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**Chicago Youth Call for Policy Changes to Improve Police-Youth Relations, Reform CPS Discipline Guidelines, Encourage Face Mask Use and More**

*First-ever State of Chicago Youth virtual town hall focuses on health, education, juvenile justice, housing, and safety/policing*

**CHICAGO** – As youth in Chicago face unprecedented challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, today Chicago youth leaders unveiled [a suite of policy recommendations](#) for a path forward during the first-ever State of Chicago Youth virtual town hall. Recommendations include ideas such as community centers for youth operated by the Chicago Police Department, mandatory community-focused training for school resource officers, reforming the Chicago Public Schools student code of conduct to minimize criminalizing language and room for bias, a new CPS sexual health policy, and a COVID-19 youth mask design competition to encourage the use of masks by youth, among others.

“To build a more equitable Chicago all voices need to be at the table, including our city’s youth,” said Beth Swanson, CEO of A Better Chicago, which co-hosted today’s event. “When we empower youth and give them a leadership role in addressing Chicago’s inequities, they create thoughtful policies that can help lead our city forward. I’d like to thank all of the students who gave so much of their time and expertise to the Citywide Youth Councils and I’d like to thank Mikva Challenge for their tireless work leading these councils especially during this difficult time.”

“We believe that youth deserve a seat at the table with city and school leaders who make public policy,” said Verneé Green, executive director of Mikva Challenge. “As we face the twin challenges of COVID-19 and racial inequities, our young leaders are leaning in and learning the necessary skills to enact the change we need now more than ever. We are grateful to A Better Chicago for partnering with us to amplify the voices of our youth and introduce their work to a broader audience.”

The event, with opening remarks by Candace Moore, Chicago’s first Chief Equity Officer, is the culmination of work done this summer by Mikva Challenge’s Citywide Youth Councils – 110 youth policymakers who have spent the last six weeks identifying, researching and speaking

with experts about the most pressing concerns and inequities currently affecting Chicago youth. Today's event was jointly hosted by A Better Chicago, a nonprofit venture philanthropy fund fighting poverty by investing in initiatives that serve low-income youth. In an effort to bring these recommendations to a larger audience and provide a public platform for youth policy makers, A Better Chicago played the role of production and promotional partner. The town hall marks the first time the Youth Councils have presented their recommendations to the public in a live event.

Youth councils serve as a mechanism for Chicago youth to have input on key city policy decisions that significantly impact youth in the areas of safety/policing, health, education, housing, and juvenile justice. Participation is open to all Chicago students in 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Each council works with corresponding Chicago government leaders at departments including the Chicago Department of Public Health, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Housing Authority and the Cook County Justice Advisory Council (for juvenile justice issues). [The full report is available online](#). Below is a summary of recommendations.

#### Youth Safety Advisory Council (Safety/Policing):

- The Chicago Police Department should create community centers for youth to provide a safe space for all in need, especially vulnerable populations, with youth programming, mental health and educational resources and community-centered events.
- CPD should develop and mandate community-focused training for school resource officers that develops positive relationships with students and integrates youth voices.

#### Teen Health Council (Health):

- New CPS sexual health policy with a transparent curriculum, no parental opt-out for lessons that explain gender and sexuality identities, and new lessons on rights and resources.
- Mental health services for youth provided by CDPH through text messaging and in-person sessions (with appropriate COVID-19 safeguards).
- Weekly after-school support groups led by a social worker in all high schools as part of the new Healing Centered Framework for schools.
- A citywide youth-focused face mask design competition to encourage use of masks by youth.

#### CPS Student Advisory Council (Education):

- Revise the current discipline guidelines of the Student Code of Conduct to minimize ambiguous and/or criminalizing language that allows space for personal biases to occur.
- CPS should allow students to take part in modifying and editing the new Curriculum Equity Initiative before it is finalized.
- The School Quality Rating Policy should shift from a numerical system into a more qualitative system that comprehensively evaluates the multiple components of school quality.

#### Chicago Housing Authority Youth Council (Housing):

- Expand the existing Workforce Development programs to include youth (ages 16-18) to prepare for and expose them to job readiness and workforce development.
- The CHA Youth Opportunities Team should partner with the youth council to develop a youth-centered virtual newsletter targeting residents aged 13-24 in CHA.

Juvenile Justice Council (Juvenile Justice):

- Cook County should host a digital forum on a roadmap to re-entry created in partnership with the youth council.
- Assist in navigating challenges of e-learning and disparities in education level upon re-entry through a coalition of the Juvenile Justice Department, CPS, partners in the alternative school network and the youth council.

### **About A Better Chicago**

A Better Chicago is fighting poverty by leveraging the collective power of Chicagoans who want to make our city more equitable for everyone. We raise funds through public donations and direct those resources to support low-income, underserved communities. We find high-potential, high-impact programs and leaders that serve young people from cradle to career. Then, we invest both dollars and strategic support to empower organizations to grow and make an even greater impact. We know that giving our young people the support and tools they need to thrive—a great education, a wage that can sustain a family, the ability to buy a home and live in a safe community—can lead to breaking the cycle of poverty for this generation and generations to come.

Since 2010, we have raised nearly \$40 million, invested in dozens of nonprofit organizations and supported over 100 capacity-building projects—ranging from strategic planning to leadership development—to strengthen the organizational capacity of our grantees. In total, our portfolio serves over 37,000 youth annually in the Chicago area. Learn more at [abetterchicago.org](http://abetterchicago.org).

### **About Mikva Challenge**

[Mikva Challenge](http://mikvachallenge.org) develops youth to be empowered, informed, and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society. We know that democracy is people taking action — speaking, engaging, learning, listening. Mikva clears a path for young people to be involved now, and to develop confidence and habits that will serve them — and the world we share — all their lives. [Outcomes](#): Alumni of the Mikva Challenge programs are more likely: to vote (3x), graduate college, volunteer and participate in civic life, than their peers. Learn more at: [mikvachallenge.org](http://mikvachallenge.org).