

# LEGAL OUTREACH THANKFUL THURSDAY Newsletter

— November 2024 —

Each November, in the spirit of being thankful, Legal Outreach highlights two partner companies that have significantly enhanced our ability to address the inequities in educational and professional opportunities for high school students from underserved communities in New York City. This year, we have chosen to shine a light on the legal departments of two companies, both of which have partnered with us for many years to change the career outlook and educational trajectory of our students — New York Life and Con Edison. In addition to highlighting these two partner companies, we are excited to also spotlight a Legal Outreach alum - Billy Fong-Frederick - who has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to the organization and our students. I hope you are inspired!

Sincerely,  
*Tamika Edwards*  
Executive Director

## Legal Outreach Partner Spotlight *New York Life & Con Edison*

### Featuring:



**Michael McDonnell**  
Senior Vice President &  
General Counsel



**Deneen Donnley**  
Senior Vice President &  
General Counsel

*Many companies place an emphasis on leadership development, skill building, and increasing economic opportunities for youth from underserved communities. Could you speak to your company's commitment to supporting these opportunities and its impact on students?*

**Michael McDonnell:** A core pillar of the New York Life Foundation's grantmaking is education, especially social and academic enrichment for underserved middle schoolers. This focus stems from research showing

**Deneen Donnley:** We believe in the power of giving. Our robust volunteer program includes skills-based volunteering with programs like Con Edison's law department's participation in Legal Outreach's

that support for children at that moment can help them be successful in high school and throughout life. Since 2013, the New York Life Foundation has invested over \$93 million in grants in this area, largely to programs aimed at reaching students during the critical out-of-school hours, after school or in the summer.

We know that impact can be measured in many ways. It can be life changing to a family when even one student's trajectory is altered by access to an afterschool or summer program. As an example of impact, our grant to VE-Junior Ventures Academy, a national education nonprofit, provided 40,000 middle school youth with programming that simulates business ownership and gives under-resourced students leadership and career development. Tellingly, 3 out of 4 students in the VE program identify a career pathway of interest due to their participation in VE.

Constitutional Law Debates. Con Edison volunteer judges are always impressed by the performance of the students and their level of preparation for the debate competition. The debates provide several critical skills to the students: analytical thinking, persuasive writing, oral argument and presentation skills, collaborative team building, and strategically crafting an argument and adjusting based on feedback. Through the debates, students are also exposed to the law, as well as, the expectations and work students would be expected to do at college or graduate school level.

[Con Edison proudly funds community-based organizations](#) that share our vision to combat the effects of climate change, advance social justice, and create green jobs. All three of these corporate giving priorities emphasize leadership development, skill building, and increasing economic opportunities for youth.

Our focus on Clean Energy and Technology Careers grants are specifically centered on reducing barriers for young adults (grade 9 and above) to support access to education, skills training, economic supports, and hiring and/or career advancement opportunities. Our goal is to help create a talent pipeline so New Yorkers can obtain well-paying jobs in emerging and in-demand clean energy, technology, and environmental science careers. Grant eligibility guidelines prioritize giving to community-based organizations with programs and/or projects centered in historically marginalized and state-designated disadvantaged communities (DACs).

*Legal Outreach is pleased that New York Life and Con Edison have chosen to support our programs for the past six and eight years, respectively. How does sponsoring the Constitutional Law Debate Program align with your company's mission and values? What has been the staff's response to working with our students at the debate competitions?*

New York Life's mission is to provide financial security and peace of mind, in keeping with our core values, which include acting with integrity and humanity. Legal Outreach's Constitutional Debate program is perfectly aligned with New York Life's values. In debating constitutional principles, students gain invaluable knowledge and skills. They also learn how the rule of law safeguards individual rights and contributes to our country's long term success and security. This program positions students for future success and given them a better sense of the good that legal professionals can accomplish. Every year our in house attorneys enthusiastically volunteer to participate in this event and always come away impressed by the students' depth of research and understanding. It is inspiring to see students demonstrate a mastery of complex legal principles, craft creative arguments and harness evidence in their favor. New York Life lawyers leave energized by your students' passion for the law, and hope that in return, we offer encouragement and an example of what a career in law could look like.

