

The Colorado Youth Advisory Council

COYAC

4th Annual Legislative Report
April 2012



A report from the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) to the Colorado General Assembly concerning the progress of the Council from June 1, 2011 – May 31, 2012

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Staffing for the Colorado Youth Advisory Council provided by the Civic Canopy. For more information, contact Ana Soler at 303-292-3144 or ana@civikkanopy.org

History and Background

The Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) was established on May 29, 2008 “to examine, evaluate, and discuss the issues, interests, and needs facing Colorado Youth and to formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials regarding those issues” (HB 08-1157). COYAC is a vehicle, created by the Colorado State Legislature, to give young people an opportunity to offer first-hand information to our legislators about issues affecting Colorado's teens. The first class of Council members was appointed in the summer of 2008. Thirty five were appointed by state senators (one per district) and five by the Speaker of the House at the time, Andrew Romanoff, as at-large members to better represent the diversity of Colorado's youth—in particular, rural youth. Subsequent classes of COYAC members have been selected through an application process, with each member serving a two year term. Members serve staggered terms, so half of the seats are open each year. The Council also includes four non-voting legislative members: Senator Ellen Roberts (R-Durango), Representative Andy Kerr (D-Lakewood), Senator Michael Johnston (D-Denver), and Representative Tom Massey (R-Poncha Springs). These Sponsors have been committed to COYAC and are still the sponsors at the time this report went to press.

COYAC has grown from building an infrastructure for gathering youth voice to a more mature Council capable of amplifying that voice to influence policy proposals. This year, they advanced to the point of writing and supporting a successful resolution in the 2012 session.

Key Accomplishments during 2011-2012

Getting actively involved with the legislative process during the 2012 session

- Meeting with Legislators: COYAC hosted a “meet and greet” with legislators at the beginning of the 2012 Session for COYAC members to get to know their individual representatives. This was by far the most well attended Meet and Greet to date.
- Tracking Bills: The Council tracked 16 bills during the legislative session. More experienced COYAC members support new members and that leadership role is important to tracking bills. This year the Communications Committees developed and piloted a new form for tracking bills which proved very successful. COYAC continues to have the support of legislators, lobbyists and aids attending COYAC

policy sessions and have benefitted greatly from this commitment.

- Taking Positions: The Council took positions on 9 bills. These spanned a diverse set of issues, ranging from drug testing for food stamps, to the issue of civil unions, to suicide prevention for minors, to the ASSET bill. The number is lower than last year and this is due to COYAC rising to the challenge of creating their own resolution for the first time in the history of COYAC. Also, the Council delved into each issue and were conscientious of examining bills that were truly relevant to COYAC goals.
- Drafting Policy: At the October 2011 meeting, COYAC members decided to write a resolution regarding teen suicide prevention. The resolution was heard by the House and Senate Education Committees as well as heard on the Senate floor during the April 2012 meeting. A tremendous amount of effort was put forth on this groundbreaking work by the Council. Members of COYAC will be leaders on the working group to ensure that the resolution is implemented.



COYAC Members Janet Chen and Brenna Christensen, Sean Weller testify in the House Education Committee hearing on the teen suicide prevention resolution.

Gathering youth opinions from across the state and sharing their views

- Offering Input: The Council met with several organizations to give feedback from a youth perspective:
 - Alliance for Sustainable Colorado regarding the Environmental Literacy Plan
 - Groundwork Denver (involves youth statewide in energy conservation service)
 - Colorado Health Action Team, Kaiser Permanente (youth led curriculum development)
- In the News: The teen suicide prevention resolution brought a new level of exposure within the media, moving beyond print articles and into television spots, blogs, and social media postings. Below is a sampling of additional blog posts, video and stories in the news. Appendix B contains three articles on COYAC and the importance of youth voice in Colorado.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUhJTKdxvYE> - Senator Ellen Roberts

presents House Joint Resolution 1004 to the Senate Education Committee. This bill is concerning teen suicide prevention in Colorado. To see the full bill click this link. <http://goo.gl/eKgJ6>

- <http://pagosasun.com/archives/2012/02February/020212/legrobertsreport.html>
- http://www.cohousedems.com/Colorado_House_Democrats/News/Entries/2012/1/23_Teen_Suicide_Prevention_Measure_Passes_House_Education_Committee.html
- <http://www.coloradosenatenews.com/?q=content/colorado-youths-take-active-role-combating-teen-suicide>
- <http://mbpfamily.ning.com/video/colorado-bill-to-address-teen-suicide> - This post contains a link to Channel 9 video about a teen suicide and the resolution.
- <http://www.9news.com/rss/story.aspx?storyid=244906> - Video
- <http://cocpntsr.blogspot.com/>

