

Young Voices Deserve to Be Heard

Children are underestimated. Young people are often deemed by adults to be frivolous or naïve, but they will nevertheless run the future. They will take over businesses, hold positions in government and invent new technologies. Young people are as essential to the functioning society as any other demographic, and as such, should be represented when large decisions are being made that affect whole communities.

If the legal age to possess a driver's permit and drive on public roads in Hawaii is fifteen and a half years of age, children around this age should be able to influence the laws that directly affect them. If there were to be a council of young people to represent the voices of the youth in the Hawaii State Capitol, the state itself and its sub-communities would benefit exponentially. This theoretical council would comprise of youths aged 13 through 17, the ages when children start becoming more aware of the world around them and forming their own opinions about it. It would meet and provide feedback and opinions regarding issues or decisions being made in the state capitol and represent the youth of Hawaii as a whole.

The representation of young voices in the decision-making process of Hawaii has numerous benefits. Young people undoubtedly have different perspectives than their elders. It is seen time and again through the difference of opinions between a parent and child, or between a teacher and student. This difference, however, does not have to be negative, but can be used to an invaluable advantage. Children bring fresh, creative perspectives and ideas that adults may overlook; furthermore, in Hawaii especially, where there is a vast range of cultures and ethnicities, representation is important. The young demographic deserves as much as any other to have a say in decisions that affect their present as well as their future.

Years from now, if nothing is done and young people have not had the opportunity to learn how to effect change, they will grow up to be community leaders who repeat the mistakes of their predecessors. If they learn valuable skills now, such as standing up for their beliefs, effectively voicing their opinions, collaborating and

compromising, these young people will grow to be much more efficient, inclusive, creative and knowledgeable leaders than those before them. If Hawaii does not become more inclusive of different groups of people, how can we ever expect any aspect of our state to improve? If we do not explore new avenues and solutions to our problems, the efficiency of Hawaii's policies, legislative opinions and problem-solving strategies will inevitably plateau. We cannot wait for our youth to grow up before they can start making an impact.

Clarence T.C. Ching, who was an avid student and community leader himself, thought the future of the youth to be of great importance. Today, his foundation benefits a myriad of schools and organizations for youth in Hawaii, among them Sacred Hearts Academy, the Children's Alliance of Hawaii, YMCA of Honolulu and Honolulu Theater for Youth. A minority himself as a Chinese-American, and overcoming numerous challenges to become a successful businessman and community leader, Mr. Ching would have leapt at the opportunity to support the endeavors of young people, who are a minority in their own right.

The creation of a youth council in Hawaii would essentially affirm the validity of the opinions of young people, who are so often overlooked or looked down upon by adults. Growing up in a cultural melting pot, as well as in one of the world's greatest natural gems, the youth of Hawaii have been raised on a culture of acceptance and respect. Additionally, young people in Hawaii can be characterized as practicing the Hawaiian concept of *kokua*, or having a strong and intrinsically kind desire to be of help to others. It is time the youth of Hawaii are able to take the lessons they have learned from their elders, and from them, create a new legacy of their own.