

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S

## Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda

2024



## **About URGE**

Young people today – a majority of whom are Black, Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or Latinx/a – are on the frontlines of the fight for Reproductive Justice: organizing, educating, shifting culture, and building power with URGE.

URGE envisions a liberated world where we can live with justice, love freely, express our gender and sexuality, and define and create families of our choosing.

As a state-driven national organization, URGE builds power and sustains a young people's movement for reproductive justice by centering the leadership of young people of color who are women, queer, trans, nonbinary, and people of low-income.

URGE focuses on policy advocacy, organizing, and voter engagement in states where the challenges and opportunities are greatest, with deep investment in Alabama, California, Georgia, Kansas, Ohio, and Texas.

From increasing youth voter engagement to engaging young people in policy advocacy, from organizing to shifting culture in our communities and online, URGE has cemented our reputation as innovative, impactful, and fearless in our fight for reproductive justice.





## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION02
ISSUE 1: ACCESSING ABORTION WITHOUT04 BARRIERS
ISSUE 2: SUPPORTING TRANS, INTERSEX, AND07 QUEER YOUNG PEOPLE
ISSUE 3: REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF OUR
ISSUE 4: ACCESSING HEALTHCARE AND
ISSUE 5: TRANSFORMING OUR ECONOMY SO12 YOUNG PEOPLE CAN LIVE
ISSUE 6: CREATING SAFE AND HEALTHY17 COMMUNITIES
CONCLUSION20

## Introduction

Young people have always been a force to be reckoned with, fueling the flame for change. They know what is needed for their liberation, and they have the vision to shape our collective futures. From voter engagement to student activism, civic education, protest movements, grassroots organizing, and influential digital campaigns, young people have moved the needle on policy time and time again. Young Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a, Asian and Pacific Islander folks; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex folks; immigrants; low-income people; and other young people impacted by systems of oppression in particular have pushed the United States towards greater equity. Young people want to LIVE.

Millennials and Gen Z are an extremely diverse population with hope in their power as a collective. With 74% of young people saying they plan to vote in the 2024 presidential election, motivated to make their voices heard – individually and as a voting bloc — there is no doubt they will be effecting change on issues that matter to their communities. We must take their perspectives seriously.

Since URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity first released the *Young People's Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda* in 2020, young people have continued to demonstrate their immovable commitment to advancing justice, challenging barriers to voting, disproving cultural narratives about their political indifference, and pushing for actualized change in an economically-driven political system where corporations are king. At the core of the Reproductive Justice framework is that we all have personal bodily autonomy and the human right to have children, to not have children, and to nurture the children we have in a safe and healthy environment. In spite of the long list of formidable foes and barriers, young people continue to envision their collective "liberation" – a world where each of us can live, love, create families, and express our genders and sexualities with power, joy, and without stigma, scarcity, or interference.



The wave of positive policy changes at the local and state level has reflected their efforts. Since 2020:

Voters showed up at the ballot to support abortion rights and reject attempts to restrict care in six states: California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Vermont, and Ohio. Five states expanded
Medicaid, ensuring people
working to make ends meet
have the quality and affordable
insurance they need to lead
healthy lives.

Driven by the activism of young people, 10 states ended the "Tampon Tax," improving access to menstrual products and treating them as the essential products they are.

Eight states, including Michigan, Minnesota, and Utah, took steps to end conversion therapy which harms LGBTQIA+ youth.

29 states enacted over 200 laws that expand access to the vote and ensure young people aren't shut out of the democratic process.

Voters in Florida, Nebraska, and Nevada approved ballot measures to raise the minimum wage for workers.

While we are invigorated by these wins, we know that with each wave of progress comes an extremist backlash.

The 2024 Young People's Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda builds upon a 2020 agenda that was developed through a significant stakeholder engagement process. This updated version acknowledges how in a short time, major events – in our case the COVID-19 pandemic, several significant Supreme Court decisions, and multiple mass uprisings – can significantly shift the policy landscape.

While the **Young People's Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda** covers several issue areas and topics, it is not an exhaustive list of all the issues and topics that are important to young people. It represents perspectives that have emerged through additional public opinion polling of young people, as well as key points of policy advocacy from within URGE and the Reproductive Justice movement. We share this agenda as a foundation for young people's liberation and to serve as a starting point for policymakers who want to engage with young people in moving us closer to Reproductive Justice.

