

Chair Hartman and members of the Committee,

My name is Jesus Nunez-Pineda, I use she/they pronouns. I have been a governor appointed youth member of the systems of care committee since its inception, as well as co creator and chair of its youth advisory board. For a little of my background, I have personal lived experience in the mental health and houselessness systems and have worked as a youth advocate for the majority of my professional career. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 2924.

As a youth who has been involved in various councils, committees, and local gatherings, the amount of tokenization that can and often does occur in these “high level” spaces is startling. I have personally been brought aboard to assist in projects in my life and had all of my input drowned out or flat out rejected by the adults in the room that “wanted youth input”. It's not uncommon to hear from young advocates about how poorly they can be treated in these spaces, or not hear back from them at all.

This challenges are not unique, they are seen as “part of the process” when learning to navigate these spaces and use your voice. There is no one solution to any problem, but that doesn't mean we haven't learned our lessons. Providing space for additional voting members that share our experiences, share our passion, share our commitment to being heard, breaks down the walls that have been in place for so long. If the goal is to elevate the voices of youth and family, then make space for the voices of youth and family. There is no room for half measures. We need the experiences, backgrounds, successes, failures, and everything in between to be given the space that has been promised to them.

I wholeheartedly believe that allowing more space for youth and family members to be elected into these seats is not only beneficial to everyone at the table, but also, completely necessary to bring about positive change.