

Esteemed Chairwomen Durazo and Members of the Senate,

Today, I stand before you with a sense of purpose and urgency. I'm here to advocate for something that can make a difference in the lives of countless young people in California.

I'm here to ask for your support in reinstating the \$20 million budget allocation for the California Youth Leadership Corps (CYLC) program.

My name is Brenda Carrillo, and I am the program lead for CYLC at de Anza College. For the past two years, I have had the privilege of working with some of the most inspiring individuals in our community.

They come from nontraditional backgrounds, including
1st generation individuals,
people with disabilities,
people with immigrant backgrounds
Student parents
,former foster care youth, and
Formally incarcerated individuals

I stand before you as an immigrant, a queer person, and a disability student who shares many of their experiences.

Through my involvement with CYLC, I have witnessed the awe-inspiring, life-changing impact that providing young people with a platform to tap into their inner power can have.

These individuals have lived through **unimaginable** struggles and have emerged from them With an **unrelenting** drive to make a positive difference in their lives and the lives of others,

they are now more determined than ever to create **positive** change in our communities

They have so much to share, so much wisdom and perspective on what affects our communities directly.

Yet,

they have never had the chance to be heard, to be believed, and to be valued for everything they are.

And not just seen as what they lack.

I am here today to ask you to give these young people that chance.

The reinstatement of the \$20 million budget allocation can make this a reality.

As you heard from our Executive director, The CYLC program was created to prepare the next generation of young people to become community organizers

But what does that really look like?

Through the CYLC program, we not only provide a space for individuals to develop leadership skills and engage in community organizing, but we create a space to foster their personal growth and healing.

The program has been transformative in engaging people who might not have been in higher education before, by having them go through the courses in a cohort model.

But not just any cohort,

A cohort that consists of a wide range of lived experiences

Experiences that help affirm their lives, their identities and their struggles as something that is systemic and not something that is inherently pre-determined due to who they are, where they come from or what they look like.

Investing in CYLC is investing in real people.

People who want to create lasting change.

Change that is radical

Change that centers their voices

Which is what we NEED to move forward not just for the sake of results or numbers but in efforts to really truly heal our communities.

People can't leave their experiences, their traumas, their struggles at the door when they enter a classroom.

So when we think of resources and programs that are serving our most marginalized, they need to be programs that are committed to doing just that.

Seeing everyone as fully human.

As people worth being invested in.

Operating with a holistic, equitable, and intentional lens

Operating from the heart.

Our program is not just a certificate program; it is a community.

We provide a space where people can come together and share their experiences,

Their dreams.

Their hopes.

This is especially important for individuals who come from marginalized and underrepresented communities, where they may not have access to such spaces otherwise.

one of our first graduates, Leilani Gonzalez could not join us today but I want to bring part of her testimony forward here.

: "CYLC has had major impacts on my life. I would go as far as saying they are the reason I am attending college right now or why I have been offered multiple job opportunities and even received many scholarships. This program prepared me for so much more than being a good individual in my community."

Additionally, because participants get to intern with community organizations and nonprofits they are able to take what they are learning in the classroom and apply it.

They get to see how they CAN make a difference in the world

This is such a rare opportunity for people.

And it shouldn't be

Experiences like internships and going to college are typically designed to benefit only a select percentage of the population -- those who can afford to take unpaid internships, those with the and those with social capital and the support to navigate higher education institutions.

This is simply unacceptable.

Instead, the people who need to be at the center of these conversations,

the ones who are most affected and who stand to benefit the most,

are those who we are trying to help.

They should be the ones leading the marches and making positive change happen. And this is exactly what CYLC empowers them to do.

We've seen remarkable success in our program, with graduates transitioning to part-time or full-time work with their internship placements, as well as pursuing AA's, transferring to 4-year universities, or going back to finish their GED.

Our partnership with Silicon Valley De-Bug in San Jose, has been particularly impactful and is one of our most successful sites,

Here is testimony from Raj Jayadev their executive Director:

College can be an intimidating place for many who have been systematically excluded from its opportunities. For the folks at De-Bug who participated, many of them never thought they would ever take a college course....The De-Bug members who participated are leaders who have just come back from prison sentences, from immigration detention, some who we met at court while they were fighting their case. ... CYLC is a training ground for grassroots movement building - in which the most impacted are leading.

In conclusion, with **your** support, we can continue to provide a safe and empowering space for our community. We urge you to reinstate funding for the CYLC program so we can expand this transformative opportunity across the state to help even more individuals make a difference in the world.

Thank you for your time and consideration