Creating recruitment, application, and enrollment procedures

- Welcoming New Members: At its October kick off meeting, the Council welcomed its new members, reviewed its policies and procedures, worked to hone communication skills of Council members to communicate with legislators, and set goals and objectives. The April meeting was intentionally geared to orienting new members as a substantial amount of COYAC members are new at this point.
- Rolling Applications: COYAC distributed the application process to replace vacancies. In an attempt to fill the seats, a rolling application process was started. It was decided in April of 2012 to return to the practice of 2 set deadlines before the October meeting in an effort to fill all seats.
- Open Houses: For the first time, The Council, in partnership with Community Colleges in Denver and Colorado Springs, held Open Houses to help fill seats. Both the Community College of Denver and Pikes Peak Community College were selected based on an analysis of the concentration of empty seats. Both college presidents attended the events. Current COYAC members organized and ran both meetings and new members were selected from this effort (each term is two years, with half of the first round of Council members serving one year terms to stagger the rotation of members). However, recruitment continues to be a focus of the Council and the goal is to have full membership by the summer 2012 meeting.
- CASB Recruitment: Members also recruited at the Colorado Association of School Boards, Youth Strand, in Colorado Springs in December of 2011. This effort resulted in 2 new members.

- New Officers: The Council elected its third round of officers at the October meeting, and decided to elect a Parliamentarian to aid in the success of the council. The officers serve one year terms and comprise the Executive Committee for the Council:
 - Youth Co-Chair: Joseph Soto, Aurora
 - Youth Vice Chair: Sean Weller, Colorado Springs
 - Secretary: Janet Chen, Denver
 - Treasurer: Brenna Christensen, Durango
 - Parliamentarian: Jimmy Graham, Aurora

Developing greater knowledge of policy issues and the policy making process

- Learning to Lobby: At the October 2011 meeting, lobbyist Greg Romberg, presented best practices for communicating and working with Senators.
- Working with Legislative Co-Chairs: COYAC called on legislative sponsors Representative Kerr, Representative Massey and Senator Roberts to share their expertise at quarterly meetings and with both youth and parents at evening gatherings.
- Budgetary Knowledge: Natalie Mullis, Chief Economist, Colorado State Legislative Council and Joe Hanel, Reporter, Durango Herald presented on the budget process.
- Ethics: Natalie O'Donnell Wood, Program Principal at National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) gave an interactive presentation on Ethics.

Looking Ahead

COYAC is wrapping up its fourth year and has reached a new level of impact and growth. The challenges of recruitment remain and continue to be addressed. There is a growing culture of accountability and dedication from members to help with recruitment within their senate district. COYAC plans to improve its website and to use popular forms of social media to inform, educate and engage youth statewide. Members were also willing to go beyond the traditional recruitment measures and step out into hosting Open Houses. The partnership with Community Colleges was a highlight of the past year.

The impact of this program to impact youth leadership is tremendous. For the first time, COYAC and members of the legislature coauthored a resolution on teen suicide. Janet Chen, Secretary of COYAC, was instrumental in this effort and she says of her experience with COYAC:

“Of all of the activities that I’ve participated in over the years, COYAC has had the greatest impact upon the development of my leadership abilities. The council offered me an opportunity that was invaluable and unique, one that I could not have found anywhere else.

COYAC has significantly broadened my previously confined perspective of Colorado's young people. Leadership in COYAC is much different from leadership in any other student organization that I have ever been in; because the Council consists of members from all corners of the state, COYAC has taught me to lead others who have vastly different perspectives from my own. It has also taught me to resourcefully overcome various challenges, such as trying to lead a committee that I only get to see in person four times a year.

Moreover, my experience working with legislators has made me much more informed about the legislative process and about the issues that impact youth throughout the state. It has made me realize just how many Coloradans share similar struggles, and how a more unified collaboration throughout the state can significantly benefit us all. Ultimately, my experience on the Council has provided me with a greater sense of civic responsibility and is an indispensable experience that has played a major role in shaping me into the individual that I am today.”

The experience greatly impacted this youth as well as the Council, however, the fact that this council pulled together to write a resolution, organize testimony and inform the legislature about teen suicide is a sign of a maturing group, a truly youth-led organization.

This resolution also hints to the greater degrees of impact and change that COYAC will grow to embrace. The ability of COYAC to give feedback directly to legislators in a way that impacts their decisions is evident through their statewide survey, testimony in committees and through their work on resolutions.

