



Maryland Youth Advisory Council

Annual Report 2016 - 2017

August 31, 2017

Larry Hogan

Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford

Lt. Governor

Arlene F. Lee

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Executive Summary

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council provides the opportunity for the State's young people to give feedback and recommendations regarding public policies and programs that affect their future and to take a leadership role in creating meaningful change.

In 2016-2017, 24 Councilmembers enjoyed a robust and busy council year, where their activities included:

- Holding 8 meetings (twice the required number);
- Adopting a broad legislative platform and amending the Council bylaws;
- Hosting 7 Community Conversations in their home jurisdictions, where local youth discussed issues that mattered most to them and offered solutions;
- Leading numerous presentations to lawmakers on the Council and its platform;
- Participating in Advocacy Day in Annapolis, which coincided with the Governor's Office for Children's Ice Cream Social;
- Engaging in Results-Based Accountability™ training and planning; and
- Tracking and supporting bills of interest, including offering oral and written testimony.

All meeting minutes, community conversation recaps, bylaws, and bill language are available upon request from the Governor's Office for Children.

Background and Mission of the Council

BACKGROUND

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council (the Council) was established through the General Assembly in 2008 (Chapter 559, Acts of 2008, Chapter 69, Acts of 2009, and Chapter 620 of 2016) to ensure that Maryland youth are given the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations regarding public policies and programs that affect their future. Youth are encouraged to take a leadership role in creating meaningful change.

Members are appointed by the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Delegates, the Maryland Association of Student Councils, the University System of Maryland Student Council, and the Maryland Higher Education Commission Student Advisory Council.

All youth members must be 14-22 years of age, serve a two year term (September 1 - August 31), and cannot serve more than one term.

MISSION:

As a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders from across the State, we, the Maryland Youth Advisory Council address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness, and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers.

VISION:

We strive to be an effective voice that:

- Incites change for the betterment of Maryland youth,
- Ensures equal opportunity for all youth regardless of background or circumstance,
- Initiates political conversations with youth,
- Educates youth on political issues, and
- Is respected by legislators and other stakeholders on youth issues.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Holding at least four meetings a year;
- Holding at least one public meeting on issues of importance to youth (topics can include: education, a safe learning environment, employment opportunities, increasing youth participation in government, health care access and quality of care, substance abuse and underage drinking, emotional and physical well-being, the environment, poverty, homelessness, youth access to services, suicide prevention, and educational accessibility issues for students with disabilities);
- Recommending one legislative proposal;
- Providing testimony before legislative bodies on youth issues;
- Conducting a public awareness campaign to raise awareness about the Council among

Maryland youth; and

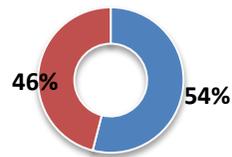
- Providing an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly.

2016-2017 Council at a Glance

The 2016-2017 Council is composed of 24 members, representing 13 counties, 13 high schools, and 9 colleges/universities. The Council is 54% female and 46% male. Of the 24 members, 12 are returning second-year members and 12 are first-year members. One member resigned from his/her position on the Council during the council year; the position was not filled.

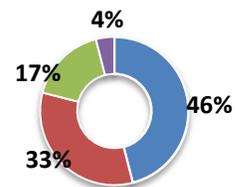


Gender



■ Female ■ Male

Race/Ethnicity



■ White ■ African American ■ Asian ■ Hispanic

2016-2017 Council Roster

2016-2017 MARYLAND YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL EXECUTIVE BOARD (elected by Councilmembers)

Chair—Darius Craig

Vice Chair—Zachary Caplan

Secretary— Ashley Russell

Legislative Committee Chair—Antonio Morrell

Public Awareness Committee Chair—Kirsten Wach

Executive Board Members— Emily Dreszer, Madeline Goldstein, Viraj Paul, Gabrielle Shlikas, and Grace Wu

APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR

Appointed in 2016

Yael Anaya—Montgomery County—Prince George’s Community College

Dianna Portee-Mason—Baltimore County—Community College of Baltimore County

Vernon Osborne—Anne Arundel County—Anne Arundel Community College

Madeline Goldstein—Washington County—Boonsboro High School

Appointed in 2015

Zachary Caplan—Baltimore County—Towson High School

Patricia Miller—Wicomico County—Salisbury University

Antonio Morrell—Prince George’s County—Prince George’s Community College

Joseph Vogel—Montgomery County—George Washington University

APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

Appointed in 2016

Gabrielle Shlikas—Harford County—Edgewood High School

Sydney Williams—Anne Arundel County—Indian Creek Upper School

Appointed in 2015

Kimberly Carter—Anne Arundel County—Our Lady of Good Council
Connor Mull— Wicomico County—James M. Bennett High School

APPOINTED BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Appointed in 2016

Darius Craig—Baltimore City—University of Maryland, College Park
Sloane Walker—Anne Arundel County—Severn School

Appointed in 2015

Jonathan Dayton—Allegany County—Mountain Ridge High School
Tyler Hagen—Baltimore County—McDaniel College
Viraj Paul—Montgomery County—Poolesville High School

APPOINTED BY THE MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Appointed in 2016

William Anderson—Frederick County - Walkersville High School
Grace Wu—Montgomery County - Richard Montgomery High School

Appointed in 2015

Emma Gilligan—St. Mary’s County - Leonardtown High School
Ryan Pickrel—Carroll County - Century High School

APPOINTED BY THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF MARYLAND STUDENT COUNCIL

Appointed in 2016

Ashley Russell—Howard County - Glenelg High School

Appointed in 2015

Kirsten Wach—Howard County—Towson University

APPOINTED BY THE MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION - STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Appointed in 2016

Emily Dreszer—Anne Arundel County - Anne Arundel Community College

Appointed in 2015

No appointments were made in 2015

Council Meeting Overview

The establishing statute requires the Council to meet at least four times each year and each meeting must be open to the public. Over the Council years, members have reflected that only meeting four times a year was not sufficient to complete its intended work and have chosen to meet monthly. The Council met once a month from September to April; meetings were held on Saturday afternoons at the Governor's Office for Children's home office located in Crownsville, Maryland. All meeting dates, times, and locations were available on the Governor's Office for Children's website.

