

NEW ERA COLORADO

Background

Young people, specifically young people of color, have always been at the forefront of progressive movements. Right now, the climate crisis, economic inequality and other compounding crises uniquely and disproportionately impact young people, worsening our quality of life and endangering our futures. Each one is rooted directly in white supremacy.

Young people are visionary and aren't held back by pessimism or allegiance to the way things are, or have been; for that reason, we have unparalleled revolutionary potential. We know that when empowered, organized, resourced, and prioritized, young people can and will transform their communities. We believe young people can and will give life to the world we dream of.

That world includes:

- An abundance of shared resources where every person's basic needs are met and resources can be accessed equitably
- Acknowledging the environment is a part of us and caring for the land
- Treating all people with dignity and safety, allowing us to show up as our authentic selves
- Building a connection between generations to combine the power of young people's possibility-thinking with the wisdom of our elders
- Wellness in our minds, bodies, and souls
- Having the resources we need to make informed, self-determined decisions about our lives and bodies, with respect for the decisions that we make
- Space for healing, creativity, and joy
- Dismantling systems of oppression and replacing them with systems of care and accountability

We're working to achieve this vision of the world through progressive policymaking. The **Youth Agenda Policy Platform** is the framework by which we will fight for progress on the issues that impact our generation. We chose these issues and policies based on our [2021](#)

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[Youth Agenda Listening Tour](#), where we talked to over 1,200 young people across the state about their vision for Colorado. During the strategic process to create the platform, we prioritized the responses of young people who identify as Black, Indigenous, a person of color, queer and/or trans to inform our stances.

The Youth Agenda Policy Platform

Centered in Racial Justice

The top issue for young people is racial justice. We define racial justice as the elimination of systemic racism, especially anti-Blackness, and the implementation of systems that support communities of color to thrive. Racial justice is not a single issue area, but intersectional; this means we must use an anti-racist lens to approach every issue by prioritizing the experiences of people of color and advocating for policies that protect the health and safety of Black and brown communities while fighting against racism as it shows up in all of our systems (e.g. criminal justice and policing systems, economic systems, and electoral systems).

A racial justice lens also means that we take an abolitionist stance. This political vision aims to eliminate imprisonment, policing, and surveillance to create lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. Abolition means that we work to create systems of care and accountability to transform the justice system to allow individuals to heal rather than relying on punitive systems that leave communities vulnerable and often don't solve the root causes of crime.

Anti-racism is the foundation for the entire Youth Agenda, which means that all of the policies listed here must be proven to achieve racial justice and actively eliminate racial inequity in our society.

1. Climate Justice

We define climate justice as the protection of our land, water and air and the dismantling of racist policies that disproportionately impact the health and well-being of Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx/e, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and historically marginalized communities.

Young people demand we:

- Hold corporations and government bodies accountable to sustainable energy solutions, reducing pollutants, and reversing racist environmental policies that

impact Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latinx/e communities in Colorado

- Address environmental racism directly by leading and supporting policies that foster more equitable access to clean air, water, land, jobs and homes for people of color and those living on low-income (including undoing historically racist zoning codes)
- Divest from fossil fuels and a transition to a renewable economy
- Support the public in owning our public utilities through municipalization efforts or otherwise
- Fight the global climate crisis on a systemic level so that our earth is a safe place to live for generations to come

2. Reproductive Rights

We define reproductive rights as the ability to make autonomous decisions for your reproductive health, free from fear or stigma and with dignity and support. We approach reproductive rights work through a reproductive justice framework, centering the experiences of Black and brown people and destigmatizing abortion through an intersectional lens.

Young people demand we:

- Protect a person's right to parent or not parent and to parent children in safe, healthy environments without fear of violence
- Continue to protect and expand abortion access, including eliminating deceptive anti-abortion counseling centers (also known as crisis pregnancy centers or fake clinics)
- Eliminate barriers to receiving abortions, including the state funding ban and parental notification laws
- Provide comprehensive sex and reproductive health education, and equitable access to all forms of reproductive and gender-affirming health care
- Protect the right to express gender and sexuality freely
- Advocate boldly for reproductive rights, including abortion care, through empowering, inclusive, and anti-racist language
- Address intersecting barriers to reproductive rights, like economic justice, climate, health care, and criminal justice

3. Higher Education & Student Debt

We define access to higher education as the ability for everyone to access post-secondary learning, regardless of their income, race, ethnicity, gender, or citizenship status. Higher education is a public good and should be publicly-funded (debt-free).

Young people demand that we:

- Fight for a more affordable higher education by lowering tuition costs to build towards a vision of debt-free college
- Cancel all student loan debt
- Implement protections for student loan borrowers, including holding the predatory servicing industry accountable through stronger accountability mechanisms
- Increase access to scholarships and federal/state aid
- Educate and support young people in accessing federal and state financial aid
- Break down other non-financial barriers, such as mental health support and language accessibility, during the application process and in the classroom

4. Economic Justice

Economic justice means that everyone has financial stability and safety, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, or income. We believe it's time for corporations and the wealthy to pay what they owe in taxes so we can all have our basic needs met through stronger social infrastructure.

