

Vote on November 8: Help Increase Opportunity for All Young People

Don't stay home. Don't stay silent. Stand up, show up and make your voice heard!

In the United States, 5.6 million young people between 16 and 24 are neither in school nor employed. About half of them are living in poverty. [Opportunity Youth](#) are young people who have not had access to pathways to success, but are both seeking and offer opportunity for investment and renewal. If we invest in this group of young people, we invest in a critical resource for our nation's future.

Opportunity Youth United, a national grassroots network of young people formed by The National Council of Young Leaders urges voters to stand up for Opportunity Youth, by asking candidates how they will increase opportunity and decrease poverty for young people and their families and communities.

On November 8th voters will have to make decisions that will affect their communities, families and futures. When they head to the voting booth and cast their votes for officials at the federal, state and local levels—or for local tax measures to support schools, communities and municipal services—they will be making choices that really matter.

The outcomes of these elections will impact the young people in every town and city across the nation—even though many can't vote. We urge those who can to VOTE!

This guide contains information you can use to learn about the candidates' positions on policies and programs that directly impact youth and their families. Use it at public forums, in letters, emails and phone calls to candidates. And use it to help shape your votes by asking the question, "How will this candidate increase opportunity and decrease poverty for young people?"

Ask the Candidates

The questions below are based on [The National Council of Young Leaders' Immediate Recommendations to invest in pathways out of poverty for opportunity youth \(OYUnited.org\).](#)

A Community of Connected Comprehensive Programs

In tween and adolescent years young people often feel disconnected and are in need of additional supports to manage the challenges of middle and high school and college. Full time programs that integrate education, job training, counseling, personal supports and mentors, caring adults, positive peer interaction and pathways to college provide the stable, connected resources necessary to reconnect them to education and the workforce.

Questions:

- How will you ensure previously disconnected youth have access to pathways out of poverty?
- What steps will you take to improve availability of quality comprehensive programs for youth?
- What advice would you give to young people who feel disconnected from their schools and communities?

Access to Higher Education

A college degree or post-secondary training for young people means a pathway out of poverty, through increased opportunity, employment, self-sufficiency and higher earnings. For the community, it means higher state and local revenues, fewer people requiring costly support from state and local programs, lower crime rates and greater ability to drive economic growth and innovation.

Questions:

- How would you invest in making college and postsecondary training accessible and affordable to low-income young people?
- What policies or programs would you support for first generation or low-income college students to ensure that they are able to stay in school and graduate?

Mentoring, Private Internships and National Service

Research has shown that providing young people access to opportunities that provide application of learned skills, real world experiences, stipends or living allowances, mentoring and leadership development greatly increases their chances of success and helps break the cycle of poverty, one person at a time, profoundly benefitting society.

Questions:

- What do you think is the role of private business in providing opportunities for young people to have real world experience and apply skills learned in the schools?
- What steps would you take to ensure national service programs such as VISTA and AmeriCorps are accessible to more low-income students?
- What types of programs and policies would you support to ensure all young people have access to a caring adult?

Diversion and Re-Entry in the Justice System

A renewed effort to build collaborative community commitment to safety and crime prevention and second chances for youth and young adult offenders to rebuild their lives can help end the pipeline to prison for many children and youth and break the cycle of poverty and crime.

Questions:

- What is your vision for expanding diversion and re-entry programs to ensure that youth and adults coming out of prison have a chance to rebuild their lives?
- What mechanisms would you put in place at the state, school or district level to ensure schools are not the starting point for a school to prison pipeline?