

# *2024 Legislative Priorities*

## CYPAC



**Connecticut Youth  
Political Action Center**

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# Affordable Housing

Connecticut is an expensive state to live in, and as of 2023, the sixth most expensive state in the entire country (Nolan, Business Insider). This can be a problem for young people looking to buy or rent residential property in the state, typically discouraging them from doing so all together. To add onto this, Connecticut is also facing an affordable housing shortage, with approximately -89,000 affordable homes available for low income renters (National Low Income Housing Coalition). Yes, that number is negative. This is an issue for young people in Connecticut. Without enough affordable housing available, young people are forced to either stay at home, relocate, or even worse, become homeless. According to the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's Fair Market Rent, a household in Connecticut must make \$66,412 annually in order to afford a two-bedroom rental home. In the same state, the median household income for people under 25 years old is just above \$45,000, that's over a \$20,000 difference (Neilsberg). The answer is simple: without the development of affordable housing in Connecticut, young people cannot live here.

The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC) urges Connecticut lawmakers to pass legislation guaranteeing housing affordability, particularly for young and low-income families. We also urge lawmakers to pass legislation to increase Connecticut's current stock of affordable housing, through means such as brownfield redevelopment and transit-oriented development.

# Environment & Climate Change

The environment and global climate change have always been large factors for young Connecticut residents. To start, our state has some of the worst air quality in the nation. With the Hartford-East Hartford metropolitan area just out of the top-25 worst air quality and Fairfield County being one of the most polluted counties in the country. In addition to this, Middlesex, New Haven, and Fairfield Counties all received F's for ground level ozone pollution on the American Lung Association's (ALA) "State of the Air" report, the association's annual air quality report card (2022).

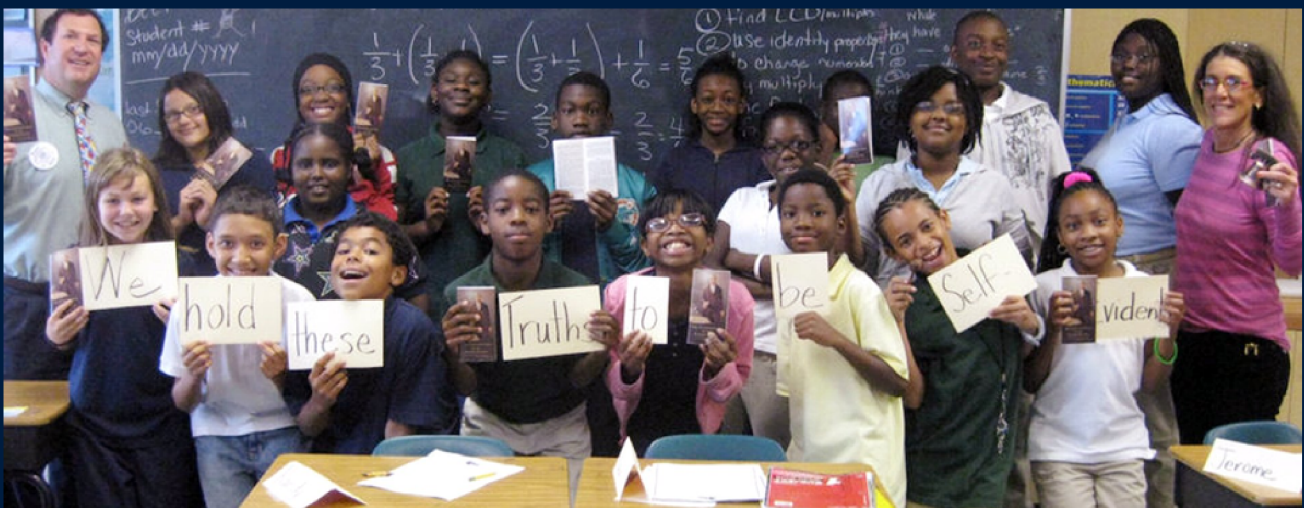
Connecticut is also in danger due to sea level rise and flooding, both of which can be attributed to global climate change. It is estimated that 61% of Connecticut residents live in flood prone areas, not including the threat of storm surge and storm related flooding. Coastal communities, industrial sites, and vital infrastructure such as railroads, I-95, and local airports are all at risk (Quincy, CT DEEP). The effects of climate change can be seen today, however most of these effects will be seen in years, when the younger generations are older. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure we protect Connecticut's future and maintain our environment.

