

August 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

After more than a year and a half of productive conversations with your administration, we respectfully ask for you to approve a charter to create a Presidential Youth Council to empower disadvantaged youth across the country, and to ensure that scarce federal resources for youth programs are directed toward where they can do the most good.

As Jason Warren, a 17-year-old participant in Youth Force in New York City said, "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."

The statement is poignant and powerful but hardly new: Jason said it more than ten years ago. Yet his statement remains true even today, and that needs to change.

Now, more than ever, we need to make sure scarce federal resources for youth programs are directed where they can do the most good. The best source of information about which federally-funded youth programs are working, which programs are not, and how to improve them is the disadvantaged young people who receive the services. Young people are unencumbered by special interest groups and lobbyists, and they can share what needs to be done to ensure federal youth programs are both efficient and effective.

We are deeply appreciative of the leadership you have shown in reaching out to young people through meetings, conference calls, roundtables and summits. A Presidential Youth Council would serve as an institutional structure to strengthen and complement such episodic events.

Such an institutional structure is necessary to ensure consistent attention to youth engagement, to provide training to young people, and to allow sufficient time for productive working relationships to form between young people and senior administration officials. The Presidential Youth Council would reduce duplicative efforts (currently numerous federal initiatives are forced to reinvent the wheel

every time they solicit input and ideas from youth), and it would expand the reach of your Office of Public Engagement, as each member of the Presidential Youth Council would engage thousands of young people across the country.

Mr. President, we respectfully request that you approve a charter creating a Presidential Youth Council. In so doing, you will empower disadvantaged youth across the country, ensure that scarce federal resources for youth programs are directed toward where they can do the most good, and help us win the future.

Signed (alphabetically):

Advocates for Youth

American Camp Association

Campaign for Youth

First Focus

Forum for Youth Investment

Mikva Challenge

National Summer Learning Association

Youth Service America