

## GILLIAN B. SCHAPS

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Lauren Fine and Joanna Visser Adjoian  
Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project  
123 South Broad Street, 24th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19109

July 17, 2017

Dear Ms. Fine, Ms. Visser Adjoian and the YSRP team,

~~I plan to graduate from Harvard Law School this May, and a~~After spending the past five years working on behalf of and alongside families wrapped up in the court system, I hope to continue my legal career in Philadelphia as a part of YSRP's dedicated and thoughtful team. I am seeking a sponsorship from YSRP for a post-graduate fellowship in order to provide racially-just and holistic representation to strengthen youth, families and communities.

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Family advocacy, particularly child welfare law, is the reason I ~~decided to become~~ a lawyer. Both before and during law school, I spent my career challenging the narrative our court system uses for families by representing black fathers who want to be primary caregivers, foster youth whose lives are steeped with trauma, and parents struggling with mental health challenges or substance abuse. Our laws try to apply one-size-fits-all rules to multifaceted and complex individuals, flattening them into stereotypes and onto conveyor belts instead of recognizing the uniqueness of each experience. That is where I see my role as a lawyer resting – in the moments of translation between law to life. Working with YSRP and on behalf of its clients would draw on all the different narratives and client experiences I have had in the past to have a direct impact on the life of a young person and their family.

I strive to use a variety of tools to craft these stories and I believe these skills would be a natural fit with YSRP. An English major at heart, I understand the impact of language and the power it has to build or break. As an Americorps alumna, I know the importance of community and how the words we use can be powerful building blocks toward creating a shared purpose. As a mediator, I learned to apply these skills to a legal end with empathy, sensitivity, and kindness. And as a lawyer working in direct service, I know the importance of listening and counseling, of learning and highlighting my client and their story. Additionally, I believe it is imperative to ground my practice in racial justice and intersectionality, particularly in the intensely personal context of working with families. I strive to always critically examine my role as a white, female practitioner and I feel that empowering families is the strongest anti-racism work I could be doing.

My experiences in family law, child welfare law (working both with parents and youth) and youth dating violence would provide unique perspectives to a fellowship project with YSRP. My specific interest areas and expertise include working with young women, young parents, and current or former foster youth (particularly in crossover cases). After five years advocating in various direct-service settings - domestic violence, child welfare, domestic relations, and public benefits - I continue to be invigorated by working directly with families. I would be very grateful to contribute this energy and thoughtfulness to YSRP and its team of advocates.

Sincerely,

Gillian Schaps