



## WHY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH?

OY are uniquely vulnerable to negative long-term consequences of disconnection given their transition period to adulthood. A recent [analysis](#) of out-of-work youth found the largest share (62 percent) has no more than a high school diploma, the least work experience, the lowest rates of school enrollment, the highest rates of parenthood and are the least prepared to find and keep jobs.

The [consequences](#) of being shut out of the labor market include damage to individual earnings and national productivity. [The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth](#) estimated that in one year, taxpayers “shouldered more than \$93 billion to compensate for lost taxes and direct costs to support young people disengaged from both education and work.”

A recent [report](#) found “reconnected” youth are 45 percent likelier to own a home, 42 percent likelier to be employed, and 52 percent likelier to report good or excellent health. If these nearly 4 million OY were reconnected, it would result in \$11,900 per year in additional tax revenue which adds up to roughly \$55 billion per year.

Further, youth mental health issues have been increasing. The Surgeon General [found](#) that “Mental health challenges are the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people. Unfortunately, in recent years, we’ve seen significant increases in certain mental health disorders in youth, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.”

### BACKGROUND

Opportunity Youth Background: [Opportunity Youth](#) (OY) are young people aged 16–24 who are disconnected from school and work. Previously referred to as “disconnected” or “at-risk” youth, the term Opportunity Youth emerged as a way to emphasize the societal and economic potential of re-engaging these young people. [Measure of America](#) recently estimated the overall youth disconnection rate of 12.6 percent, or nearly 5 million youth nationally.

Youth disconnection has been an issue in the U.S. for many years, but the COVID-19 pandemic and recession made it impossible to ignore. At the height of the pandemic, one in four youth were disconnected. Even now, jobless rates for young people are still nearly triple (8.5%) the national average and overall youth disconnection rates have [increased](#) since the late 1990s. Youth disconnection knows no political boundaries: urban and rural areas alike face high rates.

**There is no Congressional Caucus focused on the unique issues of youth disconnection, despite the importance of re-engaging youth with the workplace, school, and support systems as they transition into adulthood.**



# OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

**Bipartisan Caucus on Opportunity Youth Focus Areas:** There are numerous federal laws that impact OY. Many of these laws are up for reauthorization, or have been particularly relevant in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn:

1. Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA)
2. National Apprenticeship Act (NAA)
3. Sector-Specific Workforce Development
4. Secondary & Post-Secondary Education and Technical Training
5. Performance Partnership Pilots (P3)
6. AmeriCorps & Civic Engagement
7. SNAP Employment & Training Program (SNAP E&T)
8. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
9. Mental Health Services
10. Homelessness
11. Foster Care
12. Re-entry for Ex-Offenders (REO)
13. Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA)

A Bipartisan Caucus on Opportunity Youth will elevate and advance individual Members' policy priorities and legislation, and serve as a forum for engaging with local workforce, education, and service providers and the youth themselves.

### **Supporting Organizations**

Numerous national and state-based organizations, philanthropies, and even state and local governments, focus on addressing federal and state OY policy and programmatic issues. These include organizations like the California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN), Louisiana Opportunity Youth Coalition (LOYC), and the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC).

These groups would support the caucus by making suggestions on briefing topics, policy recommendations on active legislation, endorsing and supporting caucus member legislation through advocacy, and can provide youth and other topical expert speakers for planned caucus events.

**For More Information:**  
Sean Hughes, COYN Policy Director  
seanmichaelhughes@gmail.com