Appendix A: Colorado Youth Advisory Council Members 2011-12

Members in Alphabetical Order

Irma Aganovic

Denver

Senate District 33

Kasey Allen

Lake George

Senate District 5 (AL)

Mitchell Alton

Colorado Springs

Senate District 12

Daniel Arsenault

Centennial

Senate District 26

Cody Bratten

Highlands Ranch

Senate District 30

Annsley Brophy

Eckley

Senate District 1

Janet Chen—Treasurer

Broomfield

Senate District 23

Chase Chiga

Colorado Springs

Senate District 9

Julia Currier

Colorado Springs

Senate District 7

Daniel Fallon-Cyr

Durango

Senate District 6 (AL)

Nicole Ferree

Craig

Senate District 8 (AL)

Jimmy Graham

Aurora

Senate District 28

Abe Mamet

Denver

Senate District 32

Jake Marsing

Longmont

Senate District 17

Jack Nordell

Canon City

Senate District 2

Amanda Patarino

Lakewood

Senate District 21

Willow Post

Steamboat Springs

Senate District 8

Rebekah Romberg

Evergreen

Senate District 16

Marissa Rudd

Colorado Springs

Senate District 12 (AL)

Pranaya Sathe

Fort Collins

Senate District 14

Maria Scheffel

Parker

Senate District 4

Joseph Soto

Aurora

Senate District 29

Taylin Trujillo

Pueblo West

Senate District 3

Reh Vanatta

Poncha Springs

Senate District 5

Ethan Kopp

Littleton

Senate District 22

Jessica Kostelnik

Golden

Senate District 20

Alec Lask

Greeley

Senate District 13

Nik Malinin

Boulder

Senate District 18

Sean Weller

Colorado Springs

Senate District 12 (AL)

Members by District***District COYAC Member**

| | |
|----|------------------------|
| 1 | Annsley Brophy |
| 2 | Jack Nordell |
| 3 | Taylin Trujillo |
| 4 | Maria Scheffel |
| 5 | Kasey Allen (AL) |
| 5 | Reh Vanatta |
| 6 | Brenna Christensen |
| 6 | Daniel Fallon-Cyr (AL) |
| 7 | Julia Currier Fox |
| 8 | Willow Post |
| 8 | Nicole Ferree (AL) |
| 9 | Chase Chiga |
| 10 | <i>Vacant</i> |
| 11 | <i>Vacant</i> |
| 12 | Marissa Rudd (AL) |
| 12 | Mitchell Alton |
| 12 | Sean Weller (AL) |
| 13 | Alec Lask |
| 14 | Pranaya Sathe |
| 15 | Hannah Stokes |

District COYAC Member

| | |
|----|-------------------|
| 16 | Rebekah Romberg |
| 17 | Jake Marsing |
| 18 | Nik Malinin |
| 19 | <i>Vacant</i> |
| 20 | Jessica Kostelnik |
| 21 | Amanda Patarino |
| 22 | Ethan Kopp |
| 23 | Janet Chen |
| 24 | <i>Vacant</i> |
| 25 | Devin Schulist |
| 26 | Daniel Arsenault |
| 27 | <i>Vacant</i> |
| 28 | Jimmy Graham |
| 29 | Joseph Soto |
| 30 | Cody Bratten |
| 31 | <i>Vacant</i> |
| 32 | Abe Mamet |
| 33 | Irma Aganovic |
| 34 | Seneca Hens |
| 35 | Suzanna Steele |

Appendix B: Press

Below are three press articles, blogs and website postings of COYAC in the news.

1. Durango Herald - January 24, 2012

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20120124/NEWS01/701249958/0/FRONTPAGE/Youth-council-calls-for-suicide-prevention>

Article published Jan 24, 2012

Youth council calls for suicide prevention

Colorado teens back resolution that would train teachers



Photo by: Joe Hanel/Durango Herald

Durango High School junior Brenna Christensen listens to testimony on a resolution about teen suicide along with House Education Committee Chairman Tom Massey, R-Poncha Springs, Monday at the state Capitol.

By [Joe Hanel](#)

DENVER – Dressed in a sharp blue suit and neat tie, University of Denver freshman Thomas Tarler looked like he fit right in at the Capitol when he testified Monday at the House Education Committee. No one would have guessed what he did for his birthday last Friday.

“I spent it in a psychiatric ward. I had to turn myself in Wednesday night because I just couldn’t handle it, and I didn’t trust myself to keep myself safe,” he said.

Tarler, an alumnus of the Colorado Youth Advisory Council, urged legislators to pass House Joint Resolution 1004, which calls for suicide-prevention training for teachers and a youth-led working group to reduce Colorado’s sky-high suicide rate.

