

There is no better way to learn about democracy and the systems we use to govern our society than to be a part of that process. I served on the Minnesota Youth Council (MYC) during my junior and senior year of high school, and it was a transformative experience. I applied for the MYC because I was interested in government and community service. I came out of the Council as an empowered citizen of my state with the tools, understanding, and passion for affecting change through legislation and democracy.

I've heard so many people around me say, "The problem is too large, so there's nothing I can do about it" or "what I think doesn't change anything." My experience on the MYC proved to me that this sentiment couldn't be further from the truth. I learned that each and every single one of us has the agency to influence decisions that affect our lives; we have a voice that can be powerful.

A Minnesota Youth Advisory Council IS necessary. Young people are passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable members of society. No one knows the needs of young people more than young people themselves. If we want to talk about creating the best possible state for young people to grow up in, it starts with their representation in discussions and decisions being made about them.

For example, during my time on the Minnesota Youth Council, I served on the Governor's Children's Cabinet Advisory Council as a liaison between the two councils. At one of our meetings, I vividly remember discussions around students' experiences with mental health support in schools. The Advisory Council members, made up of adults, turned to me to get a deeper understanding of the student experience. To this day, I wonder what the group would have done/recommended to the Governor had a student's voice not been there. Furthermore, even though I was in the room, my words only encompassed my own experiences. We also needed students from a metro school, a rural school, a charter school, a private school, etc. to most accurately understand students' experiences with mental health in schools. This is only one example of why the representation of young people in our government is crucial.

-Hufsa Ahmed, St. Paul