

children atRisk

Support of Opportunity Youth and Economic Development

April 23, 2025

Dear Members of the 89th Texas Legislature:

Members of the 89th Texas Legislature have introduced several promising initiatives aimed at boosting workforce productivity and driving economic development across the state. Key bipartisan bills currently advancing through the legislature focus on strengthening public education, expanding career and technical training opportunities, and enhancing transparency and strategic planning. These efforts are essential to equipping Texas youth for success and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to the state's future

THE URGENT NEED

Nearly half a million young Texans between ages 16-24 are neither in school nor employed. At 13.1%, our youth disconnection rate significantly exceeds the national average of 10.9%.

Governor Abbott has declared expanding career training an emergency item for this legislative session, and for good reason. By 2030, more than 60% of Texas jobs will require post-secondary education or training. Yet less than 40% of Texas students attain these credentials within six years of high school graduation. This growing skills gap threatens our economic prosperity and leaves countless young Texans without pathways to self-sufficiency. The Texas Workforce Innovation Council's "[Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan](#)" also identified Opportunity Youth as a key population to ensuring future economic success.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT

The cost of youth disconnection affects all Texans. By age 28, those who experienced prolonged disconnection from work and education earn approximately \$16,000 less annually than their peers. Many qualify for public benefits and struggle to meet basic needs, creating additional costs for our state. Almost half lack health insurance, and many are already parents—potentially perpetuating cycles of economic hardship that extend to the next generation.

COMMON-SENSE SOLUTIONS

Prevent Disconnection:

- **SB 570 (Bettencourt)** – Requires schools to establish attendance policies aimed at preventing chronic absenteeism and truancy.

- **SB 991 (Bettencourt), HB 213 (Gonzales)** - Enables early identification of chronically absent students to facilitate appropriate supports

Educate and Prepare

- **SB 1728 (Perry)/HB 3882 (Lalani)** - Enhances career and technical education opportunities for at-risk youth to facilitate successful transition into the workforce

Increase Transparency and Strategic Planning

- **SB 1143 (Blanco)/HB 3173 (Talarico)** – Enhances accountability by tracking and reporting federal workforce development fund allocation for disconnected young adults and requires local strategic plans for Opportunity Youth

WHY YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

Texas has always led the nation in job creation and economic growth. To maintain our competitive edge and fulfill our commitment to all Texans, we cannot afford to leave half a million young people on the sidelines.

We respectfully urge you to vote YES on these critical, common-sense bills.

Sincerely,

CHILDREN AT RISK

The Undersigned Texas Opportunity Youth & Young Adults (OYYA) Advocates

Additional organizations supporting these bills: