

JULY 28, 2023

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i Policy Initiative

Policy Intern's Observations on Potential Advocacy and Policy Priorities

We, members of the policy initiative team, have come into contact with many different advocates who have provided us with potential policy ideas ranging from housing to facilitating youth to get drivers' licenses that they would like to see implemented as policy. We seek to work youth and adult leaders to propose legislation in 2024.

Recently, the policy interns visited the RYSE campus and spoke with the individuals working directly to house and provide services to minors. Site-visits, interviews, and in-person learning has become a priority of the policy team as we look to bridge gaps in our knowledge and provide support to the most applicable and impactful policy solutions to address the effects of youth incarceration as possible. The most glaring gaps in policy surround the trauma that is created during the incarceration process. Often times minors are labeled (for example as "drug addicts") for the sake of the criminal justice system. As a result, minors may now associate themselves with this harmful label that can stick from a young age.

There is also a policy opportunity in regard to allowing minors the freedom to gain their drivers licenses without having to obtain both parents' signature.

We believe that this will afford minors a higher sense of autonomy.

Another potential policy issue that arose during our visit is the lack of housing and services for those who age out of the system. As noted by staff at RYSE, once a minor reaches the age of 24 the potential for assistance quickly decreases, and they are often left without the same support they had in years prior.

"The most glaring gaps in policy surround the trauma that is created during the incarceration process."

As an intern, it has been very helpful to have these conversations with those who have their "boots on the ground." Not only does it give the policy team a better perspective on how to better serve the organizations we work for, but also provides me with the chance to be a student outside of the classroom and absorb knowledge that I can bring back to others interested in helping Hawaii's opportunity youth.

-Haumea Velasco