MEETING #1: SEPTEMBER 17, 2016 (11:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR'S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

The Council kicked the year off with an overview of member responsibilities, the history of the Council, and parliamentary procedure in order to lay the groundwork for the year. Elections were held for leadership positions and Councilmembers either joined the public awareness committee or the legislative committee.

MEETING #2: OCTOBER 15, 2016 (1:00 - 4:00 PM) GOVERNOR'S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

In the second meeting of the year, Councilmembers were met with the task of selecting the issues impacting youth in Maryland about which they were most passionate. This would eventually allow the Council to form a legislative platform for the 2016-2017 year. With a large variety of options and much debate over what issues should be prioritized, it was decided the Council's legislative priorities would be mental health, substance abuse, and bullying. The approval of the legislative priorities was followed by an analysis of the issues and a discussion of tactics to resolve them.

MEETING #3: NOVEMBER 5, 2016 (1:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR'S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

Councilmembers identified the legislative priority of this year as "The health and well-being of youth of the State of Maryland" and set goals to address mental health issues and substance abuse. Meanwhile, the Council decided to continue to emphasize youth involvement and engagement as a primary goal of the Council each year. Councilmembers discussed engaging in efforts to expand support for all prioritized issues Statewide.

MEETING #4: DECEMBER 17, 2016 (1:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR’S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

During an especially busy meeting, Councilmembers watched two presentations on efforts to expand youth outreach. The first was by the Girl Scouts of Central Maryland. The organization is exploring the idea of building a youth advisory board for the Latino community and would like advice from the Council on how to create the board and how to provide opportunities for youth to hold leadership positions. Second, Will McCurry from the Governor’s Office for Children shared information from the Heroin and Opioid Emergency Taskforce including the recommendations developed to combat substance abuse. A discussion regarding substance abuse in Maryland and possible actions that the Council could take to address it was inspired by this presentation. Additionally, the Public Awareness Committee urged Councilmembers to promote the Council on their individual social media platforms. The Legislative Committee began to look at past bills of interest in the House and Senate.

MEETING #5: JANUARY 21, 2017 (1:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR’S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

Councilmembers prepared for the upcoming legislative session by drafting oral testimonies, reviewing legislative bills, and discussing the course of action the Council should take on those bills. Legislative bills continued to be monitored by the Legislative Committee and the Council will be updated on new bills as necessary.

MEETING #6: FEBRUARY 11, 2017 (1:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR’S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

With the bill drop date and legislative session quickly approaching, the Council continued to work towards the legislative priority of mental health and substance abuse by attending a presentation by an organization called On Our Own. Over two years, On Our Own conducted focus groups with youth who experienced mental health crisis or struggled with substance use to better understand the helpful and harmful aspects of their treatment. On Our Own published a final report titled, “What Helps, What Harms” (April 2016) that includes recommendations developed by the youth in the focus groups, based on their own lived experiences. The categories and recommendations covered issues of youth voice, hospitalization, mental health, substance use, education, employment, and law enforcement. The Council decided to support the recommendations outlined in the report and follow its recommendations as a guide to future discussions for the legislative priority. Additionally, the Council discussed Advocacy Day, when Councilmembers put their knowledge to the test by networking and meeting with Delegates, Senators, and other Maryland officials.

MEETING #7: MARCH 18, 2017 (1:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR’S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

With the General Assembly coming to a close, Councilmembers discussed the state of the bills the Council supported: SB 141, which provides polling places on college campuses, and SB 804, which would give Frederick County Student Members of the Board voting rights. Additionally, Councilmembers looked over the past year and reflected on what the Council did well, what could be improved, and how to expand outreach to future Councilmembers.

MEETING #8: APRIL 22, 2017 (1:00 – 4:00PM) GOVERNOR’S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

The Councilmembers held a legislative discussion on the bills that the Council supported. As expected, the two bills did not get out of committee. It was recommended that the Council meet with the sponsors of the bills during the summer to learn how the Council can improve and/or support future bills in the 2018 Session. In addition, Councilmembers reflected on what they thought the Council did positively or could have done differently. April’s meeting was the last meeting of the 2016-2017 year for Councilmembers, but the group agreed to continue their work over the 2017 summer, to develop a strategic plan to guide the Council’s work for the future.

Revision of Bylaws

During the 2016-2017 year, the Council amended its bylaws to account for changes made with the passage of a revision bill during the 2016 legislative session to alter the Council’s structure. The amendments updated the size of the Council in accordance with State law and reduced the Executive Board to reflect the total size of the Council. The Council also added three positions appointed by the Chair: the Parliamentarian, Historian, and Technology Officer. Eligibility for these positions previously required an appointee to be a member of the Executive Board. However, this requirement was also removed to reflect the Council’s reduced size.

