

INVEST IN OPPORTUNITY YOUTH: AN AGENDA FOR LOUISIANA'S FUTURE



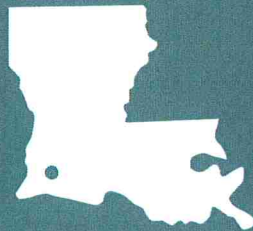
WHO ARE LOUISIANA'S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH?

Nearly 1 in 6 young people between the ages of 16 to 24 in Louisiana are disconnected from both school and work, a population known as Opportunity Youth. Louisiana ranks fourth in the nation for its rate of disconnection among youth. This has enormous consequences both for the young people experiencing disconnection and for society as a whole.

Louisiana's Opportunity Youth live in every region of the state, though youth in certain areas experience higher rates of disconnection than others. They come from all backgrounds and races, though due to historic and systemic discrimination, Black males are more likely to be disconnected than their peers followed by Latina and Black females. In Louisiana, 16% of disconnected youth live with a disability of some kind, compared to 6.5% of those who are connected. Disconnected young women are three times more likely to be mothers as connected women, 24.1% and 8.3%, respectively. And, over 10% of disconnected youth - and 25% of disconnected young Black men - are involved in the justice system and living in an institution.

When youth are disconnected from work and school during these formative years, it often reverberates throughout their lives. Without the advantages of early work experience, personal and professional network development and the interpersonal skills that connected youth gain during these years, Opportunity Youth are at a disadvantage. Over their lifetime, they are more likely to experience unemployment, lower wages, lower educational attainment, and worse health outcomes. We can do better.

Louisiana's opportunity
youth population is
86,600



That's more than
the entire population of
Lake Charles

THE OPPORTUNITY

Louisiana's youth are the future of our state and should drive our economy for years to come. Louisiana policymakers can help Opportunity Youth reconnect by investing in economic security measures, wrap-around social services, and workforce development and educational pathways.

Louisiana's Opportunity Youth deserve more from our state. Our current systems do not meet the needs of our youth. Fragmented approaches to youth policymaking have often failed to address all of Louisiana's youth needs. Despite numerous federal, state, and local programs existing to serve low-income people, too many young Louisianans still fall through gaps in the social safety net. Even when Opportunity Youth successfully receive benefits, they still often face significant needs outside of existing programs, presenting obstacles to their sustained economic stability and independence.

For all of Louisiana's young people to thrive, policymakers should promote policies and programs that proactively provide increased economic opportunities and wrap-around services that remove barriers and provide pathways to success for our Opportunity Youth.

AN AGENDA FOR LOUISIANA'S YOUTH

INVEST IN ECONOMIC SECURITY



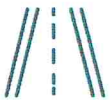
Policymakers must invest in young people's economic security for Louisiana's youth to succeed. Youth need higher wages, a more expansive Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, and paid sick days and family and medical leave. Louisiana has the second highest poverty rate in the nation, with some 829,565 Louisianans, or 18.6% of residents, living at or below the federal poverty rate in 2022. The state also has the third-highest child poverty rate in the nation, with 24.4%, or 255,159, children facing poverty and economic insecurity. For Louisiana's Opportunity Youth to thrive, they must be able to access economic opportunities and be on the path to financial security.

INVEST IN WRAP-AROUND SERVICES



Providing wrap-around services that extend beyond workforce and educational programs to address key policy shortfalls that Opportunity Youth face will set Louisiana's young people up for success. Louisiana's youth need investment in digital equity, transit, mental health, and housing to consistently re-engage with work and/or educational opportunities. Policymakers should promote equitable broadband investments and device availability, free transit with regional connectivity and rural transit investment, increased mental health supports in education and workforce programming, and more affordable housing units and increased rental protections for Opportunity Youth.

INVEST IN CAREER PATHWAYS



Extending investment in workforce programs and educational certificates and credentialing can help Opportunity Youth develop skills and connect with jobs across the state. However, after exiting high school, many young adults face a confusing and disjointed adult credentialing and workforce development programmatic landscape. It is often difficult for adults not enrolled in associates, technical, or bachelor's programs to string together requirements for certifications or degrees. By improving information sharing between K-12 institutions, community colleges, and potential employers, and advocating for increased funding for adult education, we can avoid youth disconnection and provide opportunities for Louisiana's young people to reconnect and engage in the workforce through sequenced adult career pathways.

WHO ARE WE?

The Louisiana Opportunity Youth Skills Coalition is a network of direct service providers and advocacy organizations working to ensure that the state's policies and institutions support the needs of Louisiana's disconnected youth. We focus on creating a stronger connective fabric to support all young people as they transition from school to the workforce. We connect grassroots community organizations and policymakers in designing responsive policies that meet the needs of Louisiana's youth. **To learn more about the Opportunity Youth Skills Coalition's work and policy priorities, reach out to Danielle Barringer-Payton at danielle@labudget.org.**

