

## **NASS 2025 John Lewis Youth Leadership Award**

### **Recipients' Basis for Nomination**

The National Association of Secretaries of State's (NASS) John Lewis Youth Leadership Award was established in 2021 to honor the extraordinary accomplishments of Congressman John Lewis. The award allows NASS member Secretaries of State and Lt. Governors to recognize a gifted, civic-minded young person in their state each year. The recipient should demonstrate leadership abilities, have a passion for social justice, and be motivated to improve the quality of life in their community.

The following youths were nominated by their Secretary of State/Lt. Governor to receive the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award in 2025.

### **Sophie Stern**

Nominated by Secretary Adrian Fontes, Arizona

Sophie Stern exemplifies leadership, resilience, and advocacy for disability rights. Her journey reflects a deep commitment to creating inclusive spaces and empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As the newest member of the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Sophie uses her platform to champion self-advocacy, equal opportunities, and community inclusion.

Beyond her policy work, Sophie combines her passion for the performing arts with advocacy, inspiring others through her performances at Detour Company Theatre while challenging stereotypes about disability. She has courageously spoken out about barriers in higher education, calling for programs that provide students with disabilities access to a traditional college experience. Additionally, Sophie has taken a stand on shifting DEI policies, ensuring that inclusion remains a priority for future generations.

Her leadership, voice, and unwavering dedication make Sophie Stern not only a role model but a transformative advocate whose impact resonates across Arizona and beyond.



## **Tysen Woodward**

Nominated by Secretary Adrian Fontes, Arizona

Tysen Woodward was selected for this honor because his leadership and dedication to civic engagement embody the core values of equality, justice, and democratic participation that this award represents. At just 17 years old, Tysen has shown an extraordinary commitment to empowering youth voices and ensuring that students across Arizona understand their rights and responsibilities as future voters.

As State Chair of the Kids Voting Arizona Leadership Council, Tysen has led initiatives that reached thousands of students statewide. He organized Arizona's largest student-run mock presidential election, developed voter education materials, and launched outreach programs promoting nonpartisan civic literacy. His efforts have opened doors for students from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, ensuring equal access to civic learning opportunities. Tysen's leadership goes beyond organizing events—he inspires meaningful dialogue and action. By moderating a statewide Town Hall with Arizona's Secretary of State, a Supreme Court Justice, and a State Legislator, he brought critical conversations on voting rights and civil discourse to over 1,200 students. His ability to bridge generations and foster respectful dialogue reflects the spirit of John Lewis and the belief in "good trouble, necessary trouble."

Grounded in impact rather than titles, Tysen has created voter literacy programs, advocated for youth empowerment, and championed civic responsibility. His courage, empathy, and unwavering commitment to democracy make him not only an outstanding nominee but a true example of the future John Lewis envisioned.

## **Cameryn Mabry**

Nominated by Secretary Shirley Weber, Ph.D., California

Cameryn Mabry is a dedicated community leader and public servant whose work reflects her deep commitment to service, advocacy, and empowerment. As a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the young women's facilitator at Berkeley Mt. Zion Church, she demonstrates her passion for mentorship and supporting the next generation of women leaders. Her work spans both civic and community engagement, highlighting a consistent focus on helping others and promoting social equity. Cameryn obtained her bachelor's degree from California State University, Los Angeles in Criminal Justice and graduated in 2023. She is currently a police academy trainee in Oakland California.

Professionally, Cameryn served as a Field Representative for Assembly Member AnaMarie Avila Farias in California's 15th Assembly District, where she assisted more than 165,000 constituents. Her work included assisting with writing legislation, and processing cases related to the Employment Development Department (EDD), Franchise Tax Board, DMV, and other state agencies. Beyond constituent services, she played a key role in supporting legislation that uplifts vulnerable and underserved populations, continuing her long-standing dedication to equity and justice.

Before joining the staff in the California Assembly, Cameryn gained valuable experience through community service and legal work. She volunteered with 2nd Call, an organization that helps underprivileged youth and formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society, focusing on anti-recidivism efforts and addressing food insecurity. Her internship with Key Counsel, P.C. Law Firm further strengthened her advocacy skills, as she assisted attorneys in handling a conservatorship case involving a developmentally delayed client. Through compassion and communication, she built a trusting relationship with the client's family, enabling more effective legal representation.

Cameryn's journey has also been shaped by personal loss and resilience. While pursuing her bachelor's degree, she experienced the devastating loss of several family members and a close friend to fentanyl use. Rather than letting grief deter her goals, she transformed her pain into purpose by dedicating herself to educating others about the dangers of fentanyl and substance abuse. Through both personal perseverance and professional service, Cameryn continues to exemplify leadership, empathy, and the power of turning hardship into hope.

## **Owen Lefebvre**

Nominated by Secretary Shirley Weber, Ph.D., California

Owen is an active and dedicated community leader whose work spans across multiple organizations that emphasize civic engagement and service. He currently serves with the California Secretary of State, the Democratic Party of Orange County Central Committee, Sacramento State College Democrats, Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity, Incorporated, and the Interfraternity Council. Through these roles, Owen demonstrates an unwavering commitment to civic participation, youth engagement, and leadership development within both his university and broader community.

At California State University, Sacramento, Owen has taken on significant leadership roles that reflect his ability to inspire and organize others. As Vice President of Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity and Executive Director of Sacramento State College Democrats, he led initiatives that encourage student participation in public service and in the democratic processes. His leadership has fostered collaboration across student organizations, demonstrating his skills and ability to unite diverse groups toward shared goals. In his role with the California Secretary of State's Executive Outreach Team, Owen engages directly with communities, assisting at citizenship ceremonies, resource fairs, and reentry programs, thereby connecting state government with residents in meaningful ways.

Owen's volunteer work with the Democratic Party of Orange County and Sacramento State College Democrats further highlights his dedication to civic engagement. He has participated in local campaigns, supported voter outreach efforts, and organized precinct walks during Get Out the Vote (GOTV) initiatives. His work emphasizes empowering underrepresented communities by ensuring they have access to accurate information and opportunities to participate in elections. Within the Secretary of State's Office, Owen has also contributed to policy research, briefing materials, and strategic recommendations that strengthen outreach to marginalized populations.

As President of the Interfraternity Council, one of Owen's most impactful accomplishments was spearheading the first-ever Greek Voter Registration Drive at Sacramento State. This innovative initiative united all Greek organizations on campus to promote voter registration and civic awareness. The success of this campaign was evident during the 2024 General Election, where student voter turnout significantly increased, and many students who were determined to make their voice heard, waited in long lines to vote in person. This is a testament to the kind of enthusiasm and civic responsibility Owen inspired amongst his peers.