Committees

PUBLIC AWARENESS COMMITTEE

This year the Council's Public Awareness Committee focused on expanding the Council's online presence. Many ideas were discussed to expand the Council's online visibility and spread the word about the Council's mission. The Public Awareness Committee also discussed various ways in which the Council could more effectively make itself known to legislators and the Maryland General Assembly.

One way in which the Council expanded its online presence was a "Get to Know the Council" section added to the Council's webpage. This included a picture of each Councilmember, the county that he or she represented, the school he or she attended, and a quote from each member about why he or she wanted to join the Council.

The committee also proposed ideas about how to expand this new section of the Council's webpage. Ideas included a councilmember "take-over-day," where a Councilmember would write a blog page about a "day-in-the-life" of a member during Council business. One example could be a Councilmember's day in the State capital of Annapolis.

The committee was also interested in expanding the Council's social media accounts. Proposals were drafted outlining what the Council would like to do with its Instagram and Twitter accounts, though these proposals needed to be amended to include *why* the Council would like separate accounts from the Governor's Office for Children.

The committee also focused on brainstorming ideas for small items that the Council could hand out at events. These events included the Ice Cream Social and the Community Conversations. Ideas for these items included business cards with information about the Council, such as the email address and name of the Chair. Other ideas included distributing small flyers or pens with the Council's logo.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The Council's Legislative Committee tracked the progress of bills and recommended specific bills that the Council could support. The Committee also provided oral and written testimony on bills of interest to the Council.

2017 Legislative Session

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM AND LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

Legislative Platform

During the 2014-15 term, the Legislative Committee spearheaded the development of a Legislative Platform as a way to codify the views of the Council and Maryland youth. The

platform spans seven broad subjects: Youth Representation, Youth Leadership, Education, Health and Social Issues, Youth Safety and Student Discipline, Environmental Issues, and Youth Employment. Contained within the platform are over 70 planks indicating either an area of support or opposition in relation to the seven subjects. The platform was reviewed, additions were made, and the Council approved the 2016-2017 Legislative Platform during the October meeting.

The goal of the platform is multifaceted. Firstly, the platform allows the Council to share its views and recommendations for Maryland through a central, easy to follow document. Secondly, the adoption of a platform enables the Council to advocate more broadly for youth, and individual Councilmembers will be empowered by this document as youth advocates. Finally, this document serves as a testament to the abilities of youth to be informed on a wide array of subject matters enough so to make specific, action-oriented comments and recommendations.

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council Legislative Platform serves both the Council and its peers across the State as well. The platform promotes informed advocacy, future Council discussions, and ultimately a better defined and organized Council. As a living document, the platform is sure to evolve with the needs of youth and continue to influence change for years to come.

Legislative Priority

Each year, the Council selects an issue area as a legislative priority. The priority serves as a focus of the work of the Council in the community and during legislative session. The Council held a community conversation during a meeting and reviewed the results of the two community conversations hosted during the summer of the 2015-2016 year. The topics of mental health and substance use were prominent in all of these conversations. Discussions during the community conversations included concerns around depression, anxiety, suicide, binge drinking, and drug use – including growing concerns with heroin/opioid use. Council Advisor Christina Drushel Williams also shared that these issues were discussed in many of the Council's application responses.

2017 LEGISLATIVE BILLS

During the 2017 legislative session, the Council provided both written and oral testimony on two bills. These bills promoted youth voice and leadership in decision-making processes such as the ability to vote in local and general elections and granting voting rights to student members of the board of education. Unfortunately, neither bill was voted out of committee. Looking to the future, the Council plans to continue supporting efforts which allow youth greater opportunities to exercise their right to vote, and for Student Members of the Board to be able to serve in a similar capacity as their adult peers.

SB 141 ELECTION LAW – POLLING PLACES ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

This bill required local boards of elections to establish a polling place at each senior institution of higher education that had residential student housing on campus, and defined the term "senior institution of higher education" as an institution of postsecondary education that generally limits enrollment to graduates of secondary schools and awards degrees at the baccalaureate or graduate level.

The bill was introduced on January 26, 2017 but did not make it out of committee because of questions about the logistics of establishing new polling places.

SB 804/HB1028 FREDERICK County BOARD OF EDUCATION – STUDENT MEMBER

This bill alters the duties, rights, and privileges of the student member of the Frederick County Board of Education. In addition, the bill modifies the manner in which the student member is elected.

The Council supported the bill to grant voting rights to the Frederick County Public School Student Member of the Board of Education. This bill was introduced at a time when several counties across the state were adopting measures to expand the student member's voting rights. The Council has supported and continues to support these measures, as Student Members on Boards of Education are important tools for student advocacy throughout Maryland. The bill was written by the Frederick County Board of Education and several members of the Frederick County delegation following a favorable vote by the Frederick Board of Education in 2016. However, the delegation was split on the bill and ultimately, for that reason, it did not make it out of committee.

ADVOCACY DAY

This year, the Council's Advocacy Day was on February 21, 2017, when Council members spent the day in Annapolis. All members were encouraged to attend Advocacy Day, which was an opportunity to see the legislative process firsthand. Parents were also invited to join the members throughout the day's activities.

Council members met in the State House Lobby to view House and Senate Floor Proceedings, where they watched debate over a bill. The Council was recognized in each chamber during special announcements.

Members then watched hearings in the Ways and Means Committee. Afterwards, Councilmembers prepared for the Governor's Office for Children's Ice Cream Social. This was an opportunity for councilmembers to talk with Local Management Boards, senators, delegates, and secretaries to raise awareness about the Council and learn more about the initiatives of Local Management Boards. Members also took turns helping to run the sign in table.

