

MINNESOTA YOUTH COUNCIL



An Initiative of Minnesota Alliance With Youth



MN Youth Council Committee Annual Report 94th Legislature 2020

INTRODUCTION

The 2020 Minnesota State Legislative Session was the seventh session in which the Minnesota Youth Council Committee represented the voices and interests of youth from across the state. The Minnesota Youth Council Committee grew out of an interest by the Minnesota Youth Council [MYC], a diverse group of 36 youth and adults representing each congressional district of Minnesota, plus one at-large district. The MYC's mission is to "mobilize middle and high school students across the state to create equitable systems through youth-led outreach, education, and advocacy."

The MYC is an initiative of the Minnesota Alliance With Youth, a statewide nonprofit that serves as a leading youth development capacity-builder, convener, and collaborator in Minnesota. Legislation in 2013 formalized the relationship between the Minnesota Youth Council youth members and the Minnesota Legislature, putting youth voice into law with the formation of the Minnesota Youth Council Committee [MYCC].

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

At Large Representatives:

Ava Kalenze, *St. Anthony Village High School*
Cole Hartman, *Wayzata High School*
Katelyn Dorry, *Northern Lights Community School*
Weston Loughmiller, *Fairmount High School*

Congressional District 1:

Salma Abdi, *Rochester Century*
Zamzam Abdullahi, *Rochester STEM Academy*
Richard [Tripp] Dow, *Rochester Mayo*
Shikha Kumar, *Rochester Mayo*

Congressional District 5:

Bryan Forsman, *Washburn High School*
Emily Geier, *St. Anthony Village High School*
Juwaria Jama, *Spring Lake Park High School*
Liv Steen, *Hopkins High School*

Congressional District 2:

Nina Baker, *Lakeville South High School*
Harita Duggirala, *Eastview High School*
Hasate Getu, *Park of Cottage Grove*
Claire Nelson, *Farmington High School*

Congressional District 6:

Nicholas Armstrong, *Blaine High School*
Genavieve Billiet, *Watertown Mayer High School*
Brandon Wolinski, *Rogers High School*

Congressional District 3:

Jacob Kiflu, *Seven Hills Prep Academy*
Olivia Schaefer, *Chanhassen High School*

Congressional District 7:

Robert Johnson, *Voyageurs Expeditionary School*

Anushka Thorat, <i>Edina High School</i> Yazzmine Zaccardi, <i>Coon Rapids High School</i>	Bridget Westrum, <i>Homeschooled</i>
<u>Congressional District 4:</u> Hufsa Ahmed, <i>Mounds View High School</i> Paula Akakpo, <i>Math + Science Academy -- Woodbury</i> Adri Arquin, <i>Saint Paul Central High School</i> Hailey Dickinson, <i>North High School</i>	<u>Congressional District 8:</u> Helen Clanaugh, <i>Duluth Denfeld High School</i> Ria Edberg, <i>Mora Jr/Sr. High School</i> Hannah Erickson, <i>Greenway High School</i> Lexis Gerard, <i>Cloquet High School</i>

BILL SELECTION

This year, bill selection began with the Minnesota Youth Council connecting with their communities to hear directly from other young people about their biggest concerns and needs. Supplemented with the Minnesota Student Survey data, the Youth Representatives formed their 2020 policy platform centered around six areas: mental health support, safe schools and juvenile justice, access to quality afterschool programming, education equity, comprehensive sexual health education and benefits for students directly impacted by COVID-19.