Durango High School junior Brenna Christensen, a current COYAC member, also testified for the resolution.

“Kids like to wear black and be upset and talk about how terrible the world is. So sometimes the kids who actually are experiencing depression and suicidal thoughts get glossed over, because they’re not the ones wearing black or they’re not the ones making the biggest fuss,” Christensen said.

Christensen and her youth council colleagues researched and drafted the resolution after identifying suicide – not pregnancy, drugs or crumbling schools – as the No. 1 issue among Colorado teenagers.

The youth council conducted a survey of 712 young people and found that 70 percent were “very concerned” about suicide.

Comments from the 13 House Education Committee members backed up the survey. Four legislators spoke out about their personal experience with suicide, among friends, family members or in the schools where they teach for their day jobs. The resolution zeroes in on teachers because they have frequent contact with students.

Christensen's teacher had to cope with the suicide of one of his brightest students several years ago, but the experience helped him to help Christensen when she went through a rough time last year.

"That one mistake of not noticing that kid and thinking, upon reflection, that you should have known, can haunt a teacher. We want to give them the tools that allow them to save lives," said Christensen, daughter of Katherine and Steve Christensen.

HJR 1004 passed 13-0 and now faces a vote of the full House.

Sen. Ellen Roberts, R-Durango, created the Youth Advisory Council through a bill in 2008, in order to inform legislators about topics important to young people. The youth council has taken positions on bills, but the suicide-prevention resolution is its first piece of original legislation. "It's doing exactly what I had hoped," Roberts said. Animas High School student Daniel Fallon-Cyr also serves on the 40-person council and attended the meeting Monday.

jhanel@durangoherald.com

2. Montrose Press – February 26, 2012

http://www.montrosepress.com/news/resolution-aimed-at-teen-suicide-prevention-efforts/article_08c98d86-601d-11e1-b045-0019bb2963f4.html

Resolution aimed at teen suicide prevention efforts

By Will Hearst Daily Press Writer | Posted: Sunday, February 26, 2012 2:00 am

A resolution sponsored by state Sen. Ellen Roberts aimed at increasing awareness of teen suicide prevention efforts emerged from the Senate Education Committee this week and will go before the full Senate for action.

House Joint Resolution 1004 is being carried by Roberts, R-Durango, and Sen. Michael Johnston, D-Denver, after it was brought to them by students from the Colorado Youth Advisory Council, a branch of the Civic Canopy, which works to build a stronger, healthier society. The Youth Advisory Council is made up of Colorado students ages 14-19.

“This is a tragic issue that affects people from all walks of life,” Roberts stated in a press release. “It is particularly heartbreaking when teens see suicide as their only option.”

For the full story, see today's print edition. The online story may not reflect all relevant information that was reported. We encourage readers to obtain the full story by reading the print edition or our e-edition, To subscribe, call (970) 252-7081 or click on the subscription link on the main page.

3. Colorado News Agency – January 24, 2012

<http://www.coloradonewsagency.com/2012/01/24/legislature-step-up-the-fight-against-teen-suicide/>

Legislature: Step up the fight against teen suicide

Debi Brazzale / Colorado News Agency Jan 24th, 2012



Lawmakers voted Monday at the Capitol to delve deeper into teen suicide, with the House Education Committee unanimously passing a resolution calling for a study of the issue. The bipartisan [House Joint Resolution 1004](#), sponsored by Reps. [Tom Massey](#), R-Poncha Springs, and [Andy Kerr](#), D-Lakewood, in the House and Sens. [Ellen Roberts](#), R-Durango, and [Michael Johnston](#), D-Denver, in the Senate, directs the Colorado Youth Advisory Council to study preventative measures regarding teen suicide and to report its findings to the legislature.

Citing statistics indicating that one out of every five teenagers in Colorado has considered suicide, Massey said nothing else could be more important than tackling the issue.

“If there’s anything we can do to stem this tide, it’s of paramount importance that we do whatever we can,” said Massey.

Kerr, a teacher, said he has seen the devastation teen suicide has bestowed on his school district in Jefferson County.

“I know personally that my community has been heavily impacted by teen suicide,” said Kerr. “Whatever we can do to prevent it from happening and raise awareness in our communities is critical.”

Driving the issue home, University of Denver student Thomas Tarler, who has struggled with depression throughout high school and his young adult life, said current approaches need to be augmented with a more direct approach.

“To say that there is a hotline to call, that does nothing,” said Tarler. “We need a more proactive approach. This should be the highest priority in Colorado. Suicide affects every teenager.”