After the Ice Cream Social, Councilmembers headed to the office of Delegate Aruna Miller of Montgomery County and met with her staff to talk more about the Council.

Other Meetings and Events

HOWARD COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS MEETING

Councilmembers Kirsten Wach and Emily Dreszer represented the Council at the Howard County Association of Student Councils meeting on Wednesday, October 19th at Homewood School in Columbia, MD.

CHILDREN'S CABINET MEETING

Members of the Council, Governor's Office for Children staff members, and the Honorable Lt. Governor Boyd K. Rutherford attended the December meeting of the Maryland Children's Cabinet. This meeting served as an opportunity for the Council to speak with the secretaries of Maryland's child-serving agencies about the Council's legislative platform for the 2017 General Assembly and Community Conversation Initiative.

Members provided an overview of the Council's mission, vision, history, past legislative priorities, and supported legislative bills. Members were also able to speak about the results of their community conversations and share some of the issues being discussed by youth and young adults in their communities. There was discussion between the Councilmembers and the secretaries about how the agencies could assist in addressing the issues raised during the Community Conversations. The secretaries suggested creating for a line of communication between each agency and the Council to regularly share information about recent initiatives and to ask questions about upcoming legislative and policy.

One of the most interesting parts of the meeting was when Lt. Governor Rutherford arrived. The Lt. Governor was eager to discuss how the Administration is addressing the current heroin and opioid epidemic in Maryland and was excited that the Council was including substance use as an area of focus.

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCILMEMBER MEETING

On January 13, 2017, Councilmember Darius Craig met with Baltimore City Councilmembers Eric Costello, Brandon Scott, and Shannon Sneed to present the work of the Council and its legislative priorities. Mr. Craig shared why he joined the Council and about police-community relations in Baltimore City.

WOMEN'S CAUCUS PRESENTATION

During the 2017 Legislative Session, the Council had the opportunity to present to the Women's Caucus. Councilmembers Gabrielle Shlikas, Zach Caplan, and Grace Wu attended the meeting of the Women's Caucus, chaired by Montgomery County Representative, Aruna Miller. The Councilmembers observed the Caucus discuss bills and vote on the sub-committee's recommended stances on those bills. Presentations from other groups were given to the

Caucus, including those on constituent polling and the process to appoint members to councils and commissions through the Governor's Appointment Office.

During the Council's presentation, members distributed packets to the present delegates and senators. These packets included pens, pins, as well as informational flyers about the mission of the Council. Mr. Caplan spoke about the mission and purpose of the Council, Council structure and membership, and previous legislative priorities. He also told the Caucus about the current legislative priority of mental health and substance use.

Ms. Wu spoke next, sharing why she became involved in the Council, as well as explaining the community outreach that the Council does through the Community Conversations. Ms. Wu also explained the link between the information gathered at the Community Conversations and the Legislative focus of this year's Council.

Ms. Shlikas spoke next to share a bit about herself, including what drew her to the Council. She described her passion for government and women's empowerment, and how this is carried out in the Maryland Youth Advisory Council. She explained further the leadership structure of the Council, and the strong presence of female leadership and opportunities presented by the Council.

Lastly, the Councilmembers and Ms. Drushel Williams took questions from the members of the Caucus. Questions involved previous priorities of the Council, including financial literacy. Other topics branched into the application season for the Council. Later the Council was recognized on the floor of the Senate, and witnessed testimony and debate on proposed bills.

Out of this opportunity, a relationship was built between the Council and the Chair of the Women's Caucus, Delegate Aruna Miller.

NEW GENESIS TOTAL PRAISE CENTER COMMUNITY FORUM

On Tuesday April 18, 2017, Darius Craig attended a community panel discussion at the New Genesis Total Praise Center in West Baltimore. Mr. Craig was asked to serve on the panel, as a youth representative from Baltimore City to discuss the crime epidemic in the City. The panel featured a police officer, a city councilmember, and other activists and officials in the Baltimore area.

The topics raised during the meeting included community accountability in regards to crime prevention, woes within the Baltimore City School system, and the City's role in fighting crime. Many attendees voiced their concerns with the current policy towards fighting and preventing crime in Baltimore. Darius made several points such as "holding elected officials accountable", and "more involvement by parents". Panelists and attendees were all deeply engaged in the conversation.

MEETING WITH DELEGATE ARUNA MILLER – FINANCIAL LITERACY

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council began a relationship with Maryland Delegate Aruna Miller after the Council spoke to the Women's Caucus, which the Delegate chairs. Delegate Miller then reached out to the Council to discuss financial literacy in Maryland among youth.

The Council and Delegate Miller discussed the lack of financial literacy demonstrated among Maryland Youth, focusing on what education is offered or required in public education. Topics the group felt were not sufficiently addressed included interest, loans, credit cards, credit, checking and savings accounts, taxes, and many other issues.

After identifying these problems, the Council and Delegate Miller began to discuss possible solutions. Options discussed were in-school programs, field trips, and guest speakers. The Council then focused in on the program Junior Achievement Biz Town. The Council gathered and shared information on Biz Town, and current financial literacy curriculums in Maryland public schools.

As of July 24, Delegate Miller and the Council continue to work together to improve financial literacy among youth in Maryland. Possible future ventures include speaking to county and school officials, as well as advising Delegate Miller on legislation.

RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY™ AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES WITH KAREN FINN

Councilmembers met at Community Place to be briefed on the Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) framework with Karen Finn from Clear Impact, LLC. To better track the implementation of the work the Council is doing, Ms. Finn prepared an exercise for Councilmembers to get hands-on training with RBA/Turn the Curve. Councilmembers were given three results and their corresponding indicator to work with (Youth have Opportunity for Employment and Career: Percent of Youth Ages 16-24 Not in School and Not Working; Healthy Children: Percent of Maryland Public School Students in Grades 9-12 Who Have Ever Had a Drink of Alcohol; and, Children are Successful in School: Number of Bullying And Harassment Incidents Reported). Councilmembers chose to work with the result Children are Successful in School Results and the Indicator of Bullying and Harassment.

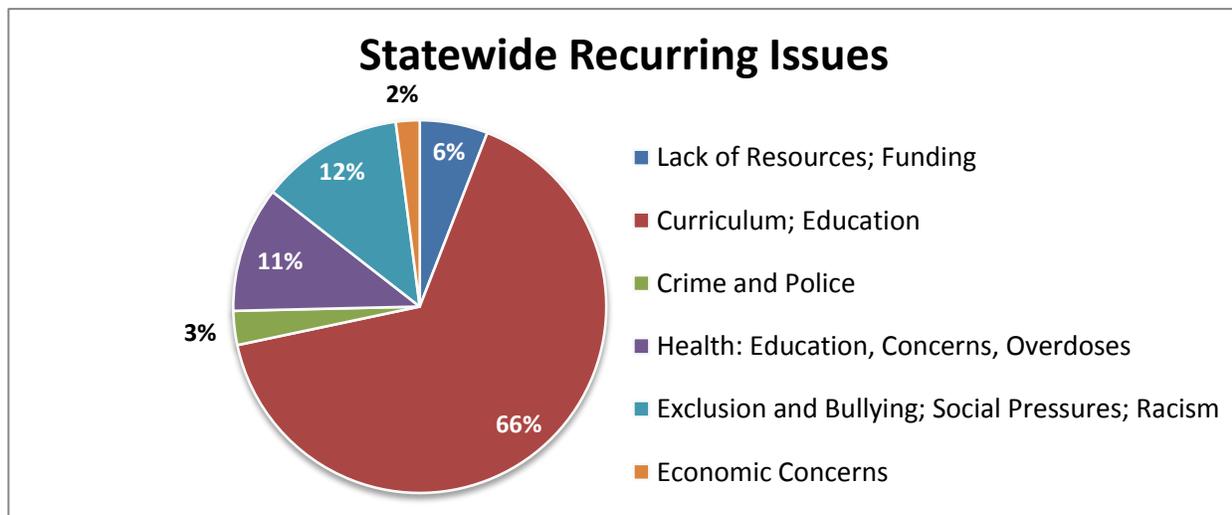
Councilmembers then dissected the result and indicator to get the story behind Bullying, brainstorming key partners and ideas that could help the outcome, envisioning turning the curve, and seeing the realistic options that could be in play to prevent Bullying and Harassment. From there the Council used the same process to develop performance measures for the Council to improve accountability.

Community Conversations

During the 2012-13 and 2014-15 Council years, members of the Council received training on how to facilitate Community Conversations by Youth as Resources, a youth-led nonprofit grant-making organization in Baltimore City. Community Conversations provide an opportunity for a community to identify and prioritize its needs and develop solutions and action plans through a facilitated conversation. The conversation guides participants to identify the community's assets and problems, the causes of each problem, and the solutions to the problems based on the identified causes. The group then develops an action plan which includes identifying targets for demands and allies for support. The Council focuses Community Conversations on youth and young adults as a way to engage young people in creating community change and allowing the Council to share the thoughts and ideas of Maryland youth to the Governor, State agencies, legislators, and community leaders.

During the 2016-2017 year, the Council's goal was to host Community Conversations each month in Counties represented by council members. This initiative was based on the recommendation and planning of the 2015-2016 Co-Chair, Allison Smith.

Community Conversation participants were encouraged to share issues or concerns they have observed or experienced in their communities. Individual and group responses from participants were recorded, yielding data from seven Community Conversations with over 375 responses. This data was collected by the Council and analyzed by the Governor's Office for Children. The chart below summarizes some of the key findings gathered in the Community Conversations by grouping together similar issues within broader categories.

