



*An Initiative of Minnesota Alliance With Youth*

# **Minnesota Youth Council Committee**

## **2021 Annual Legislative Report**

of the 92nd Legislature of the State of Minnesota

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2021 Minnesota State Legislative Session was the eighth 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]. The MYCC partners with community organizations to create change across the state, and MYCC youth members are leaders in many coalitions working for change in MN. Through community engagement events such as town hall meetings, Youth Day at the Capitol, and the Youth in Educational Leadership Summit, youth members connect with their passionate constituents to authentically represent the needs, hopes, and convictions of young people across the state.

In the midst of a pandemic, social and civil unrest, and calls to action and service in communities everywhere, the Minnesota Youth Council faced unanticipated shifts and challenges continuously throughout the program year. These changes were met with the same deference of resilience, innovation, and passion that MYC members bring to all of their work: meeting the needs and concerns of their constituents with worthy urgency and care, seeking equity in all of their projects. Following the release of the MYC's statements on how the pandemic impacts young people, its subsequent resource guide, and statement on the murder of George Floyd in the 2019-20 year, the Minnesota Youth Council made intentional, actionable goals to focus on accessibility and equity in all their work this year.

## YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

**At Large Representatives:**

Weston Loughmiller '21, *Fairmont High School (CD1)*  
 Ava Kalenze '21, *St. Anthony Village High School (CD4)*  
 Liv Steen '21, *Hopkins High School (CD5)*  
 Olivia Schaefer '21, *Chanhassen High School (CD3)*

**Congressional District 1:**

Zamzam Abdullahi '22, *Rochester STEM Academy*  
 Salma Abdi '22, *Rochester Century High School*  
 Shikha Kumar '21, *Rochester Mayo High School*  
 Kaycie Brookens '22, *Fairmont Jr/Sr High School*

**Congressional District 5:**

Nacia Griffin '24, *Hopkins North Junior High*  
 Juwaria Jama '22, *Spring Lake Park High School*  
 Bolu Ilelaboye '21, *DeLaSalle High School*  
 Alexis Moracco '22, *St. Anthony Village High School*

**Congressional District 2:**

Sahasra Molleti '24, *Eastview High School*  
 Rhea Rajvansh '22, *Eastview High School*  
 Isabelle Wong '21, *Apple Valley High School*  
 Eric Li '23, *Eagan High School*

**Congressional District 6:**

Genavieve Billiet '21, *Watertown High School*  
 Nicholas Armstrong '21, *Blaine High School*  
 Salam Hijazi '21, *Coon Rapids High School*  
 Trinity Hanif '22, *St. Michael-Albertville High School*

**Congressional District 3:**

Jacob Kiflu '24, *Thomas Jefferson High School*  
 Sage Hartman '24, *Wayzata High School*  
 Kyndal Witherspoon '22, *The Breck School*  
 Rhys Wiloughby '23, *The Blake School*

**Congressional District 7:**

Jaden Henderson '22, *Bemidji High School*  
 Karen Guise '22, *Red Lake Senior High School*  
 Bridget Westrum '22, *Homeschool - Bemidji*  
 Alya Nimis-Ibrahaim '23, *Bemidji High School*

**Congressional District 4:**

Paula Akakpo '22, *Math + Science Academy - Woodbury*  
 Adri Arquin '22, *St. Paul Central High School*  
 Hailey Dickinson '21, *North High School*  
 Laichia Vang '22, *Roseville Area High School*

**Congressional District 8:**

Ria Edberg '22, *Mora Junior/Senior High School*  
 Lexis Gerard '21, *Cloquet High School*  
 Katelyn Dorry '21, *Northern Lights Community School*  
 Emily Geier '22, *Cambridge-Isanti High School*

## Subcommittees + MYCC Bill Selection

Health and Wellness	Education Equity	Climate Justice	Juvenile Justice
Kaycie Brookens Rhea Rajvansh Sage Hartman Laichia Vang Alexis Moracco Nicholas Armstrong Karen Guise Lexis Gerard Ava Kalenze Liv Steen	Zamzam Abdullahi Shikha Kumar Kyndal Witherspoon Hailey Dickinson Bolu Ilelaboye Genavieve Billiet Bridget Westrum Ria Edberg Sahasra Molleti	Weston Loughmiller Isabelle Wong Rhys Willoughby Adri Arquin Juwaria Jama Salam Hijazi Jaden Henderson Emily Geier Sahasra Molleti	Salma Abdi Eric Li Jacob Kiflu Olivia Schaefer Paula Akakpo Nacia Griffin Emily Geier Trinity Hanif Alya Nimis-Ibrahaim Katelyn Dorry

### Environmental Justice

Chair: Adri Arquin, CD4

Value Statement:	Bills interacted with:	Feedback letter written:
“We recognize the disproportionate impacts of environmental justice on communities of color. We hope to redistribute additional resources to ensure equal access to combat environmental racism. Our aim is to involve such communities in environmental justice discussions so that we can protect them from the consequences of environmental disasters and work to combat the climate crisis with those directly impacted.”	<a href="#">HF1427 (Acomb)</a> ✓ <i>Solar on Schools Act</i> f <a href="#">HF168 (Lee)</a> ✓ <i>Frontline Communities Protection Act</i>  <a href="#">HF148 (Davnie)</a> ✓ <i>“Prove it First”</i>  <a href="#">HF550 (Jordan)</a> ✓ <i>Climate Justice Education</i>	<a href="#">HF1427 (Acomb)</a> “We understand the importance of not only having solar panels but also educating students on their uses, the climate crisis, and job opportunities in renewable energy.”