## ISSUE 1: ACCESSING ABORTION WITHOUT BARRIERS

Each of us should have the rights, resources, and support to decide whether and when to become parents and that includes safe and accessible abortion care. Unfortunately, decades of restrictive laws enacted at the state and federal level, along with the fall of Roe, have resulted in inequitable access, particularly for Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a, Asian and Pacific Islander young people, LGBTQIA+ communities, and low-income people. Despite this reality, the majority of Americans believe abortion should be legal and available in our communities without barriers or stigma, and 90% of young adults (18-30 years old) do not want to see the right to abortion threatened. To bring us closer to young people's liberation, we need policies that ensure anyone who needs an abortion can get one safely, affordably, and without stigma or criminalization.

## **EXPAND HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ABORTION CARE**

Lack of insurance coverage for abortion can be the difference between someone getting the care they need or having it denied altogether. Restricting insurance coverage of abortion denies people the ability to make decisions about their health and future.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure all public and private insurance plans, including Medicaid, cover abortion care without cost-sharing.

## INCREASE REAL ACCESS TO ABORTION

Abortion is not available to huge areas of the country due to the criminalization of providers and intrusive abortion restrictions, like arbitrary gestational bans. This disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, people of color, people who live in rural areas, low-income people, LGBTQIA+ people, and immigrants.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure access to abortion care in communities without delays or barriers.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure abortion providers offering services in "healthcare deserts" are met with support – not criminalization.

## END CRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION & ABORTION CARE

With the overturning of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court Decision, there's been an increase in the criminalization of pregnant people – with people of color, immigrants, and low-income people disproportionately targeted. Each of us should have the right to access abortion care without government interference.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure the right to abortion so no one is investigated, arrested, or prosecuted for their reproductive health outcomes

## SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S AUTONOMY & RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

Young people are fully capable of making decisions about what is best for their bodies. Unfortunately, parental involvement laws, requiring a young person to notify or obtain consent from their parents before they can receive abortion care, often delay or prevent young people from accessing care and put their health and safety at risk. Most young people involve their parents when making decisions about their health, including abortion, but we know that's not always possible.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure young people have autonomy, privacy, and the right to make decisions about their reproductive health without the mandate of parental involvement.

## REMOVE BARRIERS TO SAFE & EFFECTIVE MEDICATION ABORTION CARE

Medication abortion, most commonly performed by taking a two-pill regimen of mifepristone and misoprostol, is an FDA-approved method of ending a pregnancy; it is safe, effective, and an increasingly popular method of abortion care. Unfortunately, policies enacted by anti-abortion politicians have made it difficult for health care providers to prescribe and for people to obtain medication abortion in-person at health care clinics and via telehealth.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure medication abortion care is available and accessible for anyone who needs it.

## ENSURE ACCESS TO ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT ABORTION

Anti-abortion "crisis pregnancy centers," which often receive public funding, use deceptive practices to shame, delay, and prevent people from accessing abortion care.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Divest tax dollars from unregulated and often nonmedical facilities.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Fund and ensure access to comprehensive, medically accurate, culturally competent, and language-accessible information about sexual and reproductive health care so people can make informed decisions that are best for them and their families.



## Issue 2: SUPPORTING TRANS, INTERSEX, AND QUEER YOUNG PEOPLE

Lawmakers across the country are introducing and passing legislation aimed at denying queer and trans young people access to healthcare and the ability to fully participate in public life. Moreover, these harmful policies are crafted with the goal of alienating these young people and obliterating their systems of support. Healthcare providers, parents, teachers, and other supportive adults are being criminalized and face the threat of losing their licenses. jobs, or custody rights. These attacks, coupled with transphobic and anti-queer rhetoric, create a hostile and unsafe environment that also infringes on young people's autonomy and privacy. However, young people 18-30 years old primarily believe that politicians should not focus on these issues, and further, should do more to protect the rights of trans people. It's critical that lawmakers repeal laws that only serve to discriminate and stigmatize and enact evidence-based policies that support and prioritize the health, safety, and needs of transgender, intersex, and queer young people. This type of approach is rooted in science and has the support of major medical organizations like the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

## ACCESS TO GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

Everyone deserves access to quality and affordable medical care, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation. Policies that prohibit access to gender-affirming care for young people and impose penalties on healthcare professionals who provide it go against extensive scientific research and put patients' health and wellbeing at risk. Intersex folks still face surgeries and other invasive medical treatments without consent. LGBTQIA+ people face discrimination, stigma, lack of insurance coverage, and other systemic barriers when trying to access the care they need to lead healthy lives. Many gender-affirming care practices are closing due to fears of encroaching anti-trans healthcare laws and pressure by state lawmakers on facilities that receive state funding, resulting in a public health crisis for transand non-binary people in many states.



