

# Youth On Their Own Advocacy Policy

Youth On Their Own (YOTO) both delivers direct social services and advocates for just and equitable public policies that will help change conditions that give rise to the need for our services and/or improve the long-term success of YOTO youth. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for advocacy priorities and actions taken by YOTO.

## 1. Issue Advocacy & Core Advocacy Issues

YOTO primarily engages in issue advocacy (advocacy) and does not typically attempt to influence legislation (lobbying). While some lobbying is allowed for nonprofit organizations, and while YOTO may choose to participate in some lobbying activities, lobbying activities do not constitute a significant or substantial part of YOTO's core activities<sup>1</sup>.

YOTO's Core Advocacy Issues reflect our mission and the values of our organization. Our Core Advocacy Issues include:

- Thriving, well-funded K-12 public education systems
- Access to post-secondary education and training
- Affordable housing
- Access to basic needs
- Other mission-aligned issues approved by the board

In addition, YOTO advocates for public programs that facilitate the direction of private resources to our youth and our programs. This advocacy area includes:

- Tax Incentives/benefits for charitable contributions

## 2. Advocacy Platform

YOTO's Board of Directors will approve an Advocacy Platform at least every 24 months. The Advocacy Platform will be created, updated, and monitored by YOTO's Advocacy Committee. The Advocacy Committee will also assess the risks related to various advocacy activities and advise the Board of Directors of these risks. The platform will contain potential actions the organization may take related to each of the Core Advocacy Issues (see Section 1 above). Once approved, YOTO board and staff members may participate in advocacy activities that align with the Advocacy Platform on behalf of the organization. Any formal position or action, including providing funding to a third party, related to a specific piece of legislation will be recommended by the Advocacy Committee and requires a vote of the full board.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to YOTO attorney's memo dated January 4, 2023 for legal guidance on nonprofit advocacy and lobbying.

*Advocacy activities may include:*

- Becoming familiar with sound, credible information and research about problems and needs related to YOTO's advocacy priorities.
- Identifying staff and/or volunteers who will develop and maintain expertise on YOTO's core advocacy issues. These staff and/or volunteers may be asked to represent YOTO on these issues.
- Educating key internal and external publics, including elected officials, about the work of YOTO and the issues facing YOTO youth.
- Engaging with the media to publicize facts about priority issues and educate about solutions.
- Participating in coalitions and advocacy networks that have a public policy presence or purpose, and that will extend YOTO's advocacy while conserving limited resources.
- Monitoring legislation at the state and national levels, and engaging in advocacy where appropriate.

### **3. Advocacy Standards**

YOTO's approach to advocacy is consistent with our values of respect and honest direct communication. We will be open about our intentions and avoid personalizing issues or demonizing individuals or organizations. Specifically:

- YOTO will not use the media to attack people or institutions.
- YOTO will not present itself as a spokesperson on issues for which it does not have sufficient expertise.
- YOTO is nonpartisan in its activities. Issue advocacy will never extend to endorsement of a political candidate.

### **4. Advocacy Staffing**

Advocacy is a shared responsibility among YOTO board, staff, and volunteers. An Advocacy Committee meets throughout the year to become educated about public policy issues and discuss possible YOTO positions and responses. Volunteers on the Board and the Advocacy Committee will help monitor legislation of interest. Staff and volunteers are required to discuss in advance any proposed advocacy work they wish to undertake on behalf of YOTO with the President/CEO and the Advocacy Committee, and to gain prior approval. Current YOTO participants and program alumni may choose to participate in advocacy activities led by YOTO when appropriate.

### **5. Review of Policy**

The board of directors will review the Advocacy Policy at least every 24 months, concurrent with its review of the Advocacy Platform, to make any needed updates and to ensure the policy continues to meet the organization's needs.