Despite his many achievements, Owen faced personal and financial challenges while balancing his full-time studies and extensive civic commitments. Coming from humble beginnings, he worked diligently to afford his tuition and living expenses. He remains steadfast in his dedication to education, public service, and leadership. His perseverance, resilience, and continued commitment to uplift student voters embodies the spirit of the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award, honoring those who, like Congressman Lewis, lead with integrity, compassion, and an unwavering belief in the power of civic engagement.



## Cylie Kirejczyk

Nominated by Secretary Stephanie Thomas, Connecticut

Cylie Kirejczyk, a senior at Western New England University majoring in Political Science, believes that civic education and civic engagement are the cornerstones of a well-functioning democracy. In high school, Cylie participated in We the People, a program that promotes civic competence and responsibility among students. After helping her school win its first national championship in the Congressional Hearing Simulation Competition, she volunteered as a full-time mentor for two years, helping guide younger students in the program. Her interest and participation in the democratic process only grew as she entered college, where she has served as Secretary of the Model United Nations organization and Vice President and Secretary of the Pre-Law Society. She also interned with Senator Elizabeth Warren's office on the Immigration Team, serving as the team's only representative in the Springfield office.

Since September 2024, Cylie has served as an Executive Intern in the office of the Connecticut Secretary of the State. During her time with our office, Cylie has demonstrated a high level of commitment to our work and a natural gift for creative problem solving.

The culmination of her work with our office has been VOICE CT (Voicing Our Ideas for Civic Engagement in Connecticut), a program Cylie conceptualized and executed with only minimal guidance from staff. The inspiration for the program came from Cylie's curiosity about the barriers young people face in becoming more civically engaged. With that question in mind, she invited high school students across the state to share the challenges they face in getting involved in their communities and offer actionable solutions. Cylie singlehandedly managed the outreach for the program and ultimately received over 60 submissions. Using a rubric of her own design, she selected the top 10 entries and a winner based on several criteria, including actionability, representation, and creativity. The winner, a high school senior from Hartford, contributed the ideas to form a statewide, civics-focused organization called the Youth Impact Alliance and to create online forums for Connecticut youth to discuss local issues with their peers.

To extend the life of the program, Cylie has set up regular virtual meetings for VOICE CT participants to discuss their ideas with Secretary Thomas and office outreach staff members. She also took the additional step of creating resources for VOICE CT participants and other young people, including "Get Involved: A Youth Guide to Civic Engagement" and "Understand and Navigate the State Legislative Process: A Step-by-Step Guide for Connecticut Youth." Both resources feature easy-to-follow processes, templates for communicating with elected officials,

and links to additional resources. Cylie's work has inspired the creation of a new internship within the Secretary of the State's Office focused on youth programming to ensure the momentum and energy of the program's first months are not lost.

## **Adasia Hawkins**

Nominated by Secretary Charuni Patibanda-Sanchez, Delaware

Adasia Hawkins, a resident of Frederica, Delaware, is currently pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice at Delaware State University, where she maintains a 3.95 GPA, consistently earning recognition on both the President's and Dean's Lists, and is on track to graduate a full year early. From an early age, Adasia demonstrated a passion for service and community engagement. At just twelve years old, she began volunteering at the Greater Dover Boys & Girls Club, assisting with lesson plans and distributing meals to children. Throughout her life, she has accumulated more than 19,000 hours of community service, earning a Jefferson Award nomination in 2023 for her outstanding civic contributions.

Adasia's leadership extends across multiple organizations and initiatives. She serves as Director of Community Service and Fundraising Chair for the Society of Black Female Future Attorneys (BFFA), Community Service Chair for The Queen in You, and is an active member of NOBLE (the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives). During election cycles, Adasia has shared verified information about polling locations, registration deadlines, and ballot initiatives through social media and peer outreach. Her commitment to justice and equity is further demonstrated through her academic focus and professional experiences. Adasia recently completed an internship at Benton and Shockley Law, P.A., under the mentorship of an African American female attorney, reinforcing her goal of becoming a District Attorney General who champions fairness, representation, and empowerment for underserved communities.

Adasia's work is deeply informed by personal experiences, including her journey with epilepsy, which has strengthened her resilience and inspired her advocacy for accessibility, inclusion, and empathy. She is guided by the belief that "to be the change, you must become it." She continues to serve, study, and lead with the goal of creating a more equitable and inclusive future.

## **Amari'ah Carter**

Nominated by Secretary Alexi Giannoulias, Illinois

The Co-Winner of the 2025 Illinois Secretary of State John Lewis Youth Leadership Award is Ms. Amari'ah Carter, an inspirational young woman who is being honored for her work with

Freedom Schools in Edwardsville, Illinois and her passion to enhance young people's access to literacy and opportunities to exercise their Right to Read.

Amari'ah Carter grew up in East St. Louis, is 21 years old and a senior at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE). Amariah is a founding student member of the inaugural team of college students who helped launch the SIUE Freedom School in the summer of 2024, with support from the Children's Defense Fund. Freedom School is a 6-week summer literacy program serving Madison and St. Clair counties, which hosts 200 elementary and middle school students in 3 sites: Alton, East St. Louis and Edwardsville. Today's Illinois iteration of the 1965 Freedom Schools from Congressman John Lewis' time addresses some of the same inequities found 50 years ago in the Mississippi Delta. Freedom Schools provide a high-energy, literacy focused curriculum, embedded in a mindset of civic activism for marginalized communities. Amariah led an all-girls class in the summer of 2024 in the pilot site of Edwardsville and then was chosen as a Sankofa Servant Leader in year two in 2025 to co-open a second site in Alton, a more disenfranchised community. Amariah exhibited leadership qualities guiding and mentoring her peer college students at the Alton site, and the program showed great success: 84% of the Freedom School participants maintained or improved their reading skills; 94% of parents saw increased confidence in their children; 94% of the parents wanted to engage in civic involvement with their children and 83% of the college student servant leaders returned to the Freedom School for a second year. Amariah's hope is that the Illinois Secretary of State will help more low-income students in East St. Louis "exercise their Freedom to Read" by enhancing access to public libraries.