**POLICY RECOMMENDATION**Ensure access to safe and essential gender-affirming care, such as hormone therapy and transition-related care.



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure young people's bodily autonomy and self determination by prohibiting surgeries & treatments without individuals' consent.

## EXPAND GENDER MARKERS AND ENSURE LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE FORMS

Having legal identity documents that accurately reflect one's name and gender identity is essential to one's ability to obtain healthcare, employment, and housing, travel freely, and access public programs and spaces. This is especially true for transgender individuals who are facing increasing discrimination, harassment, and attacks. Inclusive forms are also essential to support research and funding to support LGBTQIA+ people.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure the full range of gender identities are recognized, and remove burdensome requirements so that all people can obtain the identity documents they need to move through the world with respect and dignity.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure all forms gathering demographic information are LGBTQIA+ inclusive

## SUPPORT LGBTQIA+ YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

Studies show that youth who participate in organized sports gain more than just physical benefits; they also have lower rates of anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem and confidence, and higher levels of academic achievement. Unfortunately, a history of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia in organized sports has meant sports, including youth sports, haven't always been welcoming and inclusive. Today, anti-LGBTQIA+ politicians who are pushing legislation aimed at prohibiting trans young people from participating in sports at their schools are relying on the same harmful and false tropes to exclude them simply because of who they are.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Repeal dangerous policies and barriers to ensure that all LGBTQIA+ youth can fully participate in sports.

# Issue 3: REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF OUR DEMOCRACY

The right to vote – and make our voices heard – is the cornerstone of our democracy. Unfortunately, millions of Americans have never been able to fully exercise their right to vote because of decades of deliberate voter suppression and disenfranchisement laws that target historically marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and other young people of color. Our ability to vote and to have our votes count is even more important as the integrity of elections is under attack. We cannot be a truly free society until everyone can meaningfully participate in the democratic process.

#### MAKE IT EASIER TO VOTE

Voting should be accessible to everyone who wants to participate. Outdated and burdensome voting registration requirements and systems create obstacles that prevent people from voting.



### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Enact policies that support automatic voter registration, voting by mail, expanded early voting periods, and additional polling locations make it easier for people to vote and have their voices heard.

## **END VOTER SUPPRESSION MEASURES**

In the last twenty years, states have enacted arbitrary requirements and severe penalties that not only make it difficult for people to vote but also criminalize and create a chilling effect among communities of color. Strict voter ID laws, restrictions on voter registration, prohibiting the distribution of food or water to voters waiting in line at polling places, criminalizing innocent mistakes made while voting, and felony disenfranchisement laws are examples of policies aimed at preventing people from participating in our democracy.



### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Repeal voting policies that disproportionately impact people of color and young people.

## DISRUPT & DISMANTLE UNDEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

For too long, archaic tools and rules like the filibuster, electoral college, gerrymandering, and an illegitimate court have allowed minority rule to prevail over the will of the people, undermining our democratic process.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Reform institutions and systems to ensure the guardrails of democracy are strengthened, can function to include the voice of those historically excluded and disproportionately prevented from participating in our democracy; this includes addressing Jim Crowera practices that undermine popular will and stall progress.



# ISSUE 4: ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION

Every young person should have access to affordable, quality, healthcare and comprehensive LGBTQIA+ inclusive sexual health information and services in their communities. Unfortunately, discriminatory policies and lack of sufficient funding means young people are denied the rights, resources, and respect needed to live and make informed and independent decisions about their sexual and reproductive lives. We need policies that give young people information and resources so they can lead full and healthy lives with dignity and autonomy.

## PROVIDE UNIVERSAL AND FREE HEALTHCARE THAT OFFERS FULL COVERAGE

Each person should be able to get the care they need to lead healthy lives no matter how much money they earn, where they live, or what insurance they have. Unfortunately, our current healthcare system prioritizes profits, leaving many without affordable or meaningful insurance coverage to essential services like HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, contraception, mental health care, the full range of pregnancy and postpartum care, and gender-affirming care.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Fund and ensure access to universal and free health care so no one is denied the healthcare they need because of their inability to pay.

## FUND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT EQUITABLE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

While we've made great strides in medicine, women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ individuals and other marginalized communities continue to be disproportionately impacted by health conditions like HIV and AIDS, maternal mortality, and addiction.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Provide dedicated funding that centers the unique needs and experiences of under-resourced communities and ensures they are no longer left out of the policy and research.

