience during a discussion period. This opportunity to exchange questions and ideas at the end of the training was recently included in all the training agendas. Reflecting on this training, Youth Legislators agree the discussion was highly successful.

October 2, 2023

Optional Opportunity: Social Hosting International Delegation

The Northern Nevada International Center (NNIC) contacted Tina Ashdown, NYL Program Facilitator, to request a meeting with representatives of the NYL as part of their International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). The NNIC guests included 15 international delegates from 14 countries, who came to the United States to explore current social, political, and economic issues. The International Visitor Leadership Program believed the NYL could provide valuable insights about youth involvement in the legislative process. This gathering, which occurred from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Carson City, focused on how high school students can engage in the legislative process, including their roles as youth advocates, and how the NYL fosters youth empowerment and leadership.

Current and former Youth Legislators from Northern Nevada who participated in this gathering included: Max Grinstein, Youth Legislator, 2021–2023, NYL Vice Chair, 2021–2022; Dillon Moss, Youth Legislator, 2021–2023, NYL Chair, 2021–2022; Kyle Allen, Youth Legislator, 2023–2025; Jordan Chong, Youth Legislator, 2023–2025; and Sitara Reganti, Youth Legislator, 2023–2025.

Following this distinctive opportunity, Senator Wiener (Ret.) created a “Social Hosting” training which she provided for northern Youth Legislators to help them maximize their participation in such gatherings in the future.

October 12, 2023

Training: Effective Listening Skills

This training focused on the power and value of "Effective Listening Skills." Youth Legislators were significantly impacted by the insights provided by Assemblyman Brian Hibbetts, Assemblyman Gregory Koenig, Assemblywoman Erica Mosca, and Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.). During smaller discussion groups, they answered Youth Legislators' questions about their own experiences with active listening in their legislative roles. Following these interactions, a Youth Legislator from each of the four discussion groups was selected to present a summary of each Legislator's remarks for all Youth Legislators to hear.

Nevada Youth Legislature alumni mentor-trainers were also able to share their insights and answer Youth Legislators' questions regarding effective listening skills. These participants included: Jesse Cruz, Youth Legislator, 2017–2019; and Haley Johnson, Youth Legislator and NYL Vice Chair, 2010–2011. Each testimonial was proof of the NYL program's impact.

Senator Wiener (Ret.) led Youth Legislators through three role-playing scenarios where effective listening skills were paramount. She also included invaluable essentials, such as the power of body language in listening, maintaining an open mind throughout the discussion, and listening from a speaker's perspective.

During the questions, comments, and discussion portion of this training, Youth Legislators shared what they had learned from the previous paired activity. The training ended with a discussion on the next paired activity, "Three Questions and Answers."

Youth Legislator Daniel Obstgarten was significantly impacted by this training and others. He relayed his gratitude, stating:

> I feel like the first year had a profound impact on me as a person, notably in the three non-town-hall trainings. In the case of education, as I am sure other sophomores in Advanced Placement Seminar can confirm, these skills helped me greatly in my presentations for that class and other classes as well—as a listener and a speaker. I am also finding more confidence in myself, both as a student and a leader, which is entirely accredited to the NYL program.

October 24, 2023

Optional Opportunity: Social Hosting International Delegation

The NNIC reached out to the NYL to participate in an Open World exchange program for members of Parliament from Papua New Guinea, which was sponsored by the Congressional Office of International Leadership (COIL). These delegates wanted to examine effective and positive governance, as well as legislative leadership, particularly in ways that youth can effectively participate in civic engagement. The meeting, which involved the COIL delegation and Youth Legislators, focused on the operations and benefits of the NYL Program, and how the NYL fosters the inclusion of youth voices in government. Four members of the Parliament met with the following former and current Northern Nevada Youth Legislators, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., at the Legislative Building: Kyle Allen; Owen Chang; Jordan Chong; Dillon Moss; and Sitara Reganti.

