

For Youth: How Can Youth Better Engage State Legislators? Get Their Attention

Youth can ask state lawmakers to:

- Participate in community planning processes prior to implementing new projects. Ensure youth participation.
- Host community focus groups and listening sessions to identify needs, gaps in services, available resources and strengths, potential solutions and identify important stakeholders, including youth in foster care, to participate.
- Use the [Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#) to examine racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare.
- Sponsor task forces to study disproportionality, develop remediation plans and monitor progress.
- Legislators can work to ensure that youth in care participate fully in all aspects of the work of the task force.
- Include racial equity and inclusion as part of the information and data gathering process.

Consider inviting legislators and legislative staff to participate in:

- Foster Youth Legislative Shadow Programs (See Box Above).
- Visit residential care facilities, group homes and similar facilities.
- Youth transition planning roundtables.

Consider hosting activities where youth can partner with legislators and legislative staff:

- Do role-playing scenarios to help lawmakers understand what it's like to be a young person in care in high school:
 - To have to get permission to do a sleepover.
 - Attending court hearings and missing classes and tests.
 - Wanting to join the football or cheerleading team.
 - Not having someone to guide a young person through the college admission process.
 - Getting a driver's license.
 - Going on a date.
 - Understanding challenges faced by LGBTQ youth/Native American/African American/Latino youth.
- Learn whether your state has Children's Cabinet, a Children's Caucus, a Youth Advisory Committee. Join these organizations to get to know legislators and help them to understand your concerns. If you are already participating, but there are no legislators involved, reach out and personally invite their participation.
- If your state child welfare agency offers a "drive-along" opportunity for legislators to accompany a caseworker, offer to accompany the lawmaker, if appropriate, to explain what they may be seeing from a youth's perspective.
- Use the [Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#) with legislators to examine racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare.

Questions lawmakers and youth together can ask the child welfare agency, advocates and other partners:

- How many children and youth enter and exit care each year?

- Why do children and youth enter care?
- Why do youth exit care? What are their case plan goals?
- What are health, mental health, economic, educational, housing and other outcomes for youth who exit care at 18, 19, 20, 21 (if applicable to your state)?
- Does the state extend care past 18?
- If so, what kinds of services are offered to youth once they are beyond 18?
- How many youth participate in the services and extended care programs?
- Why do youth not want to participate?
- How do youth learn about extended care?
- Are there plans to work with youth to offer improved, more developmentally appropriate services (if necessary)?
- What happens to younger siblings of youth in foster care? Can older, transitioning and aging out youth remain in contact with their siblings?