### **EXPAND ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTIVE CARE**

When someone is seeking contraceptive care, they should have easy access to the full range of services along with accurate information and counseling from a nearby trained provider. Unfortunately, lack of awareness, prohibitive costs, a shortage of trained providers, and reproductive coercion make it difficult for people to obtain contraception care. This disproportionately impacts people of color, migrants, and Indigenous people on reservations.



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure contraception care is available and affordable in our communities.

## **ENSURE HEALTH EQUITY FOR IMMIGRANTS**

Every person should have the health coverage and resources they need to lead healthy lives no matter who they are or where they're from. Discriminatory policies deny immigrants access to public programs or impose delays that inhibit their ability to access healthcare.



FULICY RECOMMENDATION

Fund culturally competent and language-accessible public services for all immigrants.

## SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE, MEDICALLY ACCURATE, LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE SEX **EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

A vital element of health and wellness for young people includes medically accurate and age-appropriate material that includes information about abstinence, as well as condoms and contraception, to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Comprehensive sex ed also incorporates interpersonal and communication skills and helps young people explore their own values, goals, and options, and is inclusive to LGBTQIA+ individuals.



Fund and ensure access to comprehensive sex education for all.



## **ACHIEVE MENSTRUAL EQUITY**

People who menstruate need access to affordable and toxin-free menstrual products so they can fully and equally participate in school, work, and society. However, policies that tax essential menstrual products as "luxury items" make it financially challenging for young people to access products to manage their periods.



POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Remove the tax on menstrual products and make them free to people

## END SHACKLING OF PREGNANT INCARCERATED **PEOPLE**

The use of shackling on incarcerated people during pregnancy, labor and delivery, transportation, and postpartum recovery is an unconscionable practice and clear human rights violation. Leading experts including the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), American Medical Association (AMA), and American Public Health Association oppose shackling as it interferes with the ability of clinicians to safely practice medicine, violates professional principles of justice and ethics, and puts the health of the pregnant person and fetus at risk.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Prohibit the practice of shackling incarcerated individuals.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Ensure incarcerated individuals have access to the full range of reproductive healthcare, including abortion and prenatal care, health care supplies like menstrual hygiene products, proper nutrition, support during labor and delivery, and breastfeeding and parenting support after birth.

# Issue 5: TRANSFORMING OUR ECONOMY SO YOUNG PEOPLE CAN THRIVE

Deciding when and how to have children is an economic justice issue. People should be able to decide if they want to have children based on their vision for their families and future – not because they can't afford to have and raise them. For young people especially, crushing student debt, a lack of good jobs, and the high cost of living make it difficult for them to meet their basic human needs or build for the future. To achieve young people's liberation we must adopt policies that ensure we have equal access to employment, livable wages, and the healthcare we need to thrive.

### SUPPORT ECONOMIC SECURITY

People are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet due to the high cost of living. As prices surge and wages remain stagnant, people are being forced to take on additional jobs and choose between essentials like groceries and rent to survive.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Address the high cost of living, and especially tackle the root causes of housing and food insecurity.

## RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE

A fundamental cause of social inequity is our capitalist economic system which prioritizes increased corporate profit margins over the wellbeing of workers. Young people across the country are working multiple jobs and side hustles in order to support themselves and their families.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Raise the minimum wage and pressure companies to pay living wages so young people can cover their basic needs, stop living paycheck to paycheck, and ultimately achieve financial security.

### **EXPAND PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE POLICIES**

Paid leave policies allow workers to meet their health, safety, and family needs without jeopardizing their economic security. The United States is one of the only remaining countries to not guarantee paid family leave; there is no federal law that provides a right to paid family or medical leave and only a minority of states provide these protections.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Provide workers support and stability through paid medical, parental, and family leave.

## SUPPORT WORK-FAMILY JUSTICE

Job discrimination remains a persistent reality for many workers in the United States, especially for women, pregnant workers, caregivers, and LGBTQIA+ workers.



### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Pass and enforce strong local, state, and federal policies that prohibit discrimination in the workplace and protect pregnant and LGBTQIA+ workers.



## **ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

Everyone should have the ability to continue their education after high school, whether at a community college, university, or technical training center. However, today it's nearly impossible to afford the skyrocketing cost of college tuition, forcing students to rely on loans that come with high interest rates.



#### REFORM GOVERNMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Public safety net programs, like Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are vital lifelines for people with low income. However, rules that restrict eligibility based on immigration status or condition benefits based on a person's decision to have additional children are rooted in faulty and racist assumptions.



