Senator Laphonza Butler on Youth Engagement

During her time in the Senate, Senator Laphonza Butler made it a priority to invite the next generation of leaders to the decision-making table. She centered youth voices by hosting roundtables, town halls, and listening sessions in her office and sponsoring legislation aimed to improve healthcare resources for young Americans.

Key Accomplishments

- *Youth Advisory Council:* Senator Butler launched her Youth Advisory Council, keeping her promise to fight for the next generation and empower young people to participate in their democratic system. The Council was comprised of more than 30 young people from across California who met regularly with the Senator and had the opportunity to **lend their voice on key issues including climate change, mental health, and economic mobility**. The Council also served as a sounding board for the Senator and her policy team on potential legislation. Senator Butler pushed to ensure the Council reflected the diversity of California and the variety of lived experiences in the state, including students and those with non-traditional academic backgrounds.

- *Young Leaders Academy*: Recognizing that internships are not accessible for all young Californians, Senator Butler created a virtual Young Leaders Academy program, allowing young people across California to gain insight into the inner workings of government. The program was a "pre-internship program;" by the end of the four-sessions, participants became strong applicants for future public service programs, including internships in California and on Capitol Hill. **130 students from across California participated in the program**.

- *Youth Mental Health Webinar*: On August 28, 2024, Senator Butler hosted a webinar on youth mental health which included panelists Jessica Cruz, CEO of National Alliance on Mental Illness and Michelle Wells, Director of Child, Adolescent, and TAY Services at San Fernando Valley Community Mental Health Center. Senator Butler spoke on the ongoing youth mental health crisis in the U.S. and stressed the important of legislation to address mental health challenges among marginalized youth.

Key Legislative Accomplishments

- *The Strengthening Supports for Youth Act (S. 4811):* Senator Butler introduced this bill which would establish a pilot program and provides grant funding to support parents, families, and caregivers in addressing mental health and substance use challenges among the children, adolescents, and young adults in their lives.

- ***The Prevention Services for Youth Act*** *(S. 4812):* Senator Butler [introduced this bill](#) which would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to issue guidance to states on establishing an effective continuum of mental health and substance use disorder prevention services for youth under the Medicaid program and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

- ***High School Voter Empowerment Act*** *(S. 4211):* Senator Butler [introduced this bill](#) aimed at increasing civic participation among young voters by promoting civics education and encouraging high schools to conduct voter registration drives. The legislation would allow schools to collaborate with state election officials to use voting machines for student government elections, providing students with hands-on experience in the voting process. Senator Butler's initiative would not only **educate the next generation of voters but also help to cultivate a lifelong habit of civic engagement**. The bill has garnered support from organizations such as Common Cause, the ACLU, and the League of Women Voters, highlighting its broad appeal.

- ***Youth Climate Leadership Act*** *(S. 4189):* Senator Butler [introduced this legislation](#) to require federal agencies to include young people's voices in decision-making, which will **increase opportunities for the next generation of leaders to meet the real challenges** posed by climate change and other human-made environmental issues. Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund, Earth Justice, League of Conservation Voters, and California Environmental Voters endorsed the legislation.