#### In Her Own Words

"The community that I am proud to serve is the St. Clair and Madison County region, known for high rates of poverty, with the primary focus (but not limited to) being the black community. I believe that it was not my choice to assist this community but that this community chose me to serve. After each community service project, I would leave feeling more fulfilled. For example, I worked with a religious based construction group that remodels abandoned properties in East St. Louis and got to know my neighborhood. Moving forward, my professor Dr. Cindy Reed remembered the leader I was as an 18-year-old freshman and recruited me to be the Co-Student Founder for the SIUE Freedom School in its first year, in partnership with the National Children's Defense Fund, which supports modern Freedom Schools based on 1965 civil rights models. In my first year, with my all-girls class, my biggest objective was to improve my students' sense of self-worth. As a young black woman, I was aware of the generational inequalities that hold us back from success. I executed my plan for improving their view by pouring positivity into them. When all the students arrived in my classroom on day one, there

was an affirmation note waiting for them from me at their desk. Knowing they are important to me without even having to know me or earn it, set the tone for the summer. Their self-perception had a profound impact on their interest in learning. By the end of the six-week program, our parents were surveyed and showed an increase in reading confidence in their children. The great majority of the students either saw gains or maintained their reading level. My second year in the Freedom School in the summer of 2025, I was honored to be relocated to new, challenging, Alton site and promoted to Sankofa – second in command and a Coach to my peers.”

## **Jocelyn Solis**

Nominated by Secretary Alexi Giannoulias, Illinois

The Co-Winner of the Illinois Secretary of State 2025 John Lewis Youth Leadership Award is Ms. Jocelyn Solis, an inspirational young woman who is being honored for her work with the In Youth We Trust/Teen Community Grant-Making in the Rockford area, and her passion for giving youth a voice in civic affairs.

Jocelyn Solis grew up in Rockford, is 21 years old and a senior at Rockford University. As a Jane Adams Center Fellow at Rockford U, and a volunteer in the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois, Jocelyn leads the “In Youth We Trust” program. Via this program, Jocelyn trains and supports a philanthropy council made up of high school students who review grant applications and determine the distribution of small grants to community organizations focused on youth and community needs. Over the past 2 years, the 30+ teen leaders of the “In Youth We Trust” Council have distributed over \$80,000 to the four-county area of Winnebago, Stephenson, Ogle and Boone, and impacted over 32,000 youth and their families. Within Rockford U, Jocelyn has been a leader in creating support structures for other First Generation college students, like herself, by setting up study groups as well as scholarship and grant application workshops. Her hope is that the Illinois Secretary of State considers supporting endowed youth philanthropy programs in other parts in Illinois, perhaps via libraries or schools, because this type of programming helps empower youth to be active members of their community and teaches them their voice matters and has real power.

### In Her Own Words

“In my work with the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois’ In Youth We Trust Council, I helped guide teens through a total of four grant cycles that specifically funded youth-led and youth-benefitting programs. During the council meetings, I facilitated discussions with the teens regarding equity and potential community disparities. I encouraged problem-solving steps and

critical thinking skills when funding consideration began, as the teen council members examined approximately 10 or more grant applications per cycle. Not only did I assist in providing an educational opportunity to council members, but our collective work has also helped fund educational projects in the community. Examples include funding for educational field trips at Boone County Conservation District in Spring 2024 and funding for summer camp programs at Voices of Stephenson County in Spring 2024 and Rockford BMX Club in Spring 2025. I also assisted in gathering contact information of different stakeholders and nonprofits to share the IYWT grant opportunity in Spring 2024. In that particular cycle, there was approximately a \$90,000 “ask” in grant applications when the council only had \$20,000 to distribute. This was particularly notable, given that the year before, there was only one grant application submission which asked for less than a quarter available for funding. My work in contacting all these different organizations contributed to raising awareness of this community resource. Since then, we have seen a consistent number of applications and a rise in community engagement.”

## **Iowa City West High School Black Student Union**

Nominated by Secretary Paul Pate, Iowa

The Black Student Union of Iowa City West High School is a social club known for providing leadership opportunities for Black students and uniting the Black students in its community. They strive to create safe spaces for Black students to celebrate Black joy and discuss Black struggle. The group fosters inclusivity and community and is open to all allies of the Black community.

The mission of the group is to educate, unite, celebrate, and provide a safe place for the Black community of Iowa City West High School. Some of the work accomplished by the group has been a Black-owned business fair, field trips to the African American Museum in Cedar Rapids to highlight Black Heritage, and hosting discussions and presentations on the topics of human rights, inclusion and resilience in the face of inequality.

To ensure sustainability, the Black Student Union Executive Board members, who will all graduate in the spring of 2025, established “intern” positions for the incoming leadership. These internships provided training and experience for guiding the organization forward for the incoming Executive Board. This dedication for continuity and training enables projects and the group as a whole to sustain from year to year.



## **LaTreyal Oliver and Elijah Smith**

Nominated by Secretary Paul Pate, Iowa

LaTreyal Oliver, a student at Waterloo West High School, and Elijah Smith, a student at Waterloo East High School, received their nomination for the 2025 John Lewis Youth Leadership award due to their advocacy in establishing accessible transportation for students and their work on increasing awareness to the dangers of teen distracted driving.

The City of Waterloo, where the young men reside, has been updating a federal 5-year transportation plan, and to ensure that student interests were seen to, LaTreyal and Elijah created a survey to interview students and guide the new transportation plan. In the summer of 2024, they worked with INRCOG to create a Waterloo Mobility Challenge. Through this work, the Go Bus was established as an option for students to receive free transportation to afterschool activities, thus reducing the financial barrier that bars some from participation. This past spring, the pair was selected to participate in a national initiative through the Nation Youth Leadership Council to bring awareness to distracted driving. They presented their research at the National Youth Leadership Council Conference in the Spring of 2025, the only team from Iowa to be featured.

The grand culmination for their work was seeing the passage of two important bills this past legislative session connected to their work. The first, Hands-Free Driving Bill – SF22 (passed into law on April 2, 2025) and the second, Election Devices in Schools – HF 782 (passed into law on April 30, 2025). Iowa Governor Kim Reynold quoted from LaTreyal and Elijah's research in her press release on the passage of Bill HF782.

## **Emma Monroe**

Nominated by Secretary Nancy Landry, Louisiana

The Louisiana Secretary of State's Office is pleased to announce Emma Monroe as its 2025 NASS John Lewis Youth Leadership Award recipient. Emma is a senior at Louisiana State University, where she has demonstrated a deep interest and passion for civic engagement and social justice. She has a strong record of public service at the state and federal levels, serving as a legislative aide in the Louisiana State Senate, and as an intern in the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the Office of the First Lady in the White House. She has likewise demonstrated a deep commitment to the betterment of her community here in Baton Rouge. Emma chaired an effort which raised over \$93,000 for Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA) and the Baton Rouge Children's Advocacy Center (BRCAC), organizations

which work to give children the opportunity to heal while seeking justice. She is also leading an effort to raise \$18,000 per year for a scholarship which will enable women at LSU to better reach professional development opportunities while in school.