## SUPPORT PREGNANT, EXPECTANT, AND PARENTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people who are expecting or parenting face many barriers and discrimination. It is critical that they receive support so they can have healthy pregnancies, raise their children, continue their education, and participate in the workforce.



## Issue 6: CREATING SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The ability to live safely in one's community is one of the most basic elements of a dignified life. However, across the United States, young people – particularly young women, young people of color, immigrant youth, and LGBTQIA+ youth – are faced with active threats to their safety: sexual violence, discriminatory policing, immigration enforcement, and environmental degradation are daily and persistent in young people's lives. To ensure the safety of all young people, we need policies that support healthy and safe families and communities.

## SUPPORT GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Gen Z is known as the "lockdown generation." With mass shootings an almost daily occurrence and guns leading to deaths in domestic violence and suicide, the vast majority of young people believe that gun violence is a problem. There is broad agreement that stricter gun laws could help reduce gun violence.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Enact policies that raise the bar for purchasing a gun, set stronger safety measures for gun owners, and fund community-based programs for gun violence prevention, intervention, and aftercare.

## **INVEST IN SAFE COMMUNITIES**

Policing in the United States has driven mass incarceration and traumatized and harmed communities of color, particularly Black communities. Instead of ever-increasing funding for harmful policing, we need policies that reduce the size of the police state and prison industrial complex, and instead, invest in community wellness.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Fund community access to quality and affordable healthcare, publicly-financed housing, and community-led initiatives such as anti-violence programs, trauma services for young people, education, increased school counseling, after-school programs, and restorative justice programs.

## ADVOCATE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Though they have little hand in creating the impending climate catastrophe, young people of color – both in the United States and across the globe – are bearing the brunt of this manmade disaster.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Take bold action like dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and stopping corporate polluters to urgently address this climate disaster.

## SUPPORT LGBTQIA+ PARENTS AND DIVERSE FAMILY STRUCTURES

Because there are no federal or state (and very few local) protections for real or perceived relationship and family structures, stigmatized structures may be used against parents in custody proceedings. Many families do not fit into the "nuclear" mold, including multi-partner families, single parents, stepfamilies, LGBTQIA+ kinship networks, multi-generational households, and other relationships. Most nondiscrimination laws were drafted prior to the recognition of such family and relationship structures which leaves folks vulnerable to discrimination in housing, employment, business, services, and many other systemic shortcomings.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Enact policies that affirm LGBTQIA+ parental rights and ensure diverse family structures are treated equitably.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Support young people's families in all their forms.

## SUPPORT SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL, INTIMATE PARTNER, AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Survivors of rape, sexual assault, domestic/intimate partner violence, and hate crimes deserve access to trauma-informed resources that support their healing and overall physical and mental health.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Fund and improve services and treatments for survivors of sexual violence and create survivor-centered transformative justice models for community accountability.

#### END DISCRIMINATORY CRIMINALIZATION

People of color, immigrants, low-income people, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, and sex workers are more vulnerable to reproductive and sexual criminalization due to decades of systemic racism, reproductive oppression, and transphobia. These populations are more often investigated, detained, and arrested by the police, with trans women of color often accused of sex work even when not engaged—just walking while trans. Alternatively having to rely on survival methods like sex work when discriminated against in other facets of their lives leads to devastating impacts on their health and livelihoods.



#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Decriminalize sex work and repeal laws that penalize pregnant people for their pregnancy decisions, while also working to destigmatize situations in which these people may end up criminalized.



## Conclusion

There is no one policy – not even one policy area – that will usher in an era of reproductive justice and liberation. And young people are not a monolith; there are as many different perspectives on the issues and ideas for change as there are young people in this country. At the heart of this vision for reproductive justice are the voices of URGE chapter leaders and young people engaged in their communities. It represents young people living in big cities, small towns, and rural parts of the country.

URGE envisions a liberated world where we can live with justice, love freely, express our gender and sexuality, and define and create families of our choosing. This policy agenda is not exhaustive, and the policy areas do not stand alone; each issue is inextricably bound with the other, as much as our individual liberation is inextricably bound up with that of our communities.

It is our hope that the **Young People's Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda** will fuel the flame for change with young people – it is a tool for liberation!

Policymakers: This is the future, and we invite you to join us in building it.

## GET CONNECTED

Contact URGE at info@urge.org, and sign up for more information at urge.org/yppa.



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## **ENDNOTES**

To find the extensive list of resources and footnotes, please view the report online at urge.org/yppa.





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