November 14, 2023

Training: Power Presentations

Senator Wiener (Ret.) provided imperative instruction on how we can create and deliver "Power Presentations." This included: topic selection, text development, preparation for questions and answers, building a rapport with listeners, and more.

Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, Assemblyman Howard Watts, Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.), and Jennifer Sturm, Principal Policy Analyst, Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau, described their own experiences with power presentations while answering Youth Legislators' questions. Youth Legislators presented group summaries to their NYL colleagues from the witness table.

Nevada Youth Legislator alumni mentor-trainers Air Force Lieutenant Kate Krolicki, Youth Legislator, 2013–2015, NYL Vice Chair, 2014–2015; and Madeleine Welch, Youth Legislator, 2013–2015, also provided their insights on presentation skills through their anecdotes and responses to Youth Legislators' questions. Both alumni related how the skills from this training have benefitted them throughout their personal and professional lives well beyond the Program.

The training concluded with a powerful role-playing activity that involved three preselected Youth Legislators to give a two-to-three-minute speech on a youth-related issue for which they would like to advocate. These issues covered various perspectives and allowed the speakers to apply skills they acquired during this training and the listening skills they learned during the NYL's October training.

The discussion portion at the end of the training inspired energetic conversation between Youth Legislators and Senator Wiener (Ret.). Youth Legislator Sitara Reganti found great benefits from this discussion time, stating:

> The discussions have helped me understand different approaches to issues from Youth Legislators in the north, south, and rural parts of the State. These interactions provide a great recap after each comprehensive training—a nice cooldown before adjournment.

February 6, 2024

Meeting: Selection of Nevada Association of Student Councils Consultant and Nonvoting Representatives on Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education

The NYL selected its representative, Youth Legislator Matthew Chen, to consult with the Nevada Association of Student Councils concerning the nomination of the student representative on the State Board of Education.

Senator Wiener (Ret.) facilitated the election of three delegates and two alternate delegates to serve as non-voting youth representatives for the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education. Youth Legislator Sitara Reganti was selected as the Northern Nevada youth representative for the Commission. Youth Legislator Hannah Villatoro and Youth Legislator Alexa Walsh were selected as Southern Nevada youth representatives. The two alternate delegates, selected from Southern Nevada, were Youth Legislator Sebastian Rios and Youth Legislator Jolie Nguyen.

Training: Town Hall Meetings

In conjunction with essential skills already addressed during trainings, Senator Wiener (Ret.) guided Youth Legislators through a paramount assignment as youth representatives. Each Youth Legislator was tasked with hosting their own town hall meeting with youth in the Senate district they represent. Senator Wiener (Ret.) highlighted the value of engaging a member of their school faculty to assist with the planning, venue, promotion, and execution of this meeting. She also suggested that Youth Legislators connect with their State Senators and Assembly Members to invite them to attend and participate.

Youth Legislators then had the opportunity to hear from State Legislators about their experiences planning and hosting town hall meetings. Senator Dina Neal, Senator Pat Spearman, Assemblywoman Angie Taylor, and Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.) provided their insights and answered Youth Legislators' questions.

Nevada Youth Legislator alumni mentor-trainers also contributed to the discussion. Kenneth Brooke, Youth Legislator, 2011–2012, and Dillon Moss, Youth Legislator, 2021–2023, NYL Chair, 2021–2022, recounted their town hall meeting experiences and provided Youth Legislators with meaningful suggestions for moving forward with planning and hosting their own events.

During the small group discussions, Youth Legislators shared their pre-assigned opening and closing remarks for their own town hall meetings which helped them simulate their upcoming experiences with their youth constituents. Youth Legislators were able to provide suggestions to their colleagues throughout this activity.

The entire training provided effective insights on planning and executing a town hall meeting.

During her actual town hall meeting, Youth Legislator Mackenzie Coughlin facilitated a more intimate discussion with her constituents saying:

> I had a small group, and everyone was able to speak their minds. They interacted with one another and engaged in healthy discussions. This helped the attendees consider how they can often learn to solve many issues on their own. The whole experience allowed us to feel more connected.

