

## FIRST 100 DAYS PLEDGE: CREATION OF THE GOVERNOR'S YOUTH COUNCIL

*“Georgia’s young people have a boundless capacity to succeed if we invest sufficiently in their outcomes,” said candidate for Governor and former House Democratic Leader **Stacey Abrams**. “Youth have been on the frontlines of critical fights in our state – they are our civil rights leaders, our DREAMers, and our gun safety advocates. The Governor’s Youth Council will be critical as I seek to build a new Georgia, one that uplifts every community and finds bold new solutions to the issues Georgians face.”*



Since America’s founding, young people have organized for justice, but recent events have sparked a resurgence of activity and engagement across Georgia and the nation. One critical aspect to effective civic engagement is involvement in the political leadership of their communities – a seat at the table in the public sector. From Tybee Island on the coast through middle Georgia to metro Atlanta, local governments have included the voices and insights of young people through youth councils. Around the country, youth input has addressed issues of violence in Oregon, standardized testing in Ohio, bullying in Iowa, youth entrepreneurship in Tennessee, suicide prevention in Colorado, community service requirements in Louisiana and Washington, domestic violence shelters and substance abuse in North Carolina, and more.<sup>1</sup>

From gun safety to persistent poverty, community safety to underfunded schools, from climate change to LGBTQ youth discrimination and immigration reform, and across a range of critical issues, young people have driven policy debates and informed the public conversation. However, Georgia has not established a formal role for these vital voices in our executive branch. Recently, a young activist asked candidate for governor and former House Democratic Leader Stacey Abrams about her thoughts on voting rights for those under the age of 18. While changing the structure of voting is a long-term discussion, as Governor, Abrams knows that she can include the opinions and insights of our youngest citizens on our most critical issues. More than simply a demonstration project, Abrams will create a robust and visible role for young people in her administration from the beginning.

**Abrams will establish the Governor’s Youth Council through executive order during her first 100 days in office.** The Council will be a diverse, representative body comprised of middle school and high school youth from across the state. Several local governments in Georgia have created youth councils and programs to engage and empower young adults in policymaking, for example in Columbus, Dublin, Macon-Bibb, Pine Lake, Savannah, Tybee Island, and Valdosta. As the next governor, Abrams will advance these efforts from the local to the state level, just as a dozen other states have done.

In empowering the Council, the Abrams administration will develop and implement an inclusive process for filling the youth council seats to ensure a diverse and representative body. The Council’s work will be supported by a dedicated staff member, and the Council will prioritize engagement of other young people in their communities.



*(Continued)*

**The Governor's Youth Council will be tasked with the following priorities, in cooperation with the governor's office:**

- Identifying key policy areas for youth civic engagement and policy input;
- Creating robust summer jobs programs that offer paid employment for Georgia's youth, a key part of economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Conducting direct outreach to youth in their communities; and
- Hosting youth town halls across Georgia on current issues of interest.

**To support the Youth Council, the governor's office will:**

- Train and mentor youth council members on policymaking, organizing, and public engagement;
- Guarantee youth appointments to the Georgia Children's Cabinet;
- Hire a full-time dedicated staff person to administer the Council, with a commitment that staff person is under the age of 25 at the time of hire;
- Secure technology options to reach youth across the state and allow them to broaden their impact; and
- Provide stipends and transportation funds for youth travel.

Abrams knows the value of youth voices, the power of having a seat at the table and the importance of bringing young people into the process. At the age of 18, she led student activism at Spelman College in the wake of the Rodney King riots. After telling then-Mayor Maynard Jackson during a televised debate that he had not effectively engaged young people, Abrams was later hired as one of two student employees in the Mayor's Office of Youth Services. There, she focused on gang prevention and youth civic engagement efforts. As a part of the Ford Foundation project on youth poverty in 1992, she co-authored a report on how young voices could shape social reform. Abrams worked with the AFL-CIO Youth Support Group to mobilize students to attend the 30th Anniversary March on Washington and was a youth speaker at the 1993 March.

*For more information on youth councils, see:*

[Authentic Youth Civic Engagement](#), National League of Cities

[Youth Councils Build Tomorrow's Leaders](#), Georgia Municipal Association

[Building Effective Youth Councils](#), National Conference of State Legislatures and National League of Cities

[Eight Successful Youth Engagement Approaches](#), U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services

**ENDNOTES:**

1. From <https://sparkaction.org/>

