



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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Health
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To whom it may concern:

As the Chair of the Committee on Youth Affairs, I am calling for the Mayor and Council to work together to establish a comprehensive youth agenda focused on expanding opportunity, employment, mental health, and recreation.

There is ongoing discussion about the District's response to the "teen takeover" phenomenon and the efficacy of designated curfew zones; however, we must advance more durable solutions to target the root causes for the behaviors that we've seen. The conversation must also include accountability. Often, conversations about accountability involve carceral approaches (i.e. locking up youth and/or their parents), which for a number of reasons is not applicable in our current context. Nonetheless, there are meaningful ways we can partner with parents, hold social media companies accountable, and redirect problematic behavior.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of areas I believe must be included in a comprehensive youth agenda, thereby moving the District from a reactive stance to a proactive stance as it relates to juvenile misconduct. These ideas are directly informed by my ongoing conversations with youth, families, and experts as to effective, evidence-based approaches that encourage safe and productive teen behavior. I am also holding a public roundtable on Thursday, April 30 as another opportunity to hear directly from youth. This list may be augmented afterward with contributions we receive at that roundtable.

Youth Opportunity

- **Creation of a District Office for Children.** D.C. is often described as resource-rich but coordination poor. Through my work as Chair of the Committee on Youth Affairs, I have come to understand the need for a coordinating body to help families navigate the multiple different child-facing systems and agencies that exist and access federal and city benefits. Standing up a District Office for Children will help families with teens at risk for entering the juvenile system by facilitating interagency services. Below is an illustration of three different agencies that currently provide youth services without sufficient interagency coordination. In the short-term, the Mayor has the authority to issue a mayoral order establishing such an office. In the long-term, the District should consider standing up an office with statutory responsibilities to aid coordination.

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Services/Programs</i>
Child and Family Services Agency	Office of Thriving Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 211 Warm Line • Caregiver subsidies • Neighborhood Collaboratives • Rapid housing assistance • Flex Emergency Funds for Families
Department of Behavioral Health	Children, Youth, and Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual, group, and family counseling • Diagnostic assessment • Medication management
Department Human Services	Youth Services Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventive and crisis services for residents to support family functioning and wellbeing • Youth Homeless Services • Truancy preventative programs

- **Fund the Child Tax Credit as part of the FY27 budget process.** Last fall, the Council voted to establish in tax year 2026 a fully refundable child tax credit of up to \$1,000 for all children under 18, with certain income restrictions. When paired with an increased match to the Earned Income Tax Credit (that was implemented in tax year 2025), the District Child Tax Credit is projected to reduce child poverty in the District by approximately 20%.¹ Without these policies, District child poverty rates are likely to continue climbing and will match or exceed pre-pandemic child poverty rates—with the Black child poverty rate approaching an unconscionable 50 percent.² Fully funding the child tax credit will work to address the socioeconomic root causes of the youth issues facing our city.
- **Make the DHS Truancy Pilot permanent.** The current process for truancy referrals is slow and ineffective, as it is well-established that the Child and Family Services Agency is not the best suited entity to handle truancy referrals. I support the Mayor’s efforts to task the Department of Human Services (DHS) with engaging students and families to identify and resolve impediments to attendance. The program works by coordinating with high-need schools to offer support services to families, helping avoid court involvement for issues surrounding chronic absenteeism. Currently active in schools like Anacostia and Eastern High Schools, the pilot program engages students with 15+ full-day absences by identifying barriers and providing tailored resources. The 2024-25 District of Columbia Attendance Report³ proves that our traditional mechanism of tackling truancy and absenteeism is not working. Making the DHS pilot permanent will funnel more

¹ Maria Manansala, DC Tax Credits for Households with Low Incomes Will Reduce Child Poverty by One-Fifth, D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, Dec. 18, 2025, available at <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/dc-tax-credits-for-householdswith-low-incomes-will-reduce-child-poverty-by-one-fifth/>.

² Connor Zielinski, DC Child Poverty Back to Extreme Level After Short-Lived Progress, D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, Feb. 19, 2026, available at <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/dc-child-poverty-back-to-extreme-level-after-shortlived-progress/>.

³ 2024-25 School Year Attendance Reporting. <https://osse.dc.gov/page/2024-25-school-year-attendance-reporting>.

resources to the only program proven to move the needle on truancy in recent years.

Youth Employment

- **Markup and vote on B26-0114, Pay Our Youth a Fair Summer Wage.** Sustainable and accessible summer opportunities for youth are fundamental to re-directing teen behavior. Participation wanes over the course of the summer in the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP), arguably because it does not guarantee minimum wage. The number one need I have heard directly and repeatedly from young people is the desire for money and jobs. B26-0114 would mandate that individuals ages 16-24 be paid the minimum wage, which is currently \$17.95. In addition, there should be discussion about extending authority to expand working hours for MBSYEP, so that students can work beyond required hours.
- **Creation of youth jobs in partnership with DC government and local businesses.** In addition to the MBSYEP, the city must establish broader job opportunities for youth during the school year. District government should partner with the business community to create year-round, good-paying jobs. I have begun reaching out to local BIDs and business leaders to initiate this conversation, but the role and benefit of our business community warrants a city-wide discussion.