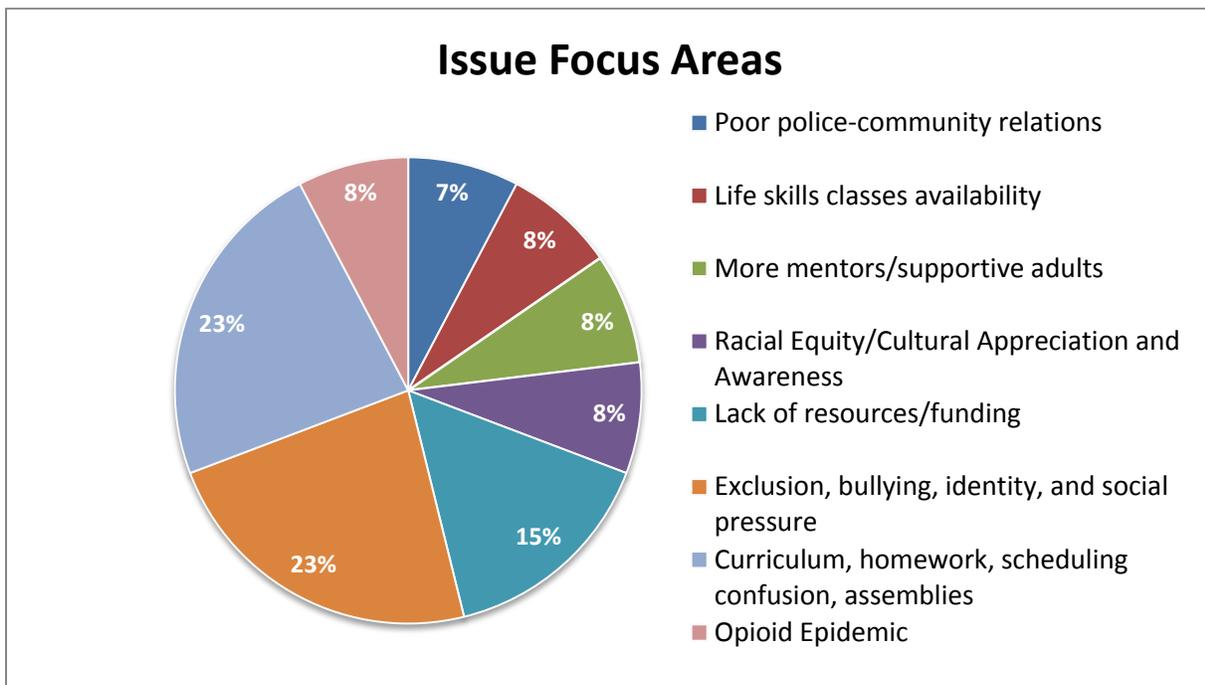


The issue category that received the most responses was Curriculum/Education (66%). The three most frequently recurring grievances within this broader category were an overemphasis on tests and scores under the current grading policies, the lack of life skill courses and their limited availability, and a workload which resulted in undesirable academic pressure.

The second most popular issue category was Exclusion and Bullying; Social Pressures; Racism (12%). The top three subcategories within this broad issue category were a lack of diversity and acceptance in the community, bullying and cyberbullying, and racism.

The third most common issue category was Health: Education, Concerns, and Overdoses (11%). The three most frequently cited complaints within this category included a weak sex education program in schools, lack of support and awareness for mental health issues, and drug overdoses resulting from the opioid crisis.

Finally, the participants of each Community Conversation identified, as a whole, one or two issue focus areas which were of particular salience within the local community. The following image displays these specially identified issue focus areas. Taken together, these issue focus areas encapsulate the topics that Maryland’s youth view as the most pressing concerns in their communities.



Overall, the Council saw great success in the Community Conversations initiative and believes it is of great value. The Community Conversations were helpful in identifying common concerns across the State and enabled Councilmembers to connect and hear from the youth they serve and represent.

BALTIMORE CITY: NOVEMBER 12, 2016 (5:00-7:00 PM) – PATTERSON PARK LIBRARY

On November 17, 2016 at the Patterson Park Branch Library, the Baltimore City Community Conversation was facilitated by Councilmember Darius Craig. Members from the community,

particularly youth, were given the opportunity to discuss and prioritize problems, issues, and concerns relating to Baltimore youth. After reviewing an extensive list of problems in the community, as a group, participants were able to prioritize “Lack of access to resources” and “Poor police-community relations” as the top issues.

Causes of Lack of Access to Resources

Participants spoke extensively about a lack of access to resources. These resources included, but were not limited to, jobs, guidance and support, and youth recreation funding. Participants also pointed to the lack of community engagement and feedback as causes for this issue. The participants noted that more funding from local governments and community engagement could address this problem.

Causes for Poor Police-Community Relations

Participants also spoke of the poor relationship between Baltimore City Police Department and the communities they serve, an issue that has plagued Baltimore for decades. Causes for this distrust included, but are not limited to, concerns about police misconduct, excessive use of force, lack of communication between police and communities, and police not being able to relate to the communities they served.

Solutions for Poor Police Community Relations

Participants brainstormed solutions for this issue. A few solutions stood out amongst everyone. The first was to ensure that police officers reflect the communities they are serving. Participants felt that this would create better relationships since the officers and community members could relate to each other. Another potential solution was an updated sensitivity training. Everyone felt that police are not properly trained to handle certain situations, which in many cases can turn deadly. Although there were many solutions, the final that stood out the most was the need for community-police liaisons. The participants felt that there needed to be more engagement between the community and police officials, and that community liaisons would be beneficial to bridging the gap.

ST. MARY’S COUNTY: NOVEMBER 14, 2016 (5:30-7:30 PM) – CHANCELLOR’S RUN REGIONAL PARK – LOFFLER CENTER

The St. Mary’s County Community Conversation was held on November 14, 2016 at Loffler Center in Chancellors Run Regional Park from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. The conversation was hosted by Councilmember Emma Gilligan and Council Advisor Christina Drushel Williams.

The conversation began with an introduction to the work of the Council in advocating for youth, as well as an explanation of the purpose of the Community Conversation: to organize and empower youth in addressing youth issues specific to the local community. The conversation then moved on to the “Hand, Head, Heart” exercise, in which attendees amalgamated their

skills (hand), knowledge (head), and passions (heart) in a group list. The assets and strengths of the community represented by the attendees were also listed. Key assets of the community included the resources and STEM emphasis provided by the Patuxent River Naval Air Station, a Higher Education Center, and close-knit community relationships.

