



Younger Americans Act

ACTION

- Support the Younger Americans Act.

HISTORY

The Younger Americans Act would provide new resources to ensure that all youth have access to opportunities and experiences they need to become contributing members of society. This bipartisan legislation was introduced in the 107th Congress by Senators James Jeffords (I-VT), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Ted Stevens (R-AK), Christopher Dodd (D-CT), and Max Cleland (D-GA), and Representatives George Miller (D-CA), Marge Roukema (R-NJ), Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), Bob Clement (D-TN), and Jack Quinn (R-NY). It will be reintroduced this year.

The bill authorizes resources to support community-based efforts to provide young people ages 10–19 with access to five core youth development resources:

- ongoing relationships with a caring adult,
- safe places with structured activities,
- access to services that promote healthy lifestyles,
- opportunities to acquire marketable skills, and
- opportunities for community service and civic participation.

Among the many different types of activities that communities could fund under the Younger Americans Act are:

- mentoring,
- character development,
- youth centers and clubs,
- camps and programs outside of school hours,
- risk-avoidance programs,
- academic and cultural enrichment,
- youth entrepreneurship,
- community service,
- civic participation activities,
- training or group counseling, and
- referrals to state certified counselors to provide services.

The Younger Americans Act targets youth who face greater challenges, including youth placed in correctional facilities and other out-of-home residential settings, youth who live in areas with high concentrations of poverty, youth who live in rural areas, and youth who are at higher risk due to a history of abuse, neglect, or disconnection from family or school.

The legislation also contains specific provisions for involving youth in planning, implementation, and evaluation decisions by requiring that one-third of the federal and local decisionmaking councils called for in the bill comprise people age 21 and younger.

KEY FACTS

The United States has no national federal policy to promote positive youth development. Existing federal initiatives for young people either attempt to fix problem behavior, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and delinquency, or are education-based. Too many children and youth grow up without adequate family and community support or the opportunity to build productive futures.

Young people must have real-life options before they make harmful decisions. Without improved resources, young people with the fewest options are the ones most likely to resort to violence and display other problem behaviors.

- Approximately 8 million children under age 14 spend time without adult supervision on a regular basis.¹
- Children without adult supervision are at significantly greater risk for school truancy, stress, poor grades, risk-taking behavior, and substance abuse. Children who spend more hours on their own and begin self-care at younger ages are at increased risk for poor outcomes.²
- The hours of 3:00 PM–6:00 PM on school days are the peak hours for teens to commit crimes, smoke, drink, use drugs, or engage in sexual activity.³
- The U.S. General Accounting Office has estimated that, in 2002, afterschool programs for school-age children met as little as 25% of the demand in some urban areas.⁴

SOURCES

1. Miller, B.M. (1999). Unpublished findings. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time.
2. Pettit, G.S.; Laird, R.D.; Bates, J.E.; & Dodge, K.A. (1997). Patterns of afterschool care in middle childhood: Risk factors and developmental outcomes. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 43, 515–538.
3. Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M. (1999). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
4. U.S. General Accounting Office. (1997). *Welfare reform: Implications of increased work participation for child care*. (GAO/HEHS-97-95). Washington, DC: Author.

CWLA CONTACT

Tim Briceland-Betts

202/942-0256

bricebet@cwla.org



CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Headquarters

440 First Street NW, Third Floor

Washington, DC 20001-2085

202/638-2952 • Fax 202/638-4004 • www.cwla.org