Vice Chair Jolie Nguyen elevated her town hall experience by inviting members of the community to attend and participate, including her State legislative representatives and members of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. On reflection, she stated:

> I invited police officers and State Legislators to my meeting. These individuals had a much deeper understanding of many issues that people wanted to address. When I was unable to answer a question, I had someone more experienced in the room to address these constituent concerns.

April 11, 2024

<u>Meeting: Election of Chair and Vice Chair; Content for NYL Report to the Governor</u>

The NYL has established a practice that invites the Vice Chair to preside over at least one meeting/training during their leadership year. Therefore, Vice Chair Jolie Nguyen chaired this meeting/training.

Senator Wiener (Ret.) facilitated the Chair and Vice Chair elections for the 2024–2025 year. Youth Legislator Sebastian Rios was selected as Chair and Youth Legislator Ethan Cohen was selected as Vice Chair.

Youth Legislators also discussed the content for the *NYL Annual Report to the Governor, 2023–2024.*

Training: Negotiation Skills

In this training, Youth Legislators were invited to explore many important insights on "Negotiation Skills." Lea Case, Belz & Case Government Affairs, taught Youth Legislators effective techniques, based on her education and professional experience.

During group discussions, Senator Melanie Scheible, Senator Jeff Stone, Assemblywoman Selena Torres, and Senator Valerie Wiener (Ret.) shared their wisdom regarding negotiations. They provided important legislative and professional perspectives.

Nevada Youth Legislator alumni mentor-trainers shared personal anecdotes and answered Youth Legislators' questions about negotiation skills. Grant Gabriel, Youth Legislator, 2011–2013, NYL Chair, 2012–2013; and Max Grinstein, Youth Legislator, 2021–2023, NYL Vice Chair, 2021–2022, imparted relevant insights from their own experiences, including advocating for their own bill proposals, as well as the NYL bill, during legislative sessions.

Youth Legislators concluded the training portion with role-playing scenarios involving negotiation skills. All the scenarios mirrored real-life situations that could apply to their role as youth representatives.

During the discussion period, Senator Wiener (Ret.) strongly encouraged Youth Legislators to submit testimonials for the *NYL Annual Report to the Governor, 2023–2024* which would enrich the annual report and provide Youth Legislators with the opportunity to create their own important and lasting message about the NYL Program.

May 9, 2024

Optional Opportunity: Virtual Conversation

Through this optional activity, several Youth Legislators participated in an end-of-year virtual conversation to reflect on the first year of the NYL two-year term. This conversation provided a wonderful venue for gaining different perspectives from Youth Legislators. Many of the testimonials provided in this report are from this virtual conversation. Youth Legislators also discussed questions included in the end-of-year survey which they had received from Tina Ashdown, NYL Program Facilitator. Chair Walsh facilitated the discussion.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 2023–2024 year was marked by connection, effective trainings, and the ability to bring varied viewpoints to the table. Youth Legislators were able to understand the legislative process and communicate with youth constituents in their districts. Despite differences in zip codes, Youth Legislators were able to find common ground with one another while also respecting their colleagues' unique ideas and individual leadership styles. Youth Legislator Sebastian Rios grew substantially throughout 2023–2024, stating:

> The first year of the Nevada Youth Legislature has provided me with a wonderful opportunity to learn new skills on topics such as: message accountability; constituent outreach; listening; and presentations. We have learned about the importance of actively seeking out multiple perspectives and ways we can address other people's needs. I look forward to applying what I have learned to the legislative process in year two and beyond.

Youth Legislator Ethan Cohen summed up how he has connected with the NYL, stating:

> The NYL is the equivalent of letting youth become CEOs of their favorite brands or owners of their favorite sports teams. We have been given the opportunity to excel in a field we are passionate about.

Simply, and profoundly, this year has motivated Youth Legislators to expand their world view and effectively represent the youth of Nevada.

Respectfully submitted by:

Alexa Walsh, Chair
Nevada Youth Legislature
2023–2024