Emma embodies that same community-focused spirit as the award's namesake. She has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to civic engagement and the advancement of those most in need in Louisiana. Her work with the state legislature, Congress, the White House, and organizations like PCAA, BRCAC, and National Foundation for Women Legislators reflect her desire to make our state and nation a better place to live.

## **Shawn Jiminez**

Nominated by Secretary Shenna Bellows, Maine

Shawn Jiminez's work centers on advancing equity across educational, civic, and justice-oriented communities at the local, state, and federal levels. As the youngest representative appointed to the Maine Education Association's Human, Civil Rights, and Social Justice Committee, he advocates on behalf of 22,000 educators and students through legislative testimony and statewide equity initiatives. Within the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Maine, he serves as Co-Chair of the Youth Advisory Board, refining programs and resources that strengthen mental health systems across the state.

At Bowdoin College, Shawn founded Students for Educational Equity, a student-led organization that addresses accessibility gaps. Most recently, he led a project supporting K-12 undocumented students in Maine following the federal repeal of the sensitive locations policy. He also serves on the Youth Advocacy Team of the League of Women Voters of Maine, maintaining responsibility for co-organizing the 2025 Women in Civics panel and developing civic education initiatives.

Nationally, Shawn serves on the leadership team of Class Action, where he co-organizes legislative campaigns to end legacy preference in college admissions procedures. His commitment to reshaping education access extends to incarcerated individuals through his work with College Guild, and to Title I schools across the country as a Teach for America Fellow. Across these roles, Shawn works to reimagine institutions that shape mobility, while also ensuring that historically excluded communities are meaningfully included in reforming the systems that unjustly wield power.

The activities described act as a snapshot of the passion for leadership, social justice, and community betterment that motivates Shawn every day. As a college junior, he is highly accomplished. The experience that he is building as a community organizing leader will serve as an important springboard for her future work and education. He easily embodies the core tenants of the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award. It is our honor to recognize his work.

## **James McLaughlin**

Nominated by Secretary Susan Lee, Maryland

James McLaughlin served as a Youth Intern for Baltimore Votes' Student Election Judge Program, he served as the student representative to the Baltimore City Board of Elections, working to break down the barriers for students serving as election judges. James oversaw the execution of the Student Advisory Board, a collective of ten Baltimore City High School students who aimed to assist the Student Election Judge Program. Prior to beginning my work with the Student Advisory Board. He led a presentation in August at a meeting of the Baltimore City Board of Elections, during which I outlined the objectives of the Student Election Judge Program and encouraged the development of a partnership between the Board and Baltimore Votes.

Ultimately, after a series of meetings with Board staff, Baltimore Votes were allotted a total of four Friday and Saturday training sessions, times more suitable for students' schedules. The Student Election Judge Program was also given control over student training scheduling as well as student polling assignments, allowing fellow members of the Student Advisory Board and me to communicate directly with students. With Ms. Sabrina Graves, Director of Election Judges, and Ms. Abigail Goldman, Deputy Director of Elections, we set a goal of recruiting 90 student election judges to serve on Election Day.

To accomplish this objective, he promoted the Student Election Judge Program. He led Student Election Judge Program presentations at both the Baltimore Votes Election Strategy Summit and the Beyond Boundaries Summit in September; these conferences focused on promoting civic engagement within Baltimorean communities. I also hosted a seminar at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) to encourage college students to serve as election judges. Furthermore, he was also interviewed on WYPR, a local radio station. Rebecca Barker of Fast Company wrote a profile on him, detailing my experience as an intern with Baltimore Votes and explaining why students should be civically engaged.

His efforts to recruit student election judges helped contribute to the Student Election Judge Program, which received nearly 150 applications from students interested in serving as election judges. In order to ensure these students faced no barriers to serving on Election Day. Once

students had been trained, he received their polling place assignments and conducted text outreach to alert the students of their location for Election Day and answer any questions they might have. On November 5th, he proudly served as an election judge at Roland Park Elementary and Middle School in Baltimore City, and while the Board of Elections does not have a final tally of student election judges. November 5th as well due to the Student Election Judge Program's efforts.

As we approach the 2026 election cycle, he has taken an active role in rolling out the Baltimore Votes Student Ambassador Program, which will aim to recruit two students from each Baltimore City private and public high school to promote student civic engagement within their communities. Through this opportunity, students will be able to complete their academic service-learning hour requirement and will gain invaluable civic engagement experience by recruiting their peers to serve as election judges and, ultimately, serve as election judges themselves in 2026.

### **Lilianna DeBlasio**

Nominated by Secretary Susan Lee, Maryland

Lilianna DeBlasio was a dedicated employee of the Howard County Board of Elections. She played a critical role upholding the integrity and efficiency of the election process. Her most important responsibilities included operating and servicing highly sensitive, specialized election equipment, which is paramount in delivering a secure and transparent voting process. She demonstrated strong leadership and organizational skills by coordinating election projects, logistics, and ensuring all voting systems operated seamlessly. She also led other summer interns in conducting proper maintenance of election machines and coordinated work they were undertaking. Together with her team, she helped in troubleshooting technical issues, initiated security protocols, and provided guidelines to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal election laws.

She also collaborated with community groups to conduct outreach activities in an attempt to increase public awareness and involvement in the electoral process. This involved hosting information forums and establishing relationships with community leaders in an effort to foster civic participation. She was involved in tabling events alongside her fellow workers that allowed them to network with other election agencies in Maryland. She developed proposals that were discussed with members of boards of elections to prepare for the election. She contributed towards a more informed and electorally engaged community by upholding democracy's

integrity. She has continued to work with the Howard County Board of Elections and participating in community events with a view to fostering a more active voting population.

## **Ankita Kumar**

Nominated by Secretary Steve Simon, Minnesota

Ankita Kumar is from Plymouth, Minnesota and is a senior at Wayzata High School. Ankita has no hesitation in living her life according to her values and sharing just who she is, including the descriptor on her social media, "A do-er and a dreamer." She is a beacon for the rights and voice of young people in her community, active in both general and specific opportunities to learn, experience, and share those passions with others.

Ankita developed a program to engage fellow students around school board elections, believing, "School boards have a significant impact on every student's school experience. It's important for young people to understand who is making school-related decisions, and it's important for school board members to understand the student perspective." Beyond recognizing the need, and conceiving the effort, Ankita built partnerships and an infrastructure. She sought funding, winning an Aspen Institute Center for Rising Generations grant to seed her community project, School Board Spotlight – Elevating youth voice in local elections. She opened and shepherded accounts on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to reach, engage, and inform other students about the importance of keeping informed and being engaged. She established a 'Pledge to Engage' website to encourage participation in local school board elections. And she recruited other students and organized interviews of school board candidates by and for young people, recording and posting them online as resources for anyone.

As much a team member as leader, Ankita is an active participant in Minnesota's Youth in Government and Model United Nations, displaying her investment in learning ways to work together, practice curiosity instead of judgement, and create solutions that solve issues in her state and around the world. She has been a volunteer for the Red Cross for years, and is President of her school's Red Cross Club. And she serves on the board of directors of a nonprofit formed and run by students to pre-register their peers to vote, the Youth Voter Project. Ankita sums herself up best in her own words, "It's one of my values that youth have a voice and participate in democracy. I think it was really important to show up and stand for my beliefs..."



## **Maitreya Reeder**

Nominated by Secretary Steve Simon, Minnesota

Maitreya Reeder, a senior at St. Anthony Village Senior High School, lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she is known not only locally but statewide as a champion of voting education by and for students. It is no coincidence that she quotes Rep. Lewis on her social media, “Democracy is not a state. It is an act...” She is a young person of action who works both to make her community and her state better now and into the future and to bring as many of her peers on board with those goals as she can.

For Maitreya, life is both mirrored in her extracurriculars and bolstered by them. She's a leader in the Youth in Government program, serving as the state's Youth Secretary of State and traveling to the Conference on National Affairs (CONA). At CONA- a gathering of ~800 students from across the country- her bill was one of only 10 to make it to the program's General Assembly. Back in Minnesota, Maitreya worked as a student policy consultant for Catalyst for System Change, researching and writing a policy brief on adding overdose prevention and response education to the state's health curriculum. She testified in committee and saw that bill passed by the Minnesota legislature. She also testified on a bill to mandate student members be included on every school board, believing strongly that laws and policies about students should be made only after hearing from students. In addition, Maitreya was an intern in the Minnesota House of Representative's Chief Clerk's Office.

Maitreya is also the Executive Director of a high-student-organized and student-led nonprofit organization, the Youth Voter Project (YVP). The organization recruits and trains high school ambassadors to provide peer-to-peer elections education and voter pre-registration and registration drives. Maitreya was on the original board, serving as the Public Relations Director, and she was asked to step up to lead YVP when the first E.D. graduated. Maitreya's conviction is well summarized in words taken from a piece she wrote for the Minnesota Women's Press, “That's the beautiful thing about democracy. If you truly care about something, you have the ability to make change...”

## **SNHU Chandler Center Civic Engagement Committee**

Nominated by Secretary David Scanlan, New Hampshire

Founded in 2005, the SNHU Chandler Civic Engagement Center has been, and continues to be, a pillar of support to various and varied groups in the Manchester, New Hampshire community.

In the school year 2024-2025, the SNHU Chandler Civic Engagement Center engaged 883 students for a total of 12,182 service hours. Of those 12,182 hours, 5,787 hours consisted of students engaged in the SNHU Service Learning Program, and 1,172 hours reflected the work of 298 students as part of the Volunteer Project program. The SNHU Chandler Civic Engagement Center served roughly 26 community partners in Manchester, including the Manchester Food Bank, Families in Transition, Manchester Diaper Pantry, Easter Seals, and Boys & Girls Club. Additionally, the SNHU Chandler Civic Engagement Center coordinated with 17 1st-year students for a week before school “5 Days of Service”. These 1st-year students completed 183 service hours in 5 days.

Besides volunteering in the Manchester community, the SNHU Chandler Civic Engagement Center engages with various organizations on the importance of civic engagement. The SNHU Chandler Civic Engagement Center speaks regularly with the student body on opportunities to exercise their civic responsibilities. They spoke in 31 classrooms, 3 resident halls, and numerous campus partner meetings. In October of 2025, in collaboration with the NH Secretary of State’s Office, 5 students from the Center participated in an Intergenerational Forum with a local Retirement Home. The Forum was met with widespread support and plans are in the works for regular follow-up meets between the Center and the senior home.

Currently, the Center is in the process of speaking with every athletic team on campus, encouraging athletes to civically engage, and to recognize the value of civic engagement as a means of bettering the local community. As the Program Coordinator of the Chandler Center said, “They are passionate and excited to learn and then motivate their peers – it is the magic that propels their work on campus.”

## **Rashanna James-Frison**

Nominated by former Lt. Governor Tahesha Way, New Jersey

At just 18 years old, Rashanna James-Frison has already demonstrated the kind of civic-minded leadership, moral clarity, and sustained commitment to justice that defined the legacy of Congressman John Lewis. A Newark native and current first-year student at Lincoln University, Rashanna has served as a Fellow with The Gem Project, a non-profit based in Newark, NJ, focused on youth community engagement and academic achievement, for over three years, beginning her journey at age 16.

Rashanna has made a profound impact on her community. She co-led the development of a youth-led accountability scorecard designed to evaluate elected officials, helping young people

turn six months of focus group insights, white papers, and school board interviews into actionable key performance indicators. This tool was informed by data and lived experiences and presented to local leaders to help them better respond to the needs of young people in Newark. Rashanna has also worked with the Greater Newark Healthcare Coalition to support the Medicaid redetermination process in response to mass disenrollment.

Rashanna also played a central role in civic education efforts that contributed to a historic win for youth in Newark—lowering the voting age to 16 for non-partisan school board elections. She facilitated trainings and peer engagement to prepare young people to vote and understand their power.

Her leadership extends beyond organizing. Rashanna was one of nine youths selected to help design a youth grantmaking initiative in partnership with the Victoria Foundation. She is also a published author, having written *The Black Unicorn: A Daughter from Newark* while still in high school. In the year since, she launched a literacy initiative to donate 1,000 books to 1,000 eighth-grade girls across Newark, emphasizing her belief that literacy is a civic right—especially in an era of misinformation. Rashanna’s public service has included a seat as one of the youngest commissioners on Newark’s Civilian Complaint Review Board, and she continues to speak on panels throughout the region, uplifting her story and galvanizing others.

Rashanna embodies the intent of the John Lewis Youth Leadership award. She is a young person who understands that democracy requires action, and she acts with purpose. Her work across civic engagement, public health, racial equity, and youth development has already created a lasting impact.

## **Ali Sabir**

Nominated by former Lt. Governor Tahesha Way, New Jersey

Ali Sabir has long been familiar with the legacy of John Lewis and that has influenced his work in civic engagement and civic education. Ali consistently has demonstrated outstanding leadership skills with an understanding that he is very much a teammate, and values being part of something bigger than himself. He loves to learn and take those lessons to others in a way that draws respect from his peers and adults alike.