Mental Health

- **Facilitate city-wide “pop-up” deployment of Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) Crisis Response Team (CRT) units.** The widely broadcast altercations at teen takeover events highlight the need for conflict resolution and mental health support. Creating DBH pop-ups in multiple locations will boost access to conflict resolution tools and mental health services for youth and provide them with responsive, immediate care when they are in crisis. These could be situated at Metro stations and within DPR facilities. In conversations with DBH Director Dr. Bazron, these CRT units can be deployed routinely.
- **Develop a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF).** In February 2026, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council published a report⁴ on the costs and benefits of a constructing a DC-based facility for youth committed to DYRS, illustrating that creating a PRTF in addition to community supports would strongly benefit the juvenile population. At present, DYRS is struggling with placements for youth with high mental health needs—creating the city’s own residential center for these children will drive down recidivism and promote the mental well-being of our most vulnerable youth.

Youth Recreation

⁴ Hind Berrah, Niloufer Taber, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Benefits and Costs of a D.C.-based Psychiatrist Residential Treatment Facility, Feb. 26, available at: <https://cjcc.dc.gov/page/cjcc-research-and-reports-0>.

- **Extend the hours of operation for at least 1 DPR Recreation Center per Ward.** Existing DPR teen programming is insufficient and needs to be supplemented. We saw that when DPR expanded programming into the evening hours, not only is it well attended, it is routinely successful. However, it is key that multiple locations are available. The weekend of April 4, 2026 DPR set up programming at only one recreation center—King Greenleaf—which led to a takeover that needed police intervention. By expanding across multiple centers with extended hours, we prevent these kinds of bottlenecks. While I appreciate the staffing impact of extending hours at DPR facilities, these recreation outlets have proven vital. Looking at short-term options (over the summer months) could allow the agency to meet city needs while developing long-term sustainability plans.
- **Activate third spaces across the District in partnership with BIDs and businesses.** There is ample evidence of the decline of functional third spaces for youth—the amount of movie theatres, malls, and public plazas that have closed in the past two decades is staggering. The District has an opportunity to partner with local BIDs and businesses to activate spaces like RFK and local venues to serve as attractive outlets for young people. Some businesses serve as welcoming spaces for youth. However, there needs to be a city-wide effort to activate more locations.
- **Build dedicated teen centers throughout the District, starting with RFK.** While it is important to leverage existing spaces, a long-term solution for teen takeovers involves creating more places for youth to go to access services and enjoy recreation. The RFK development offers an incredible opportunity to construct a metro-accessible Teen Center with ample recreation spaces.

Accountability

- **Hold social media platforms accountable.** The teen takeover phenomenon is propelled by social media. The city should consider creating civil liability for foreseeable injuries caused by unpermitted events proliferated on social media platforms. If social media is the main instrumentality for messaging these events, we must seek to disconnect teenagers from the message.
- **Establish an Interstate Teen Takeover Taskforce.** An important aspect of this public safety issue is the fact that vast amounts of teenagers from neighboring jurisdictions are coming to these takeovers using the WMATA system. It is imperative that we work with our state partners in Maryland and Virginia to develop a prevention strategy that deals with these influxes of non-DC youth.
- **Develop an app that empowers parents and community members.** In Chicago, there is an application developed by the city⁵ that provides easy links to available activities and

⁵ Regina Waldroup, New Program to Help Chicago Police, Parents Prevent Disturbances is Working, Organizer Says NBC News, June 2, 2023, available at: <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/new-program-to-help-chicago-police-parents-prevent-disturbances-is-working-organizer-says/3154153/>.

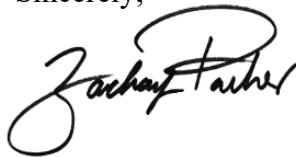
opportunities for youth and families. DC should develop a similar free, downloadable app that connects teens and parents with resources.

- **Implement a text alert system to warn parents of planned takeovers.** Cities have implemented free text alert systems⁶ that send automatic text blasts to parents on the day of planned teen takeovers. DC should replicate this and set up a free opt-in text system to directly connect parents with takeover updates and advise them to tell children not to attend. Research shows that parents serve as a protective factor in a child's life—children are more likely to resist negative social pressures if parents offer them alternatives. A text alert system would bolster parents' ability to protect children from teen-takeover related dangers.
- **Create a Teen Takeover Prevention Unit.** The teen takeover phenomenon has monopolized valuable District resources, including pulling MPD officers away from other areas of the city. The District should explore developing a Teen Takeover Prevention Unit, comprised of trusted community leaders and adults including violence interrupters that could be deployed as needed across the city. With a focus on deescalation, this Teen Takeover Prevention Unit could be housed under the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice and safeguard valuable public safety resources.

I have no misgivings about the urgent needs facing our city and know that each of the above proposals will require collaboration, creativity, and funding. However, I see what is playing out as a crisis that needs our purposeful attention. With a drive to do right by reach D.C. resident and deliver for our city's young people, I believe we can come together and bring durable solutions to fruition.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I look forward to our work together to deliver on these and other priorities.

Sincerely,



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Chair, Committee on Youth Affairs
Council of the District of Columbia

⁶ 'My Future, My Chi' App, available here: <https://explore.mychimifuture.org>.