The resolution is now headed for consideration by the full House before it heads to the Senate. ***You may use part or all of this article in Web or print publications, as well as in radio and TV broadcasts, at no charge and without further permission. Please credit the Colorado News Agency.***

Appendix C: Teen Suicide Prevention Resolution Testimony

Date: 02/23/2012

Final HJR12-1004

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

03:27 PM -- House Joint Resolution 12-1004

The committee took a brief recess.

03:32 PM

The committee came back to order. Senator Johnston, co-prime sponsor of House Joint Resolution 12-1004, presented the resolution, which addresses teen suicide in Colorado. The resolution directs the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) to organize a working group to study the issue of teen suicide prevention and report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly. It also encourages additional training for high school faculty members for recognizing the warning signs of suicide and encourages public schools to participate in National Suicide Prevention Week, September 2 - 8, 2012.

Senator Johnston provided statistics about teen suicide in Colorado. Members were provided a packet of information about the resolution (Attachment A).

03:35 PM The following persons testified:

03:35 PM -- Rebekah Romberg, representing the COYAC, testified in support of the resolution. She provided background information on COYAC and its membership. She talked about COYAC's duties, noting that this resolution is the first COYAC-initiated legislation. She provided information about teen suicide issues, explaining why COYAC decided to bring this resolution. She said the resolution requires COYAC to organize a working group to study the issue of teen suicide prevention and to report to the General Assembly.

03:39 PM -- Suzanna Steele, representing COYAC, testified in support of the resolution. She talked about why it is important to include teachers in suicide prevention efforts. She shared a story about a teen in Massachusetts who, after being cyber-bullied, committed suicide. She also shared a story about a friend who was bullied and attempted suicide. She talked about current efforts underway, saying they are often ineffective. She explained why the resolution is important.

03:43 PM The witnesses responded to committee questions and comments. Senator Hudak asked whether observing National Suicide Prevention Week would put the idea of suicide into students' heads. Ms. Romberg responded, talking about the training that is included in observance of the week. Follow-up conversation with Senator Hudak ensued.

03:46 PM -- Thomas Tarler, a student of DU and a former member of COYAC, testified in support of the resolution. He provided information about his background. Mr. Tarler shared his experience as a sufferer of clinical depression. He talked about the idea that suicide is "contagious." Mr. Tarler described a recent survey of students about the issues that are important to them, referring to the final page of the handout (Attachment A). He noted that teens feel strongly that issues of teen suicide should be addressed.

03:53 PM Mr. Tarler responded to committee questions. Senator Spence asked Mr. Tarler to talk about his experiences at school, asking whether his teachers were responsive to his depression symptoms. Senator

Johnston thanked Mr. Tarler for his courage in coming to testify before the committee. Mr. Tarler responded, asking the committee members to bring the issue forward. Senator Heath commented on the testimony as well.

03:58 PM -- Gretchen Cheverton, representing Second Wind Fund, Inc., testified in support of the resolution. Ms. Cheverton described her experiences as a young person who attempted suicide. She talked about the lack of discussion about mental health issues and suicide, noting that if her school had participated in National Suicide Prevention Week, she would have realized that she was not alone. She said it makes sense to train those who come into contact with kids every day about how to recognize depression and suicidal thoughts. She stated that teen suicide is a public health emergency.

04:06 PM -- Mark Shively, representing himself, testified in support of the resolution. He shared his experience as the parent of a teen who committed suicide. Mr. Shively talked about the next best steps to prevent teen suicide, including raising awareness and doing away with stigma around depression. He talked about the importance of getting schools involved in recognizing warning signs. Mr. Shively said it is important to focus on prevention

04:12 PM Senator Roberts, co-prime sponsor of the resolution made closing comments, talking about COYAC and its purpose, noting it is geographically, economically, racially, and educationally diverse. She explained that COYAC has engaged with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the State Board of Education (SBE) as they work toward a more substantive solution to the issue. She shared a personal experience about a friend who attempted suicide.

Appendix D: Sponsors COYAC is extremely grateful to the sponsors who have supported our work to date. We would especially like to thank the El Pomar Foundation, which stepped forward to support the vision of youth involvement in government with a grant covering half of our annual budget in our first year of operation.

Founding Supporter

The El Pomar Foundation

Lead Sponsors

Anschutz Family Foundation

Past Supporting Organizations

Aponte and Busam
Rocky Mountain Health Plans
League of Women Voters

2011-2012 Sponsors

College in Colorado - \$500
Osprey Packs, Inc - \$500

Civic Canopy Staff

Bill Fulton, Co-Director
Drew O'Connor, Co-Director
Ana Soler, Managing Director
Tracy Vlnicka, Coordinator