<u>Mental Health Funding + Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MYC supports providing additional funding for school counselors and mental health resources. • Students support banning conversion therapy due to the potential for mental health harm. 	<u>Increase Teachers of Color</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minnesota Youth Council supports efforts to increase Teachers of Color and American Indian teachers.
<u>Public Safety + Juvenile Justice</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students support rethinking the school-to-prison pipeline and life sentences for adolescents. • The Minnesota Youth Council supports measures to keep Minnesotans safe from gun violence* <p>*see previous statements (2018, 2019)</p>	<u>K-12 Tax Credit + Afterschool Funding</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students support addressing the need for ongoing academic enrichment and technological devices. • The Minnesota Youth Council supports funding our afterschool programs and providing safe spaces for young people to thrive.
<u>Sexual Health Education</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MYC supports having age-appropriate conversations in the 	<u>Unemployment Benefits for Young People</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minnesota Youth Council supports the call to high schoolers

K12 classroom regarding consent and sex education, and ultimately around health and respectful relationships.	who have been laid off due to COVID-19 to receive unemployment benefits temporarily.
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COMMITTEE MEETINGS + TESTIFIERS

Bill Feedback Letters

- [HF 12](#) Conversion Therapy Ban [Representative Cantrell]
- [HF 1363](#) Support Our Students [Representative Huot]
- [HF 1414](#) Comprehensive Sexual Health Education [Representative Lippert]
- SF 436 “Red Flag” Law (HF 9 Companion) [MYC Letter of Support]

Minnesota Youth Council representatives were presented with several opportunities to share their experiences and insight before committee members. Through written, in-person and virtual testimonies, Youth Representatives shared personal experiences and advocated on behalf of their communities for:

- [School Climate](#): Adri Arquin, Ava Kalenze, Hailey Dickinson [Education Finance, 02/12/20]
- [Public Safety Statement](#): Paula Akakpo [Public Safety, 02/19/20]
- [Increase Teachers of Color](#) (HF 3201: Adri Arquin [Education Policy, 02/19/20]
"As a member of the Minnesota Youth Council, having the opportunity to testify in front of elected officials is one of the most important and clear ways to represent my district's youth. By speaking out about the need for teachers of color and the problems inside our schools, I was able to share a perspective of a student at a diverse urban high school, which is greatly needed in our legislature. Through this opportunity, I was able to help influence officials and make direct pathways for the voices of students in my community."—Adri Arquin
- [Mental Health Need + HF 4257](#): Hufsa Ahmed and Liv Steen [Education Policy, 03/10/20]
- [Distance Learning Experience](#): Shikha Kumar [Education Policy/Finance, 06/24/20]

HIGHLIGHTS

Children's Cabinet Advisory Council

This year, Hufsa Ahmed, one of our Congressional District 4 Representatives, served on the Children's Cabinet Advisory Council as the MYC voice. Knowing that the work of the Children's Cabinet is to consider all areas in which children and families are impacted, Hufsa provided personal insight and relayed information to the MYC to think through complex problems.

"My time on the Minnesota Children's Cabinet Advisory Council was my first experience interacting with adults on a statewide level. It was really interesting for me to hear from the perspective of educators, health professionals, community leaders, and policymakers all in one space. Being a part of a group that was so passionate about creating a better world for the youth of Minnesota, even during these difficult and uncertain times, was comforting and inspiring. As one of two students on the Council, I found my role in the group to be one that could bring forth topics that were commonly overseen by adults—but discussed heavily among youth and especially those on the MYC—and to voice a different viewpoint on existing ideas given my personal experiences. Ultimately, it was important to me as someone who lives in the world the Council discusses, that the rest of the group understood the importance and significance of the issues brought forth." -- Hufsa Ahmed

Youth Day at the Capitol + Gov/Lt. Gov Meeting

- MN Youth Council met with Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan to discuss youth issues such as mental health supports, school safety, the opportunity gap, and juvenile justice at the 2020 YDAC Retreat. Representatives were able to hear directly from the Governor and Lt. Governor on their legislative priorities and the areas in which young people could share their experiences.
- YDAC 2020 is an annual event hosted in partnership with MN History Center, Secretary of State's Office, YMCA, YWCA, and MCEA to invite over 250+ young people to join MN Youth Council at the State Capitol and MN History Center to become engaged in youth policy and advocacy work. Alongside students from across the state, MYC Representatives held advocacy trainings, led a youth-led march, and held bill hearings centered on youth issues.