We, the Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC), urge the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) to continue to enact legislation to improve the quality of our air, water, soil, and environment. Specifically, we encourage the Connecticut General Assembly and state lawmakers to revisit the ban on gas emissions in order to improve our air quality for future generations. Lastly, we advocate for the creation of programs and grants to ensure municipal coastal resiliency and education on global climate change.

# Civic Education

At the Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC), we believe civic education is core to the educational curriculum. We believe that every student, in Connecticut and the United States (U.S.), should have access to a quality and well-rounded civic education. This includes curriculum on the structure of the American government, your rights as a citizen, your duties as a citizen, and the importance of voting and civic engagement. Overall, civics education has been on the decline in the U.S., while issues such as polarization rises (CT Museum of Culture & History). In order to ensure young people understand the government, their rights and duties as citizens, and grow up to be active citizens, action must be taken to increase the quality and access to civic education around the state.

The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center urges the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) and state lawmakers to make efforts to reinforce the importance of civic education in schools and pursue legislation to ensure minimal civic education standards are applied to curriculum in schools.



5th graders learning civics.

# Mental Health Resources

Four years removed from the pandemic there is a growing concern about the mental health of young people in Connecticut. The prevalence of mental health issues among youth is alarming, and it is clear that more resources are needed to address this pressing issue. According to Sunny Patel, M.D., a Senior Advisor to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), one in five children in the state has a diagnosable mental health disorder (Patel). This means that thousands of young people are struggling with conditions such as anxiety, depression, and ADHD on a daily basis. Without adequate support and treatment options, these conditions can have long-lasting effects on their overall well-being. Moreover, investing in mental health resources for young people is not only beneficial for individuals but also for society as a whole. Untreated mental health issues can lead to poor academic performance, substance abuse problems, and even suicide attempts among youth (McQuaid, CT News Junkie). By providing more resources and support systems for Connecticut's youth population, we can prevent these negative outcomes and promote healthier communities.

We, the Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC), urge the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) to continue prioritizing investment in mental health services for our youth population today, so we can ensure a brighter future for all residents of Connecticut tomorrow.

# Pledge to Advance Connecticut (PACT) Program

Affordable access to quality education is an issue of great importance among Connecticut students and families. Since the Pledge to Advance Connecticut (PACT) Program's inception in early 2020, enrollment and retention at Connecticut's 13 community colleges has steadily increased. The adoption of this program has led to the widespread accessibility of college education for people of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Since its adoption, thousands of students have taken advantage of the program (Sullivan, CGA). Given the cost of a program of this magnitude, frequent reauthorization is required by the Connecticut Legislature under the purview of the Committee of Higher Education. Given the cost of attendance to state colleges and universities, offering students two years of debt-free public education will be highly advantageous to Connecticut students and the state's economic progression.

The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center's imperative goal is for the PACT program to continue to be reauthorized and solidify itself as an integral part of Connecticut's community college system.



Tunxis Community College, Farmington, Connecticut

# Clean Energy

Similar to the environment and climate change, clean energy is a high priority for us at the Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC). As mentioned before, Connecticut has reached unhealthy air quality. In order to combat this, the state needs to lessen its dependence on fossil fuels by pursuing clean energy alternatives; such as wind and solar. Late last year, the Park City Wind project failed, citing economic headwinds (Spiegel, CT Mirror). If the state can rebid and execute a new agreement, the project could bring over 300 megawatts of energy to Connecticut homes, schools, and businesses (Hughes, CT Mirror). The state's demand for electricity is growing and off-shore wind can provide. Fossil fuel reliance is an item of the past, it's time for the state to move forward with cleaner, safer, and more environmentally-friendly energy alternatives

The Block Island Wind Farm, the first off-shore wind farm in the United States (U.S.), has had tremendous results. Just five turbines power 17,000 homes, and only 10% of the turbines' power completely powers the island—exporting the rest to the Rhode Island mainland (Ørsted). The island transitioned from diesel generators back in 2016 and have moved to completely clean energy. It's time to emulate this success for Connecticut.