The conversation then turned to community issues, such as homelessness, lack of residential medical resources readily available, and the repeated mention of youth struggles with self-identity and social pressure. Participants decided to prioritize the need for mentors and supportive adults, as well as the issue of self-identity and social pressure. Solutions were developed to address the need for an increase in effective mentors for youth. These solutions included adult mentor training (emphasizing long-term dependability and other components of relationship building), opportunities for youth and adults to shadow one another for a “day in the life” approach, and reevaluation and expansion of parenting groups and classes to encourage support in relationships between fellow parents as well as between parents and children.

WICOMICO COUNTY: DECEMBER 19, 2016 (6:00-8:00 PM) – SALISBURY UNIVERSITY – CONWAY HALL

The Wicomico County Community Conversation was hosted by Councilmember Connor Mull. The group participated in the Head, the Hand, the Heart, the Human exercise and identified strengths and skills that they all brought to the table to contribute to their community. Discussion at the meeting focused on the opioid epidemic and on racial equity/cultural awareness. The group believed that more discussion about substance use and abuse, especially in schools, would lessen the stigma and encourage more people to seek treatment. They also believed that more job availability on the Eastern Shore would help create possibilities and a sense of hope for a future that may lead to less drug abuse.

FREDERICK COUNTY: JANUARY 23, 2017 (4:30-6:30 PM) – C. BURR ARTZ PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Frederick County Community Conversation was hosted by Councilmember Will Anderson. Discussion at the meeting focused on college-level class offering, the County budget, differences in opportunities at different schools, and school funding. The meeting highlighted differences that set high schools in the County apart from one another. Topics the students focused on were college readiness and courses offered in schools. They believed Frederick County Public Schools should do a better job of offering college-level classes and differentiating between International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and dual enrollment opportunities. The students identified the Board of Education, the Teachers' Union, and Student Councils as allies and avenues for affecting change.

BALTIMORE COUNTY: JANUARY 27, 2017 (5:00-7:00 PM) – TOWSON HIGH SCHOOL

Students from the greater Towson community and throughout Baltimore County had a discussion on the wellbeing of young people in Baltimore County. When discussing the

strengths of Baltimore County, much of the emphasis was placed on the numerous opportunities Baltimore County Public Schools County were offering to its students to become involved in student organizations and clubs outside of the classroom. In addition, participants were complimentary of the many magnet programs at County schools, such as the law and public policy program at Towson High School, the location of the Community Conversation. A leading strength highlighted throughout the conversation was the easy access students had to leadership opportunities and how that has not only benefited those individual students, but the organizations they are a part of.

Although the students were quite proud of themselves and their activism, they have a lot they would like to change in Baltimore County, starting with the lack of life skills taught in the classroom. Students easily agreed that a strong academic curriculum is crucial to the wellbeing of County students, but the attempt to mix life skills in with courses has not made much of an impact. Instead of going over credit scores for a few minutes in economics and then home safety in engineering class, students believed that a standalone home economics course should be required in order to graduate. Many students felt as though they have been inadequately prepared to deal with day-to-day tasks that everyone has to do after graduating.

Another major area of concern among County students was the poorly implemented grading policy throughout the county. Not only were the students unable to comprehend the policy, but they felt that teachers did not grade uniformly. Students stated that the new grading policy added more pressure on students to succeed on their tests, which impacted their mental wellbeing. The Baltimore County participants stated that they were not only placed at an academic disadvantage in the past year, but an emotional one as well.

Finally, minority representation within County was a major concern. Students that identify as LGBTQ+ reported that they felt as though their health issues were not covered in health class, in addition to the fact that they had no easy access to have an open conversation with a trusted adult about contraceptive use. The health curriculum does not place a heavy emphasis on how students can be safe during intercourse, another indication that students are not receiving the type of knowledge and life skills they feel as though County should be responsible in teaching them. Students also shared their worries over the lack of minorities in leadership and teaching positions when compared to the composition of the student population.

The conversation elicited strong opinions. Ultimately students felt optimistic about the future for Baltimore County youth. Participants left the Conversation energized, ready to continue ensuring their voices were heard.

CARROLL COUNTY: FEBRUARY 15, 2017 (6:00-8:00 PM) – CENTURY HIGH SCHOOL

The Carroll County Community Conversation was hosted on February 15, 2017 at Century High School. Councilmember Ryan Pickrel and Council Advisor Christina Drushel Williams hosted this event. This was the first Community Conversation to gain local newspaper coverage from the Carroll County Times.

The first topic in the Community Conversation was assets and strengths in Carroll County. The students discussed how Carroll County has a quality education system, multiple youth leadership opportunities, a growing community, and much more. The conversation was then guided to problems, issues, and concerns in the community. The most notable issues brought up were lack of diversity in the county and perceived lack of acceptance. Academic issues included over-testing with exams - High School Assessment (HSA), Advanced Placement (AP), Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and finals - and school assemblies and curriculum not relating to youth, especially with regard to how topics are presented.

The students went on to detail the causes of ineffective school assemblies. The major causes identified were that the assemblies are created by adults with no youth input, students' expectation that assemblies will be boring, and messages in the assembly are "don't do this, or be punished". The conversation finished with students offering a solution - the students planned to have a meeting with the administration of the school regarding a "Unity Day". In this meeting students would set a formal time and agenda in advanced, have a clear objective, and provide multiple options for feedback on full execution. This "Unity Day" was successfully implemented later in the year.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY: MARCH 28, 2017 (5:00-7:00 PM) – RICHARD MONTGOMERY HIGH SCHOOL

The Montgomery County Community Conversation was hosted March 28, 2017 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm at Richard Montgomery High School. The Community Conversation was hosted by councilmembers Grace Wu and Viraj Paul, and Council Advisor Christina Drushel Williams.