Webinar: Student Voice in Creating and Maintaining Relationships

- In response to the unprecedented impact COVID-19 had on teacher/student relationships, Council Representatives sought to provide space for educators to hear

directly from young people regarding their experiences with distance learning. Representatives Shikha Kumar, Claire Nelson, Weston Loughmiller, and Hufsa Ahmed spoke to over 500 educators over two days, offering insight and ideas.

COVID-19 Response + Resources

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to flatten the curve, young people across the state were left with a new normal and exacerbated issues. The MYC Representatives recognized that, as the voice for young people, they had a unique opportunity to connect our youth with resources and information to empower all young people to meet their challenges head-on.

Over the last three months of the 19-20 session, the MYC issued a comprehensive statement, including district-by-district resources for young people. They shared tips, wrote articles on the impact of COVID-19 on our communities and security, and held several community conversations to share their experiences.

- [MN Youth Council's Response to COVID-19](#)
 - [COVID-19 Resources for Students by Congressional District](#)
 - [Congressional District 2 Representative: Harita's Helpful Tips for young people on distance learning and social distancing](#)

- COVID-19 statements from Youth Representatives
 - [Distance Learning and the Lack of Broadband in MN](#)
 - [Blood Donation](#)
 - [Student Experiences with Distance Learning: Key Takeaways and Policy Recommendations](#)
 - [Food Insecurity](#)

- MYC and Children's Cabinet Conversation
 - [Youth Forum on COVID-19](#) with MDH, MDE and Gov Children's Cabinet

George Floyd Statement

The death of George Floyd left communities -- and our young people -- shaken and called to take action. Recognizing the power of their voice, the MYC led by Representatives Juwaria Jama, Claire Nelson and Paula Akakpo issued a statement to acknowledge the harm that had been done and their hope for a safer future for our Black and Brown communities.

Representative Claire Nelson, alongside a cohort of MYC Representatives, built a website and toolkit for young people to take direct action by contacting their U.S. senators to advocate for the passage of the [Justice in Policing Act \(2020\)](#). By connecting with social media influencers, they were able to reach young people nationwide.

- [MN Youth Council's Response to George Floyd](#)

- [Youth Advocacy Resources + Action Steps](#)
- [Take Action on Police Brutality website](#)

Town Halls

This year, the Council made the commitment of being in community and hearing directly from their fellow students and young people. Each district held a town hall or community conversation with the support of their Adult Partners and staff. By doing so they were able to get feedback on the issues that the Council typically leans into and ensure that they were authentically representing Minnesota's youth.

- [Youth talk about civic engagement](#)

MYC 19-20 Monthly Newsletters

- [August 2019 MYC Newsletter](#)
- [September 2019 MYC Newsletter](#)
- [October 2019 MYC Newsletter](#)
- [November 2019 MYC Newsletter](#)

MEDIA

- [Youthprise Conversation](#)
- [Coffee and Zoom with COPAL](#)
- Selection Announcements
 - [Olivia Schaefer selected to serve on the Minnesota Youth Council](#)
 - [Erickson selected for Minnesota Alliance With Youth](#)
 - [Fairmont student serves state youth | News, Sports, Jobs](#)
 - [Cloquet student represents area on Minnesota Youth Council](#)
 - [Learning to Lead: Voyageurs student enters third year with the Minnesota Youth Council](#)
- COVID-19 + Distance Learning article
- MN Youth Council Representatives in the news!
 - [House education committees examine the report card on distance learning](#)
 - [Black Lives Matter protest draws thousands in Rochester](#)
 - [My proudest accomplishment Voyageurs grad-learned to lead](#)
 - [Two bills aimed at supporting mental health at schools throughout Minnesota](#)
 - [Preview: Students strike again, for climate](#)
 - [2019 20 Under 40: Helen Clanaugh](#)
 - [Wayzata High student advocates for peers as a member of Minnesota Youth Council](#)