The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC) urges the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) and Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) to consider future agreements concerning the creation of wind turbines off the east coast and for the CGA to continue to enact legislation surrounding clean energy.

# Juvenile Justice

Connecticut has one of the country's highest levels of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system, detaining an out-sized number of children of color relative to their peers (Thomas, CT Mirror). The state has made significant efforts to address the needs of young offenders and provide them with appropriate rehabilitation and support. However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure a fair and effective juvenile justice system.

Connecticut has implemented various programs aimed at diverting young offenders away from the criminal justice system. These programs focus on providing counseling, education, and vocational training to help juveniles reintegrate into society. Additionally, the state has established specialized courts that deal exclusively with juvenile cases, ensuring that their unique needs are met.

Despite these efforts, there are still concerns about the treatment of juveniles in the criminal justice system. The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC) urges Connecticut lawmakers to pass legislation that emphasizes more resources to prevention and early intervention programs to address the root causes of delinquency. We also urge lawmakers to focus the debate on diversion programs, prevention strategies, and address racial disparities within the system. By doing so, Connecticut can ensure a fairer and more effective approach towards juvenile offenders.



# Absenteeism in Schools

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, chronic absenteeism rates have climbed in Connecticut. Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student missing 10% of in-class instruction time, about 18 of the 180 in an academic calendar year (State of CT). Between 2017 and 2019, rates remained at about 10%, however during and after the pandemic those rates grew to over 20% (CT Mirror). This percentage equates to over 100,000 students across the state. Illness and the pandemic can be to blame for this, however the mental health crisis and family obligations are also contributing.

However, in better news, the absenteeism rate dropped about 3% this past year; going from 23.7% to 21%, according to the Connecticut State Department of Education. Although we are seeing some steady improvements from pre-pandemic levels, there is still a lot of progress to be made.

The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC) urges the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) and Connecticut lawmakers to pass legislation to solve chronic absenteeism in our schools. Along with the state and local boards of education, we advocate for more inclusive and safe school environments, increased access to physical and mental health resources, and increased engagement between families and school officials.

# Homelessness

As discussed in a prior section, Connecticut is an expensive state to live in and with a lagging supply of affordable housing, homelessness is unfortunately high. According to the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), the number of homeless individuals in Connecticut has risen in the past couple of years, a trend that has been seen in many other states (HUD). More specifically, there are nearly 3,000 accounted for homeless people in the state, including nearly 500 young people (CT Coalition to End Homelessness). Unfortunately, young people are at exceptional risk for homelessness and may not be able to take care of themselves as effectively as older adults.

We, the Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC), urge the Connecticut General Assembly to pass legislation that further supports homelessness services and builds on and expands on our state's current stock of affordable housing.



Homeless woman in West River Memorial Park, New Haven, Connecticut

# Local Board of Education Voting Age

This past January, the Newark, New Jersey City Council voted unanimously to approve an ordinance that would allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections. This is the largest city in the United States (U.S.) so far to make this move (Gross, NJ Spotlight). School board and municipal elections typically see very low voter turnout in New Jersey, this is an attempt to improve this, as well as give students a voice in elections that directly affect them.

The Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center (CYPAC) believes legislation like this should be emulated in Connecticut. Just like New Jersey, our state sees very low municipal election turnouts at about 33%. This is compared to nearly 80% during presidential elections (Martinez, CT Mirror). Legislation like this is needed in Connecticut in order to give students a voice. It is simply unfair that they are impacted directly by policies in which they have no control over.

We, the Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center, urge the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) to pass legislation expanding the voting age to 16-years-old in Board of Education elections, or pass legislation requiring localities to expand the voting age to 16-years-old in Board of Education elections through ordinances.

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