



## Memorandum

To: Ming Wang, Program Administrator, Utah Department of Human Services  
From: PATH Team at CLASP  
Date: May 17, 2019  
Re: Examples of State and Local Youth Offices

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### **SUMMARY**

Utah's PATH application calls for the establishment of a Youth in Transition Office with management and oversight responsibilities to improve services for youth/young adults throughout the state of Utah. The team identified learning about relevant examples of Youth in Transition offices at the state and local level as a high priority TA need. The team also expressed interest in learning about the feasibility, opportunities, barriers, pitfalls, and organizational structures of these offices to help understand whether and how to best organize such an office in Utah. This memo responds to that TA request and is intended to inform our conversation during the May 21-22 site visit.

### **Local Examples**

#### **Los Angeles County**

In 2004, LA County passed Proposition 63 (Mental Health Services Act). Proposition 63 authorized LA county to place a 1% tax on millionaires in the county and use the funds for Mental Health Services and prevention. Around the same time, the county decided to create separate divisions for children, youth, and adults. Each division was led by a deputy director that reported directly to the Director of the Department of Mental Health. In the [youth division](#), the department of mental health focused on youth between the ages of 16 and 25. The division funded emergency shelter programs, housing, drop in centers, systems of care training, and collaborating with CBOs for mental health services. It is important to note that in 2019, LA County's Department of Mental Health is being restructured such that the three divisions will be reintegrated and led by one deputy director. Current staff reported they do not believe the reintegration will impact the service array for youth/young adults. Given the division's coordinating role, it is unclear how the reintegration will impact transition age youths' experience of the system.

#### **Sacramento, California**

The city of Sacramento has a [youth division](#) housed in the Department of Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment (YPCE). In 2016, the department renamed and reorganized to include the city's youth in the governance structure for the agency while aligning the city's youth programs under a unified vision, mission, set of values, framework, and goals to help young people succeed. The department's strategic plan outlines five goals:

- Create and help navigate critical pathways for youth development, safety and health.
- Provide quality parkland and recreation facilities.
- Promote lifelong recreation and learning.
- Foster community livability and strong neighborhoods.
- Ensure success through administrative, operational and organizational excellence

The youth division of YPCE focuses on youth employment, civic engagement, after school programs, sports and summer programs. The Civic Engagement component includes the Sacramento Youth Commission and the Summer @ City Hall program. Both programs teach youth how to get involved in city-level civic engagement, advocacy, and organizing, and how to navigate their local government. The Sacramento Youth Commission consists of appointed members ages 14-19 who live in Sacramento. They update the Sacramento City Council and submit formal recommendations, assist the City of Sacramento in promoting City services and functions related to youth, receive suggestions and complaints regarding youth matters and recommend solutions to the City Council, assist youth in understanding the workings of local government, and encourage participation in the Sacramento community and their neighborhoods. Youth commission members can conduct studies and investigations in the field of youth and community interest and share those findings and make recommendations to the City Council. Overall, the commission is responsible for advocating for a focus on youth problems and needs among Sacramento's institutions and organizations to improve the health and well-being of children and youth in City of Sacramento. The city of Sacramento is dedicated to helping its youth become leaders and develop tangible skills for the workforce through the work of its youth division.

### **Baltimore City, Maryland**

Baltimore City has a [Youth Commission](#) that is housed in the Mayor's Office. The youth commission is made up of 17 voting members and 14 non-voting members between the ages of 14 and 24, who are high school graduates or full-time students. Each of the voting members are from the 14 voting districts and the other 3 are seats at large. Each of the voting members are appointed by the mayor. The other 14 members represent the Baltimore City School System, the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Health Department, Police Department, Department of Social Services, State's Attorney's Office, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, the State Department of Juvenile Services, the Family League of Baltimore City, and Baltimore City Community College. The youth commission is responsible for reviewing issues relating to children and youth, making recommendations for programs, policies, and any necessary legislation to promote the health and well-being of children, youth, and their families, advocating for issues related to children and youth, developing and maintaining a 3 year action plan outlining areas for study by the commission, working with the private and public sector to bring forth the concerns of children and youth, as well as evaluating programming that will enhance the development of children and youth, developing a communication network to disseminate information about services to children and youth, and submitting an annual report to the mayor and the city council. The youth commission members are appointed for one four-year term and are required to meet 6-10 times each year. All youth that are on the commission are compensated for their time.