He has been very interested and involved in the importance of voting. At sixteen years old, he was disappointed in voter turnout in his town, as viewed particularly through the lens of race and class. With some help from the non-profit Prepare2Vote he identified voting districts in his

town where voter turnout was low and began thinking of ways to encourage voting in the future. Ali then identified several classmates with similar interests and started the Prepare2Vote Ambassador Program for students who are not 18 but want to promote the importance of voting and learn about how it works. He has also been appointed as a Youth Ambassador to the NJ Division of Civil Rights (Office of the Attorney General), selected as one of fewer than 50 youth across the state, to collaborate with peers to combat discrimination in schools and communities.

Ali has always believed that civic education must be paired with direct action. It was his belief in that concept that drove him, in partnership with his school's history department, to create Civics Week at his high school. It is a program he designed and now teaches. Civics Week has since grown, and the students who were once taught by it have now been recruited by Ali to help teach it. Through a partnership with the local nonprofit Prepare2Vote and the local Board of Education, it has now expanded into Moorestown's public middle school, for which he received his school's Friend of History Award.

He was one of two students appointed to his town's (Moorestown, NJ) Better Together Advisory Committee to advance equity and civic participation. This past Spring the importance of civic participation and civic education took on a new urgency for Ali. As global and local tensions escalated—including the discovery of swastikas at his own school—he felt compelled to move beyond meetings and created the “Breaking Bread and Sharing Beliefs” interfaith potluck. He and those he organized took on the difficult and very sensitive task of bringing together leaders and families from across faiths, transforming a polarized atmosphere into one of dialogue and shared humanity—a deliberate act of building the "Beloved Community" that John Lewis championed.

As Ali has said, his goal throughout his work is to make civic and community participation feel less like a privilege reserved for a few and more like a common birthright for all.

## **Liam Pereira**

Nominated by Secretary Maggie Toulouse Oliver, New Mexico

Liam Pereira exemplifies the spirit of the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award through his deep commitment to civic engagement, youth empowerment, and public service. As New Mexico's 2025 Youth Governor and 2024 Youth Speaker of the House, Liam has led with integrity and vision, expanding the Youth and Government program to reach more students statewide and launching a new Lobbyist Branch to give youth broader opportunities to advocate for issues

they care about. His leadership has strengthened the program's inclusivity, responsiveness, and collaboration among student officers. Over four years, Liam's dedication has inspired peers to engage thoughtfully in government and policy, modeling civic responsibility and constructive dialogue. Most recently, his selection as a Presiding Officer for the 2026 Conference on National Affairs reflects national recognition of his leadership and character. Liam's steadfast commitment to empowering others and creating lasting systems for youth voice embodies the legacy of Congressman John Lewis's call to make "good trouble" for the betterment of community and democracy.

## **Coby Ross Gentry**

Nominated by Maggie Toulouse Oliver, New Mexico

Coby Ross Gentry of Carlsbad, NM is a dedicated proponent for amplifying the youth voice in politics and a staunch advocate for initiatives to improve quality of life and opportunity for rural New Mexicans. Coby began his political advocacy work as a junior in high school, serving as an intern to the Mayor of Carlsbad in 2023 before joining the office of the US Congressional District 2 representative where he held a variety of roles including constituent support services. Coby leveraged his selection and experience as one of the "Honorary Lieutenant Governors" in January 2024 to become a full-time intern to Lt Governor Howie Morales for the First Session of the 57th Legislature where he was able to build a network of support to champion efforts in affordable living, transportation network growth and access to career opportunities for rural New Mexico residents. Balancing his full-time university course work, Coby now serves as the Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director, New Mexico Office of Military Base Planning and Support where he advances state policy initiatives to enhance affordable housing, military spouse employment and educational opportunities for military-connected members and their families stationed at the state's rural military installations. In his free time, Coby travels to college campuses with the Democratic Party of New Mexico to encourage civic-minded activity by his peers, from encouraging youth to vote and sharing opportunities for active participation in state government or through formal and informal advocacy forums.

## **London Coney**

Nominated by Secretary Frank LaRose, Ohio

At just 14 years old, London Coney exemplifies the leadership, integrity, and commitment to excellence that the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award seeks to honor. As a dedicated scholar and role model in her school and community, London has already begun to build a

legacy of service, academic achievement, and positive influence.

London is a proud member of the National Junior Honor Society, a recognition reserved for students who demonstrate outstanding scholarship, leadership, service, citizenship, and character. Her commitment to academic excellence was recently honored when she received an award for maintaining a 3.5 GPA or higher throughout the entire school year—a testament not only to her intellect, but to her discipline, focus, and resilience.

Beyond the classroom, London carries herself with the quiet confidence and grace of a natural leader. Whether helping her peers succeed academically or volunteering her time in meaningful ways, she approaches every opportunity with humility and purpose. Her strong moral compass, consistent work ethic, and ability to inspire those around her have made her a respected voice among her classmates and teachers alike.

In the spirit of the late Congressman John Lewis, London understands that leadership is not about a title—it's about action, courage, and heart. She is already using her voice and her gifts to uplift others, and she shows incredible promise as a future changemaker in her community and beyond.

It is with deep pride and confidence that I nominate London Coney for the 2025 NASS John Lewis Youth Leadership Award.

## **Henry Pardo and Rexella Bishop**

Nominated by Secretary Gregg Amore, Rhode Island

It is my great honor to select Rexella Bishop and Henry Pardo to receive Rhode Island's 2025 National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) John Lewis Youth Leadership Awards. As students at Central High School in Providence, Rexella and Henry were the driving force behind the Providence Schools Mental Health Fair, which had a goal of stopping the stigma around mental health issues.

Rexella and Henry started the Providence Schools Mental Health Fair as high school juniors, then grew the program for a second annual event when they were seniors. The 80+ vendors at the fair offered mental health resources and interactive activities to students. To ensure the fair was a welcoming and uplifting environment, Rexella and Henry also organized live music, giveaways, food, and yoga sessions.

Due to their leadership with the Providence Schools Mental Health Fair, Rexella and Henry were asked to participate in a Mental Health Awareness Month roundtable on youth mental health organized by Governor Dan McKee's office. Alongside national mental health advocate and former Rhode Island Congressman Patrick Kennedy, Rexella and Henry shared how adults can better support students' needs.

Beyond their mental health advocacy efforts, Rexella and Henry are widely seen as competent, smart, and community-minded. Both Rexella and Henry participated in the Rhode Island Department of State's Civic Leadership Program and earned Certificates of Civic Excellence. Henry was also honored by Lt. Governor Sabina Matos with a Lt. Governor Leadership Award. Rexella is currently enrolled at Boston University and studying biology/pre-medicine. While in high school, she was one of twenty students who participated in the first year of the "Future Gen Cancer Scholars Program," a six-week program for students of color from the urban core. Henry is studying marketing at Bryant University, after participating in the PricewaterhouseCoopers Accounting Careers Leadership Institute at Bryant during his senior year. Henry also worked with our team as a State House tour guide for several months – he was incredibly welcoming to all building visitors and helped translate the tour for Spanish-speaking visitors.

