



# Call for the Creation of a National Youth Council

*“If you had a problem in the Black community, and you brought in a group of White people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there’d probably be a public outcry. It would be the same for women’s issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us.”*

–Jason, 17 years old

For too long the views and perspectives of youth have been absent from the policy making process. The genuine inclusion of youth voice in the creation of public policy is critical if we, as a nation, are to insure the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs that serve young people. Therefore, we, the undersigned, call for the creation of a National Youth Council to provide federal policy makers with unique insights and recommendations from young people regarding the policy issues that impact our nation's 105 million youth.

## National Youth Council

A National Youth Council, modeled after successful state and local youth councils, would consist of young people selected from across the country to:

- Advise the President, the heads of Federal departments and agencies providing youth services, Members of Congress, Congressional Committees and Subcommittees, and other senior Federal Government officials on proposed and pending legislation, budget expenditures, and other policy matters with respect to youth, particularly disadvantaged youth
- Gather the views and perspectives of young people across the country through grants to State and Local Youth Councils and similar organizations
- Prepare an Annual National Youth Report summarizing the views and perspectives of youth, particularly disadvantaged youth, with respect to Federal youth service

## Structure

The National Youth Council would:

- Be established within the Executive Office of the President
- Consist of not fewer than 24 young people serving three year terms
- Meet in person not fewer than 4 times each year and online or via phone not fewer than 8 times each year
- Be led by an adult director and staff, and 2 youth co-chairs
- Select youth members based on their demonstrated competence in infusing their views and perspectives (as well as the views and perspectives of young people in their region), into local, state or national policy making, with additional priority given to:
  1. Individuals with current or previous service in a State, local, or national entity with duties similar to the Youth Council;
  2. Disadvantaged youth; and
  3. Youth whose selection enables the National Youth Council to reflect all regions of the country as well as the broad diversity of the Nation.

## Grant Programs

The National Youth Council would oversee two grant programs.

- *Youth Council Capacity Building Grants*. These grants would be awarded on a competitive basis to existing state and local youth councils who wish to expand their capacity to authentically engage young people in the policy making process.
- *Youth Council Report Grants*. These grants would be awarded on a competitive basis to state and local youth councils and similar organizations to solicit the views and perspectives of youth, particularly disadvantaged youth, with respect to federal youth services. This information would be documented by the grantee in a State or Local Youth Report, to be utilized by the National Youth Council in preparation of their Annual National Youth Report.

## Precedents

There are clear local, state and federal precedents for a youth council:

- A growing number of Governors, State Legislatures, Mayors, City Councils, and County Commissions across the country have successfully engaged young people in the policy process through Youth Councils. These councils provide advice on proposed and pending legislation, state budget expenditures and funding for youth programs. Some have the duty of drafting and proposing legislation.
- The federal government has a rich history of seeking the input of specific populations to gain input on policy decisions.
  - In 1978, the National Council on Disabilities was established to advise the U.S. Department of Education, and now advises the entire executive branch as well as Congress .
  - In 1995, President Clinton created the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) through executive order. PACHA directly advises the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, who then reports PACHA's findings to the President.
  - In 2009, President Obama created the Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. This council is composed of religious and secular leaders and scholars from different backgrounds, and is charged with making recommendations to the President, through the Executive Director, for changes in policies, programs, and practices that affect the delivery of services by such organizations and the needs of low-income and other underserved persons.

## For More Information, Please Contact

*(listed in alphabetical order)*

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## Co-Signatories (updated June 16, 2010)

The call for the creation of a National Youth Council is a joint endeavor of a number of leading youth service, leadership, and advocacy organizations, including (in alphabetical order):

- Advocates for Youth
- American Camp Association
- America's Youth Councils Network
- Campaign for Youth
- Covenant House
- DoSomething.org
- First Focus
- Forum for Youth Investment
- Mikva Challenge
- Youth Service America
- YouthBuild USA