Young people demand that we:

- Implement progressive tax policies that require wealthy corporations and individuals to pay their fair share
- Provide affordable and accessible housing for all (including housing-first policies, land grants, and rent control)
- Improve funding for public goods and services, like education and Medicaid
- Lower the barriers to access social safety net programs like tax credits, welfare, public housing, and free lunches
- Provide reparations *now* to Black and Indigenous folks
- Repeal TABOR's (Taxpayers Bill of Rights), Colorado's restrictive tax code, and replace it with a progressive and anti-racist code
- Support and advocate for unions and labor organizations fighting for workers' justice

5. Democracy Reform

We define democracy reform as the equitable access to democracy, at every level and for every person regardless of identity. It also means we must reform our systems so that they better represent the needs of the people. Direct voter education and voter registration are key aspects to ensuring voter enfranchisement.

Alongside direct work, there must be policies that continue to increase access to voting for every community in our state.

Young people demand that we:

- Ensure our most impacted communities can participate in the political process
- Continue to serve as a gold standard for election access in the country, with equal access to polling places, early voting, and multiple ways to cast your ballot
- Continue to improve Colorado's automatic voter registration system to increase access for voters who are Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx/e, Asian American and Pacific Islander, historically marginalized communities, and people living on low incomes, and first-time voters
- Defend against disinformation and anti-democracy efforts
- Get corporate money out of politics and limit the influence of wealthy individuals and corporations
- Maximize political representation and power for young people and Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx/e communities

6. Health Care & Mental Health

We define health care as access to resources that allow our mental and physical health to thrive. We define mental health as the mental well-being of our communities and the equitable access to mental illness and trauma supports, especially as it relates to systemic oppression. Mental health is particularly important to young people.

Young people demand that we:

- Create a universal health care system where we all have equitable access to high-quality health care services
- Make medical school more accessible and affordable for all to reduce the provider shortage in Colorado
- Remove profit as a motive from health care
- Provide community-focused care for communities of color, particularly Black, Hispanic/Latinx/e, and Indigenous communities
- Have affordable access to all forms of therapy and mental health support in K-12 schools
- Support victims and survivors of trauma
- Addressing the root causes of mental health challenges, including racism, economic injustice, and the climate crisis

7. Education

We define education as the equitable access to high-quality education and support within the education system regardless of identity. We support the public school system and believe the individuals working within the system deserve dignity and respect, financially and otherwise.

Young people demand that we:

- Fund our public schools with sufficient public dollars through a progressive tax system
- Support employees within the education system, including funding for teachers and higher education adjunct professors
- Actively support public school and teachers' unions
- Ensure culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy includes Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx/e, communities of color, and LGBTQ+ students
- Foster safe and welcoming environments that have adequate mental health resources to support social and emotional well-being

8. LGBTQ Rights and Gender Expression

We define LGBTQ rights as the ability for everyone, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, to live a safe and healthy life without fear of discrimination or violence.

Young people demand that we:

- Protect and uplift trans communities and people
- Provide gender affirming care in schools
- Protect marriage equality and equal protection under the law
- Create policies that ensure students' right to privacy for personal identities or clubs they engage with in high schools
- Ensure comprehensive sex education includes LGBTQ+ folks
- Create equitable access to health care for LGBTQ+ communities

9. Immigrant Rights

We define immigrant rights as the ability to live a safe and healthy life regardless of your immigration status and the implementation of specific supports for immigrant communities.

Young people demand that we:

- Reform immigration policies and create a rapid pathways to citizenship

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- Protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Ensure access to economic programs to support affordable higher education, financial aid, and health care
- Abolish Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

10. Criminal Justice

We define criminal justice as the reimagining of our criminal justice system so that it fosters justice, healing, and restitution. We take an abolitionist stance toward criminal justice, believing that the root causes of crime lie at the socioeconomic level and can't be properly addressed through individual punishment and surveillance.

Young people demand that we:

- Abolish the police and carceral system, replacing them with systems of community care, economic justice, and mental health services
- Expand access to the political process for folks with criminal backgrounds
- Reform the juvenile justice system
- Create alternatives to jail like restorative or transformative justice
- Expand alternatives to policing, like community support and mental health services
- End cash bail

How It Works

The Youth Agenda is a measure to hold ourselves and our leaders accountable. The policy platform will align our organization with young people's vision of the world and evaluate how decision-makers and elected officials are holding up against young people's demands. We will use the Youth Agenda to decide how we push for change on the issues that matter the most to young people.

Through policymaking, organizing, and civic engagement, we will lead and support advocacy efforts on:

- **Climate Justice:** We will protect our environment and dismantle racist policies that disproportionately impact the health and well-being of Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx/e, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.
- **Reproductive Rights:** We will cement a person's ability to make autonomous decisions for their reproductive health and create a culture for reproductive care free, from fear or stigma and surrounded by dignity and support, in Colorado.
- **Higher Education & Student Debt:** We will make attending post-secondary learning more accessible and affordable for everyone, regardless of their income, race,

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ethnicity, gender, or citizenship status.

- **Economic Justice:** We will make it possible for everyone to have financial stability, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, or income. We believe corporations should pay what they owe to build a strong social infrastructure to meet everyone's basic needs.
- **Democracy Reform:** We will make sure that everyone can participate in our democratic processes. We will reform systems so that the needs of all people are represented and advocate for policies that improve voting access for young people, especially young Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx/e, and Asian American and Pacific Islander people in Colorado.

If we're not taking a forward stance on an issue, we'll be supporting the work of our partners. This could look like using our organizing power and mobilizing force to support policies and campaigns in alignment with the Youth Agenda or educating young people about the intersectional nature and impacts of these issues.

- Health Care & Mental Health
- Education
- LGBTQ Rights and Gender Expression
- Immigrant Rights
- Criminal Justice

From the Golden Dome to the street, the Youth Agenda is the goalpost we measure our fights – and victories – against.