Both Rexella and Henry have shown incredible dedication to their communities, and they are seizing opportunities to continue learning and experiencing new things. I have no doubt they will continue to support their classmates and their communities in the years to come. I look forward to presenting them both with a John Lewis Youth Leadership Award.

## **Ayden Calvert**

Nominated by Secretary Monae Johnson, South Dakota

Ayden Calvert is currently an intern at both James River Public Affairs and Turbak-Berry Law Office. He recently served as a Senate Intern in the South Dakota Legislature and previously worked as an Activity Aide at Avantara Nursing Home. Ayden is also an elected Senator in the Augustana Student Association. His volunteer involvement includes leadership and service through YELL (Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning), Rotary International, Teen Court, and Key Club, demonstrating a consistent commitment to civic engagement and youth empowerment.

Ayden advocates for youth and communities impacted by the criminal justice system. Through his work with Teen Court, the South Dakota Senate, and Rotary's RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership

Awards) program, he has focused on reforming the juvenile justice system, expanding civic education, and empowering young leaders. His advocacy centers on creating more equitable systems and amplifying youth voices in policymaking spaces.

Ayden's leadership in Teen Court has contributed to lowering youth recidivism by promoting restorative justice practices and offering young offenders constructive alternatives to traditional sentencing. In the South Dakota Senate, he supported legislative efforts that impact education and public safety, helping to streamline appropriations and improve resource allocation. As Senate Secretary, Ayden tracked legislative operations, coordinated schedules, and maintained documentation, all of which supported a more informed caucus. His volunteer work with YELL and Rotary has also provided mentorship and leadership training to dozens of young people across the state.

While working in the South Dakota Senate, Ayden played a pivotal role on the appropriations committee, helping to analyze and support budgetary decisions that directly impacted education, healthcare, and infrastructure. His contributions helped the caucus navigate the process. His behind-the-scenes leadership as Senate Secretary was instrumental in maintaining the integrity and efficiency of the legislative process.

Ayden Calvert's record of service, leadership, and advocacy reflects the spirit of John Lewis's legacy. With over 1,600 volunteer hours, multiple leadership awards, and a demonstrated commitment to justice and equity, Ayden stands out as one of South Dakota's most promising young leaders.

## **Zackary Stroebert**

Nominated by Secretary Tre Hargett, Tennessee

Zackary Stroebert serves as the Student Government Association President At Cumberland University and has shown exceptional leadership in encouraging his fellow students to take part in the democratic process. After attending a voter engagement workshop hosted by our office earlier this year, Zackary took the initiative to organize a campus-wide voter registration effort during National Voter Registration Month in September.

Under his leadership, Cumberland hosted a full week of activities focused on voter registration and civic engagement. Zackary brought students together across campus, providing them with the information and resources needed to take their first steps toward active participation in the

electoral process. His efforts created an engaging environment that encouraged students to understand the importance of their role in democracy.

He also took time to visit several of his classes to talk about the importance of voting, especially in local elections that directly impact the community. His personal outreach and willingness to lead by example helped inspire many of his peers to see how their participation can make a real difference.

Zackary's example reflects the values of service, leadership, and civic responsibility that the NASS John Lewis Youth Leadership Award celebrates. Through his efforts, he has helped foster a culture of civic engagement that will benefit both Cumberland University and the broader Tennessee community for years to come.

## **Binti Aweis**

Nominated by Secretary Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Vermont

Binti graduated from Winooski High School in June 2025 and now attends the Community College of Vermont. She is described as a quiet and caring leader and as reliable, empathetic and determined. One of her most notable accomplishments was helping start the Unheard Stories program for Winooski students. Unheard Stories is a youth-led program where traditionally marginalized students are invited to share their stories through dances, skits, fashion, poetry, or any other way they see fit. They work throughout the year to craft their stories and have a big performance at the end of the school year. It has been deeply impactful for both the students who participate in it and the audience members who witness their storytelling. Unheard Stories helps uncover stereotypes and transform the audience's views of what it means to be African or hold other marginalized identities.

Binti has also been involved in many other social justice opportunities in her community. She's participated in clubs, led workshops, and organized gatherings. Binti joined the Education Justice Coalition by participating in the Summer Social Justice Camp. For two years, she joined as an organizer and facilitator of the camp. She also participated in our Youth Organizer Training Program - a yearlong program in partnership with Outright Vermont where youth learn organizing skills through 5 daylong training retreats and monthly zoom meetings. Last year, Binti was an intern at the Education Justice Coalition where she helped build the Youth Social Justice Network and planned a Statewide Youth Gathering.



**NASS**

National Association  
of Secretaries of State

## **Rafaela Botti**

Nominated by Secretary Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Vermont

Rafaela received two nominations for this award. She lives in Middlebury and is described as tireless and passionate young person who leads by example and from the front to create a community that is welcoming and just for all. She serves on the board at the Teen Center in Middlebury and also planned and ran a week-long teen summer camp focused on social justice and change. She is also working with the Teen Center to form a local youth council that will help our teens use their voices in our community.

Rafaela also established a local radio show called Freaknqency of Change. The show focuses on social justice themes and plays protest and social commentary music from the past six decades and also highlights organizations and coalitions across the state. She is also a member of the Vermont State Youth Council and has worked with organizations such as the Education Justice Coalition, Outright Vermont, Midd Pride, and the Atria Collective. She is also involved with Vermont Chapter of the National Organization Vote 16 (youth-led campaigns to lower the voting age to 16 in local elections.

## **Kiprey Kalume**

Nominated by Secretary Steve Hobbs, Washington

Kiprey is a deep thinker and someone who cares very deeply about justice in her community. She works for her school community in many ways, but her work for the BSU and more widely in the Seattle Congolese community shine brightly.

Acting in a leadership role in her school's Black Student Union, Kiprey has been active in seeking ways to counter microaggressions toward all students. She has also increased awareness around immigrant communities from African nations.

Having moved from Kinshasa to Seattle at five, Kiprey has maintained a connection to and an appreciation for the culture of the Congo. She tells her story below:

"As I grew older, I realized that parts of my world had followed me—not the vibrant culture of my home, but the minerals that lie beneath it. Congo supplies over 70% of the world's cobalt, the mineral that powers phones, laptops, and electric cars. Yet behind those devices are children working in unsafe mines and families struggling to survive. It made me wonder: how can my world, so rich in color, rhythm, and beauty, be reduced to the earth it was built upon?

Living between the United States and Congo taught me how easily beauty and pain can be overlooked—and how powerful it can be to turn that understanding into change.

I began using social media to educate people about Congo, posting videos, stories, and art that celebrated our culture while exposing the injustices behind cobalt mining. My goal was to make people see Congo not just for its minerals, but for its humanity.

I founded Bana ya Congo Seattle (BCYS)—Kids of Congo Seattle—an initiative that celebrates Congolese culture while raising awareness about injustices back home. Through community events, fundraisers, and social media campaigns—like our Congolese Independence Day celebration, where we raised \$500 for children in Congo—I aimed to show that activism can be both powerful and joyful. At the same time, I became more involved locally, promoting diversity and inclusion among Black students in my school district.”

Like many students of her age, Kiprey has had her ups and downs finding a level of balance around her various activities alongside her academic obligations. She has been finding a much healthier stride in her senior year. Some of her success has been grounded in finding ways to have her academic studies serve her interests. For example, as an AP Research student, she is currently conducting a content analysis on how reality shows portray and frame black women differently compared to other races and analyzing the impacts of those portrayals.

## **Luna Esmeralda Perez**

Nominated by Secretary Steve Hobbs, Washington

Luna has been an incredible community member and friend to all those she interacts with, with LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) and around her school. Luna, as part of LULAC, has participated in several conferences both locally and nationally to advance her knowledge and skills, and bring those experiences back to her community. Recently as part of the LULAC PNW regional Youth Conference, Luna was a presenting speaker at the Youth Gala, where she highlighted her struggles and the work of her Youth Council. At Union High School, alongside the Union LULAC Council, Luna has helped organize and participated in their annual Hispanic Heritage Month Assembly. Luna has also volunteered her time to local elementary schools to host book readings, playdays, and cultural events for the kids, translating for students who don't speak English, and sharing her passion for writing/poetry and encouraging students to use it as a way to put down their feelings.

Luna is active with the Adult LULAC Council by assisting with advocacy days surrounding immigration topics, has fundraised alongside the Adult LULAC council for those impacted by immigration policies, and has traveled to the State Capital with fellow LULAC Youth to tour and speak with representatives from their area.

One example of Luna's impact is their school's annual Hispanic Heritage Month Assembly, where students could experience the Latino/Hispanic cultures, history, and traditions showcased by the students themselves. The Union LULAC club has for the past 3 years been the presenters of the school's assembly and have led fun and informative activities and presentations to engage their fellow classmates in the diverse culture of the Latino Community. Luna has played a key role in these assemblies by contributing to the content of the presentations and coordinating with other school groups to bring live music and dance to the program. She actively participated and encouraged her fellow (non-latino) classmates to also participate and learn alongside her and the LULAC club, showcasing her compassion and enthusiasm to share and grow with others outside her culture.

Luna is the elder of her younger sister with down syndrome, and a daughter of a single mother who immigrated to the states. Aside from being a great student, and an avid advocate for her community she also ensures that her family is taken care of. She takes her sister to school every morning, usually at a sacrifice to being on time to her own education. Luna is also tasked with helping around the home and prepping meals. Her mom also needs her help with translation, meaning that Luna is at every appointment, meeting and events that require their mom's participation. She makes it a priority to know her rights as a student and community member, and uses it to educate her immediate family, extending even to other members like cousins, aunts, uncles. Luna, at only 16 years old, carries this monumental weight for her family, and goes the extra mile to even include helping others, while still experiencing the everyday struggles of high school. In her mind, these are simply bumps in the road meant for her to overcome, further exemplifying how courageous and humble she is when managing her situations. Despite her personal and educational challenges, Luna continues to be a positive light for her peers and is viewed as an example of strength and dignity to the community of all ages.

## Delegate Josh Holstein

Nominated by Secretary Kris Warner, West Virginia

24-year-old Josh Holstein embodies the spirit of the John Lewis Leadership Award. He's a young, talented, civic-minded servant who leads with confidence, integrity and a passion to do his very best for his community and state.

He began his involvement in politics in Southern West Virginia as a teenager registering new voters in high schools and volunteering for congressional campaigns. In 2020, at the ripe age of 19, he decided to seek public office.

This young, ambitious man from Boone County made history when he was elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates making him the youngest state legislator ever elected from Boone County and one of the youngest law makers in state and national history. He currently serves on several key House committees, including Judiciary, Energy and Public Works, and Technology and Infrastructure.

In July 2025, Holstein was elected Chairman of the West Virginia Republican Party, becoming the youngest person ever to lead the organization and the youngest Chairman in Republican National Committee history.

Grounded in Appalachian values, he has firsthand knowledge of the challenges facing West Virginia because he has lived through many of these same challenges. He's an eighth generation West Virginian, lifelong Boone County native, and proud son of generations of coal miners. Holstein is a graduate of Sherman High School and earned a degree in economics from Marshall University.

With a record of strong, principled leadership and deep roots in his community, Holstein is committed to building a more prosperous, resilient West Virginia. Holstein has voted to lower taxes and lessen regulations to entice businesses, and in turn, jobs to West Virginia, protect elections, and improve educational opportunity for children. He says, "As long as I am able, I will work to do my part to serve our people and to restore West Virginia to 'Almost Heaven'."



## Brayden Williamson

Nominated by Secretary Kris Warner, West Virginia

Rising bluegrass singer, Brayden Williamson, uses his voice to entertain, empower and elevate his home state of West Virginia. He's a leader on stage and in the classroom.

23-year-old Williamson is a member of the National Society of Leadership and Success. NSLS is the nation's largest honor society with more than two million members. He also serves as the student representative on his college's Board of Governors.

Williamson, a business administration major, attends Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. While he earns high academic praise, he also continues to achieve musical milestones.

At age 16 his first single, "Watchin' Grass Grow," made it to the number one slot on the Mountain Bluegrass WWB Charts. In 2023, he was recognized as Guitar Player of the Year at The Evan Dickerson Bluegrass Music Award. He's performed in multiple states and has more than 70,000 Facebook followers. Williamson performs original songs and classic covers from artists such as Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Vince Gill, and Eric Clapton.

Williamson has the talent to reach mass audiences. Staying true to his principles of fairness, humility and faith he uses his platform to raise awareness for community needs in Logan County and beyond. Each Christmas he orchestrates a huge outreach program to feed more than 2,000 people. He hosts concerts to raise funds for scholarships. His community outreach inspires others to get involved and make a difference.

According to Williamson great leadership starts with authenticity and humility. He says, "Always be honest and make sure you craft your listening skills above all."