The heart of our company is our people. Con Edison employees maintain our best-in-class reliability as a utility and will lead us in achieving a more sustainable, clean energy future for our company. We strive to have a diverse slate of corporate giving programs, including pro-bono volunteer services. Con Edison employees can participate in employee engagement opportunities at nonprofit organizations throughout New York City, Westchester County, and O&R served areas. We are proud that employees use their knowledge and skills for good and they feel good giving back.

Con Edison volunteer judges for the Constitutional Law Debate Program consistently say their experience judging the debates is fantastic. Volunteers are impressed with Legal Outreach and the format of the debate and find it to be well run and an enjoyable experience.

*In your view, what do you think companies within the private sector need to do to truly expand educational and professional opportunities for youth from underserved communities who would not ordinarily be exposed to these opportunities?*

First, we are continuously striving to hire and nurture talent internally, and to be a place where all inspired young people, like the students of Legal Outreach, want to be! To do that, we know that New York Life has to invest in people and programs that reach all communities. Through VE and other supported programs, New York Life regularly brings youth from underserved communities into our offices to learn about roles in insurance and corporate America more broadly. As another example, we have a longstanding partnership with YearUp United to provide internship opportunities that can convert to full-time positions. To date, we have had 130 employees join us through this internship program. In addition to these programs, New York Life engages in other mentoring and broadening opportunities for young people and will continue working to expand our impact.

Philanthropic funding in the private sector is so important. At Con Edison, within our [Clean Energy and Technology Careers](#) grants we fund nonprofit programs that include skills-based training, barrier reduction and retention services, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, paid internships, career coaching, curriculum development, and coalition and network-building.

# Alumni Spotlight



**Billy Fong-Frederick, Legal Outreach Class of 2004**

**Educational Background:**

- B.A. in American Studies (Minor in Chinese), Colby College, 2008
- M.S. in Elementary Inclusive Education, Teachers College, 2012
- M.S. in Educational Leadership and Administration, College of Saint Rose, 2019
- Current first-year doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College

**Profession:** 4th and 5th grade teacher, NYC Department of Education

*What inspires you to stay actively involved in supporting Legal Outreach programs and students, and what impact do you hope to have on current and future students?*

**Billy Fong-Frederick:** I owe the fulfilling life I lead today to Legal Outreach (LO), and I want to ensure that future generations of students from immigrant and underrepresented communities have access to the same transformative opportunities I experienced. Through the organization's programs and the commitment of its dedicated staff, I gained invaluable experiences that equipped me with foundational skills and fostered the confidence necessary to pursue my passions and ambitions. While my traditional Chinese parents instilled in me a strong work ethic, I needed Saturday Writing Class to bridge academic gaps. The Constitutional Law Debates were crucial in boosting my confidence in public speaking and teaching me to think critically and articulate my thoughts clearly under pressure. Most importantly, I needed a community of supportive mentors who believed in my potential and steadfastly saw me as worthy of success, even before I recognized it myself. If it were not for LO's thoughtful programming and committed staff members, I would not have been able to achieve the opportunities that I attained in college, graduate school, and in my current profession.

My experiences have taught me that intelligence and capability alone are not sufficient; a strong community is essential. This is what I hope current Legal Outreach (LO) students recognize, embrace, and cultivate during their time in the program. Even today, I continue to rely on my LO brothers, sisters, and mentors. This enduring bond is why I remain actively involved in LO. I want students to understand that, beyond their current classmates, they are part of a larger family of LO alumni who are committed to supporting and celebrating their present and future journey and achievements.

*In addition to being recognized on our Alumni Wall of Legacy Builders for his generous financial support of Legal Outreach over many years, Billy's contributions (over the years and to present) include:*

- *Saturday Writing Program grammar instructor*
- *College Access Program Assistant*
- *Alumni Career Preparation Series Coordinator*
- *Summer Law Institute volunteer recruiter and interviewer*
- *LO 40th Anniversary Benefit Committee - alumni member*

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Thank you New York Life, Con Edison,  
and Billy for your unwavering  
commitment to our students and  
programs. With your help, we are able to  
continue paving the way for our students'  
educational and professional success!



Support Legal Outreach's  
skill-building, college  
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exposure and leadership  
development programs by  
making a donation today.



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