

Assembly Bill 46

California Youth Empowerment Act

Assemblywoman Luz M. Rivas

SUMMARY

Our nation's youth participated at historic levels in the most recent General Election. They have repeatedly shown they care about our country and our state. Our youth have proven they deserve to have their voices heard in their government's decisions. AB 46 establishes the California Youth Empowerment Commission that will empower underrepresented youth by providing them with opportunities to be civically engaged in California's policymaking process.

BACKGROUND

Youth across our country and the world have spoken up to hold governments accountable for their positions on critical social and environmental policies, and we have experienced record-shattering youth voter turnout in recent elections—including a turnout of over 70% in the 2020 General Election—as youth realize the power of their voice.

Young Californians are already participating in our democratic processes at the city and county level by joining local youth advisory bodies. Currently, there are over 130 active local youth commissions in our state advising local governments on critical public policies.

Recognizing the importance of providing the state with the opportunity to hear from young individuals, the State Legislature established the California Advisory Commission on Youth in 1978. This Commission has since been phased out.

PROBLEM

While multiple state commissions such as the California Commission on Aging and the Commission on the Status of Women and Girls are authorized to advise the state government on matters pertaining to a particular community, there is no commission focused solely on the needs of youth. This leaves the voices of nearly 900,000 Californians younger than 18 unheard¹.

While California's youth have repeatedly proved that they are ready to become catalysts for change, many face significant barriers that prevent their voices from being heard by our state government.

This is especially true for vulnerable youth populations, including the estimated 270,000 homeless youth that live in California, and the thousands of youth in the foster and criminal justice systems².

The civic engagement of youth is further hindered by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that is exacerbating existing social inequities. For example, youth homelessness is on the rise and data shows that young Californians—particularly Latino and black youth—are losing their jobs at rates much higher than the rest of the general population.³

Unfortunately, without a formal platform in state government for youth to express their hardships, state lawmakers cannot fully address the impact this pandemic has had on these young adults.

SOLUTION

AB 46 will address the lack of youth representation in state policymaking by establishing the California Youth Empowerment Commission. This Commission will consist of twenty-five individuals from across the state between the ages of 14-25. At least half of them will have experienced youth homelessness, foster care, juvenile incarceration, or have special needs—thus ensuring representation from traditionally underserved youth.

The Commission's duties will include examining and discussing policy, holding meetings and roundtable discussions with youth advocates and the public, and investing in personal development by providing grants, with strict oversight mechanisms, to programs that seek to rectify the caustic inequities that affect young Californians.

As our state seeks to reinvest in developing our future leaders, it is imperative that youth have a seat at the table. Our democracy will be better served if young Californians are given an opportunity to contribute their perspectives in policy decisions that will have far-reaching ramifications for the future of our state.

CONTACT

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¹ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-characteristics.html>

² <http://transformschools.ucla.edu/stateofcrisis/>

³ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/unemployment-among-young-workers-during-covid-19/>

Support

Alliance of Boys and Men of Color (Sponsors)
California Association of Student Councils (Sponsors)
California Coalition for Youth (Sponsors)
California Youth Connection (Sponsors)
Mi Familia Vota (Sponsors)
San Francisco Youth Commission (Sponsors)
Alliance for Children's Rights
American Academy of Pediatrics
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California League of Conservation Voters
Doing Good Works
Home Start, Inc.
Inland Empire United
Larkin Street Youth Services
Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health
LYRIC, Center for LGBTQ Youth
NextGen California
Public Counsel
Vacaville Police Activities League
Voices Youth Centers
West Coast Children's Clinic