## **State Examples**

### **Massachusetts**

The Massachusetts statewide young adult council advises the department of mental health on how to improve services for youth and young adults. The group has helped with revising several assessments and making policy changes. For instance, the youth council played a role in changing a regulation that reframed the age for child mental health services. This change in regulation allowed the children's mental health system in Massachusetts to serve youth between the ages of 18 and 22. Additionally, it promoted a better collaboration between the child and adult systems. The council meets weekly to discuss issues in the department of mental health. Currently, the group is led by 3 young adults. Most of the youth that participate on this council are experts in housing, education, and mental health. The overall focus of the council is improving the quality of services for transition age youth within the Department of Mental Health.

### **Colorado**

Colorado's Department of Labor and Employment Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides [youth in transition services](#). The department provides students who are transitioning from high school to college and employment coaching to make their transition into adulthood as seamless as possible. The goal of the youth in transition unit is to promote competitive, integrated employment for Colorado's youth through thoughtful career pathway development as a result of coordinated services with education, workforce centers, and other adult service agency partners. Colorado is participating in the ASPIRE and SWAP initiatives. ASPIRE stands for Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness in Education and Employment. It offers interventions including Case Management, Financial Education, Self-Determination Training, Training information for parents and families, and individualized explanation of benefits the youth and family are receiving to help youth improve their employment and educational outcomes. The School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) is a program that was designed to help youth and young adults with disabilities receive employment and overcome any employment challenges. SWAP does evaluation and diagnostic services, vocational counseling and guidance, physical and mental restoration services, and training. Additionally, they do case management, career development, career exploration, employment-related instruction, job development/placement, year-round community-based services, and one year follow up. The department is focused on coordinating services across workforce, K12 education, and postsecondary education systems.

### **Tennessee**

[Tennessee's Commission on Children and Youth](#) is a policy making body with 21 members appointed by the governor. Each member represents a development district in the state. Four youth advisory members meet the requirements for a Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) state advisory group. The Commission is responsible for issue areas and councils that cover children's mental health, juvenile justice, early childhood, home visiting, regional commissions, and young child wellness. One of these councils is the [Youth Transitions Advisory Council](#), which includes all state departments providing services to youth and young adults. The Youth Transitions Advisory Council was created by Tennessee's state legislature to assist the Department of Children Services with developing an extension of foster care services through age 21 for youth aging out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Additionally, the YTAC produces an annual report documenting the number of foster youths

receiving services, the progress made by the department toward the provision of services, and any recommendations the members YTAC have to improve these services. Some of the recommendations involve insurance for youth, employment of youth, trainings, immigration, service and supports, education, and legal issues pertaining to foster youth. The commission meets 3-4 times a year, and meetings are open to private service providers, mental health advocates, and other community stakeholders. The overall role of the Youth Council is to improve and coordinate services across systems for child welfare and juvenile justice involved youth while also supporting youth leadership development and partnership.

### **Key Takeaways and Considerations**

- States and localities typically establish youth focused offices around 3 goals:
  1. Coordinating youth services across sectors or across adult and child serving systems
  2. Improving the quality of youth services within a sector, agency, or branch of government
  3. Fostering youth leadership development and authentic youth partnership
- These offices can be housed in a range of agencies/departments (executive branch, department of parks and recreation, vocational rehabilitation, departments of mental health), are intended to bridge a range of systems (youth workforce-youth development-recreation, k12 education-higher education-workforce, child welfare-juvenile justice-housing-mental health), and can be structured as commissions or divisions within larger agencies.
- Offices vary in terms of whether they primarily focus on youth advising, governance and leadership, management and implementation of programs, or filling a coordination and cross-sector policy development role.
- Establishing a youth in transition office requires careful consideration of any proposed youth governance structure, the responsibilities and authority of youth leaders (recommendations versus setting policy, control of resources, decision making authority) and the relationship between youth governance bodies and agency staff or supporting staff.
- Establishing a youth in transition office also requires careful consideration of the mechanism by which the office is established (legislative, administrative, executive order) and a sustainable funding strategy to ensure that the office remains viable through leadership transitions.