Education Excellence  
Chair: Bridget Westrum, CD 7



Value Statement:	Bills interacted with:	Feedback letter written:
<p style="text-align: center;">“The Education Excellence subcommittee believes that all students across Minnesota deserve an equitable education, meaning that all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, race, etc. have access to a learning environment that best suits their needs.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF562 (Urdahl)</a> ✓ <i>Social Studies Requirement Modified</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF358 (Jordan)</a> ✓ <i>Comprehensive Sex Education Standards</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF217 (Hassan)</a> ✓ <i>Increase TOCAIT Representation</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF4 (Hausman)</a> ✓ <i>Education and Emergency Relief Fund</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF 562 (Urdahl)</a></p> <p>“The importance of this bill, and general knowledge of the functions of civics, will create a more just and engaged society. Additionally, we commend your efforts to include young people like the MYCC on this bill, demonstrating the importance of young people’s participation in our civic processes. “</p>

Health and Wellbeing  
Chair: Ava Kalenze, At-Large/CD4

Value Statement:	Bills interacted with:	Feedback letter written:
<p>“We believe that inclusivity is key in conversations surrounding mental health: all students should have the opportunity to seek help, and feel respected, represented, and supported, regardless of their gender identity, sexuality, racial identity, socioeconomic status, and other identity factors.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF2171 (Davnie)</a> ✓ <i>Research Racial Health Disparities in MN</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF375 (Youakim)</a> ✓ <i>Youth consent to Inpatient Mental Health Care</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF358 (Jordan)</a> ✓ <i>Comprehensive Sex Education Standards</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF4494 (Bennet)</a> ✗ <i>Parental Rights Established</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">HF375 (Youakim)</a></p> <p>“Going forward, we believe the passing of the bill into law can create a valuable precedent for the bodily autonomy of youth in Minnesota”</p>

Juvenile Justice  
Chair: Katelyn Dorry, CD 8

Value Statement:	Bills interacted with:	Feedback letter written:
<p>“We believe in holistically addressing the school-to-prison pipeline, police free schools, solutions not suspensions, students informed on rights, human dignity, no one is beyond redemption, and solutions beyond the criminal justice system.”</p>	<p><a href="#">HF922 (Long)</a> ✓ <i>Juvenile Restraint Guidelines Established</i></p> <p><a href="#">HF947 (Pinto)</a> ✓ <i>Detention Facility Guidelines Reassessed</i></p> <p><a href="#">HF416 (Edelson)</a> ✓ <i>Juvenile Conviction Report Required</i></p>	<p><a href="#">HF922 (Long)</a></p> <p>“We believe that the bill moves towards a more locally determined, flexible approach that can best account for the varying nuances in local criminal justice systems.”</p>

 =bill supported/passed MYCC hearing  
 =bill opposed/did not pass MYCC hearing



### **Call to Action Toolkit**

In partnership with [Roseville Area Schools](#) and the [Minnesota Humanities Center](#), and with the support of Youth Service America and the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Minnesota Youth Council created a [9/11 Day of Service Call to Action Toolkit](#). This toolkit will guide you through steps that will help you identify an issue important to you and your community and create a meaningful impact.

### **Youth Voice Service Grants**

Beginning in Fall 2020, the Minnesota Youth Council was able to provide support and funding for 20 student-led projects across the state through Youth Voice Service Grants. The funding was accompanied by support from MYC staff and representatives and the opportunity to contribute to the second annual YELS (Youth in Educational Leadership Summit -- see below). Projects were reviewed by MYC representatives and were relevant to the four focus-areas of the Minnesota Youth Council's work: Juvenile Justice, Education Equity, Environmental Justice, and Health and Wellness. These grants helped to fulfill the MYC's ongoing commitment to community engagement and the empowerment of young people in communities across the state. The Youth Voice Service Grants demonstrate the demand and enthusiasm for youth-led advocacy projects in Minnesota.

Thank you to the Youth Voice Service Grants' funding partners, [Youth Service America](#), and the [Graves Foundation](#)!

### **MYCC 2021 Hearings**

March 26: Health and Wellbeing (HF375) and Environmental Justice (HF1427)  
April 26: Education Equity (HF562) and Juvenile Justice (HF922)

### **Youth in Educational Leadership Summit 2021**

On Saturday, April 24, the MYC hosted the second YELS conference -- entirely virtual. Student presenters from the MYC, Youth Voice Service Grant participants, and more young leaders came together to lead sessions and trainings on a multitude of topics, all pertaining to advocacy and leadership, and action as young people. Again, the sessions surrounded the four key focuses of the MYC: Environmental Justice, Juvenile Justice, Education Equity, and Health & Wellbeing. Learn more about YELS, upcoming conferences, sessions, and presenters [HERE](#).



## **Retreats**

All of the Minnesota Youth Council's Retreats occurred virtually this year due to ongoing guidance in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, the members convened on Zoom quarterly to discuss major projects and issues, hold legislative committee meetings, interact socially, and participate in sessions to better their advocacy approaches.

## **Record Year for Member Engagement**

In a virtual legislative session and program year, MYC members set a new precedent for youth engagement at the legislature and within state department responsibilities. MYCC representatives contributed 23 testimonies, written and spoken, to House Committee hearings in the 2021 session. Additionally, members were involved with 31 separate projects among the state departments in the 2020-21 year.

Despite the stress and obstacles of the pandemic, Minnesota Youth Council members were able to set a precedent for involvement and represent their peers in different capacities at the state level.

## **MYCC Funding Bill is Signed into Law**

The Minnesota State Legislature passed an E-12 Education Omnibus bill that included funding for the Minnesota Youth Council; this historic day marks the first time the legislature has made a financial investment in the MYC since it was established as the only legislatively mandated voice of youth to a state government in 2013!

The Minnesota Youth Council received \$3750,000 in state funding over the next two years, which will increase pathways for youth voice at the Capitol by supporting staffing and program expenses, providing stipends for Youth Representatives, and supporting student lead community engagement across Minnesota.



## Individual Member Achievements

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In a record year of member involvement, Minnesota Youth Council members had opportunities to collaborate with state agencies, community partners, and municipal governments to connect with, and do impactful work, on behalf of young people. The list, below, covers the projects that subcommittees and members worked on, spanning many subject areas and providing many perspectives. Respective state agencies may be listed in parentheses after their corresponding project.

- Children’s Cabinet Advisory Council (Governor’s Children’s Cabinet)
- MN Wrap Around Initiative (Governor’s Children Cabinet)
- Youth MOVE MN (DHS)
- Teen Vaping Prevention (DHS)
- Telemedicine Focus Groups (DHS)
- School Linked Mental Health Grants (DHS)
- Citizen Oversight Committees (DNR)
- Climate Change (DNR)
- Transportation Equity and Climate Change (DOT)
- OST Rural Transportation (DOT)
- Farm to School (MDA)
- NQI CoIIN (MDE)
- Distance Learning Advisory/Equity in Distance Learning Committee (MDE)
- Academic Standards on Environmental Justice (MDE)
- School Support (MDE)
- Student Gender Identity (MDE)
- Comprehensive Sex Education (MDH)
- Sexual Violence Prevention (MDH)
- Peer Leaders Suicide Prevention Training (MDH)
- The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (OJP)
- Safety and Wellbeing within Juvenile Detention and Residential Settings (OJP)
- Governor’s Council on Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday (MDHR)
- Construction and Skilled Trade Counseling (DLI)
- MYC Framework (MMB/MDE)
- ARP Strategy Feedback (MDE)
- WSCC Committee Representative (MDE)
- “Sleeves-Up MN” Adolescent COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign (MDH)
- IPPT Report (EQB)
- Minnesota Coalition against Sexual Assault
- Planned Parenthood Minnesota Action Fund
- Take Action Minnesota

## Media

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[4.30.21 Sahan Journal- MYC Member Trinity Hanif: COMMENTARY: Minnesota has serious health inequities for people of color. Two bills now before the legislature could help fix that.](#)

[25 Under 25: Women of Color to Watch 3.30.21](#)

[Everyone wants to close Minnesota's achievement gap. Students say it starts with hiring more teachers of color. 1.27.21](#)

[Olmsted County joins in calling for statewide conversion therapy ban 12.16.2021](#)

[WAYZATA STUDENT WINS STATEWIDE VIDEO CONTEST ON DANGERS OF VAPING 4.29.2021](#)

[Bemidji Teen Offers Gardening Startup Kits for Free to Youth, 3.3.2021](#)

[Bemidji teen starts free youth gardening initiative, 2.27.21](#)

[School Board Shares Experience, 2.20.21](#)

[Area students serving on Minnesota Youth Council 10.1.2020](#)

[Fairmont student joins state Youth Council, Sept 25 2020](#)

[Eagan's Eric Li joins Minnesota Youth Council, Sept 24 2020](#)

[Two Hopkins students serve on Minnesota Youth Council, Sept 25 2020](#)

[Red Lake Senior High School Student Karen Guise Joins the Minnesota Youth Council, Sept 14 2020](#)

[Minnesota Gov. Walz & Flanagan Announce Appointments \(Salma\)](#)

[Wayzata High School student joins Minnesota Youth Council, Sept 3 2020](#)

[Minnesota Youth Council's District 7 reps want to make a difference 10.17.2021](#)