

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Utah Attorney Wins National Award for Advocacy Against Unfair Treatment of Youth in the Justice System**

**(Washington, D.C.)**—Utah attorney, and youth justice advocate, Nubia Peña has won the National Juvenile Justice Network's 2019 Youth Justice Emerging Leader Award.

Each year, the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) honors a person who demonstrates dedication to reforming the youth justice system by advocating for the fair treatment of young people, promoting racial equity and actively working towards the use of community-based alternatives to incarcerating kids. NJJN chose Ms. Peña as this year's awardee due to her demonstrated commitment to ending the school-to-prison pipeline, being an active voice for court-involved youth as a youth attorney, and working within the community to support kids at-risk of becoming involved with the justice system.

“Our Youth Justice Emerging Leader Award reflects one of our primary objectives – to ensure our movement’s newest leaders are prepared to confront the structural barriers that have created an inequitable system,” says NJJN’s Executive Director Sarah Bryer. “Nubia's track record shows her dedication and passion for transforming our current approach to youth justice to one that prioritizes restorative justice and holistically supporting positive youth development.”

Ms. Peña dedicated her professional life to youth justice advocacy after working as a law enforcement victim advocate for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault and violent crimes. As she expanded her advocacy work to include racial and economic justice and immigration rights, Ms. Peña decided to enter law school and challenge unjust policies and practices as an attorney. While studying at the University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law in 2014, Ms. Peña was a contributing author on the report “From Fingerprints to Fingerprints: The School-to-Prison Pipeline in Utah,” which examined school discipline rates in Utah – the first effort of its kind in the state. She went on to act as the program director for Racially Just Utah and later as a juvenile defender with Utah Juvenile Defender Attorneys. Most recently, Ms. Peña was named the Director for the State of Utah's Division of Multicultural Affairs and she continues to serve as the training specialist for the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault. In addition, she is a national training consultant and keynote speaker, focusing on the subject of school push-out and the intersections of trauma. She has also founded Royalty Rising Youth Ministry, an initiative supporting the empowered development of marginalized youth and trafficked and harmed girls.

The Youth Justice Emerging Leader Award will be presented to Ms. Peña during NJJN's 2019 Forum on Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) leads a movement of state-based organizations and individuals all of whom seek to shrink our youth justice systems and transform the remainder into systems that treat youth and families with dignity and humanity. NJJN works to align all of its efforts with anti-racist principles with the understanding that structural racism is the defining factor of justice systems. NJJN comprises 53 member organizations in 43 states and the District of Columbia and fifty plus alumni of our Youth Justice Leadership Institute. NJJN is the only membership organization of state-based, youth justice advocacy groups, and individuals that addresses the full spectrum of youth justice reform issues.

Learn more at [www.njjn.org](http://www.njjn.org)