The Community Conversation began by briefly introducing the background of the Council and the Community Conversation Initiative. The first part of the Community Conversation was discussing the assets and strengths of Montgomery County. Some common assets brought up were the many education programs available, including magnet and International Baccalaureate programs, the diversity of the county, many youth leadership programs, and access to technology. The conversation then went on to discuss the issues and concerns in the County, including the achievement gap, Wi-Fi in schools, the lack of after-school support, and crowded buses and class sizes. The most prominent issue addressed was the disparity between funding and access to resources in different parts of the County (upper and lower Montgomery County). Solutions developed for the achievement gap and access to funding started by reaching out to the County's several government associations, including the Student

Government Association and minority scholars program and testifying at the County's board of education meetings.

WASHINGTON COUNTY: APRIL 24, 2017 (6:00-8:00 PM) – WASHINGTON County FREE LIBRARY

The Washington County Community Conversation took place on April 24th 2017 at the Washington County Free Library. Councilmember Madeline Goldstein hosted. The group identified bullying and homework as key concerns for their community. Bullying included harassment at school and “behind the internet,” and participants said that they were not sure what their schools were doing to address bullying. Homework concerns included not having enough time to study, too much daily work to keep up, repetitive assignments and busywork, and not having clear instructions.

HARFORD COUNTY: JULY 14, 2017 (3:00 – 5:00 PM) – ABINGDON BRANCH LIBRARY

The Harford County Community Conversation took place on Friday, July 14th at the Abingdon Public Library. There were seven people in attendance, and issues facing youth were thoroughly discussed.

First, the participants began by naming strengths in the Harford County community. These strengths included affordable and accessible housing, strong sports communities, focusing on basketball and soccer, as well as a well-structured education system. Other strengths included very impassioned and dedicated youth populations, as well as a variety of student organizations such as Student Members of the Board of Education (SMOB), local Student Government Associations (SGA), and the Maryland Association of Student Council's (MASC).

Then, the participants addressed problems that they saw in their personal communities and Harford County as a whole. Problems discussed were school bullying, fighting in schools, lack of school discipline, school underfunding, and teacher pay. Other issues involved a lack of awareness about programs, in school and in the community, that aid people with drugs and mental illness problems.

Two problems that were looked at more closely were fights in school, as well as lack of school funding. The assembled group then dove into the reasons they felt that fights in school happened. This boiled down to immaturity, lack of respect for authority, and a lack of authority present in problematic areas where fights occurred, such as busy hallways. Possible solutions to the problem were discussed, including an increase in authority presence in high risk areas, outside speakers/experts addressing the students on issues such as violence and bullying, and stressing nonviolent problem solving methods in schools.

The next issue discussed was school funding, with a focus on teacher salary, student voice at individual schools, how youth could impact funding from the County and State government, and retaining effective teachers. Solutions discussed included having students become more involved with their local Parent Teacher Associations, school by school fundraising, and advocating for great voting rights for students on the school board.

Improvements and Recommendations for the 2017-2018 Council Year

During the final meeting of the year, Council Advisor Christina Drushel Williams facilitated a reflection activity for members of the Council to think about the council year, focusing on 1) What worked, 2) What didn't work, and 3) Suggestions of improvement for next year. Below are the results of the reflection activity.

WHAT WORKED? WHAT DID YOU LIKE?

- Committee breakouts at meeting
- Communication - receiving reminder emails with materials before meetings and assignment reminders
- Monthly meetings with an accessible and consistent location
- Community Conversations - spacing; ability for Councilmembers to plan and take ownership
- Icebreaker activities
- Opportunities to promote MYAC - Children's Cabinet, ice cream social, women caucus, legislators
- Testifying and writing testimony
- Ms. Christina [Drushel Williams]
- Food at meetings and Community Conversations
- Creativity and ability to share ideas and views within the group
- Networking and presenting opportunities for other organizations during meetings
- Marketing – more people and organizations are hearing about the Council and looking to attend events

WHAT DID NOT WORK? WHAT DID YOU NOT LIKE?

- Lack of communication between members and committees
- Agency Liaisons communications
- Communication with legislators
- Meeting attendance
- Following up on meetings, ideas, legislative platform, and legislative priority
- County representation
- More participation in committees, tasks, and emails
- Not enough committee time during meetings
- Lack of information sharing between committees
- Icebreakers
- Pace of session was too fast and hard to keep up
- Long travel for some
- Publicity
- More community events beyond Community Conversations

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER NEXT YEAR? WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE?

- Better use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) – Councilmembers use personal social media accounts to promote the Council and its activities
- For Councilmembers that have long travel distance – explore use of conference calls options or video streaming during the meeting
- Increase marketing of Council:
 - Present to other youth councils/organizations – MASC, USMSC, MHEC SAC, etc.
- Host and attend more community events – attend Governor/agency events, youth-oriented events
- Improve Legislative work:
 - Begin legislative topic discussion earlier (1st meeting);
 - Create a clear timeline for legislative session and tasks;
 - Coordinate legislative agendas with other youth advocacy organizations (MASC, etc.)
 - Focus efforts on a few bills
 - Assign bills to a Councilmember to follow and provide updates
- Improve Committee Communication:
 - Committee chairs take a lead on committee communication
 - Delegate assignments to committee members

The Council recommends to the 2017-18 Councilmembers to review and consider these ideas for the improvement of the Council and related activities during the 2017-18 term.