



February 24, 2021

Chair Pratt and Members of the Jobs and Economic Growth Finance and Policy Committee,

The Minnesota Youth Council is happy to write in support of SF 1044. As a legislatively mandated organization made up of Minnesota youth from all across the state, we understand the importance of ensuring that high school students have access to the benefits and resources they need to thrive. The lack of unemployment benefits available to students has the potential to weaken the strength of the workforce and overall economy, as well as exacerbate the opportunity and achievement gaps we already see across Minnesota.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, we are facing an uphill battle in terms of the economy. High school students make up a significant portion of the workforce that will be necessary to achieve economic recovery. Ensuring that high school students have access to unemployment benefits provides more of an incentive for students to get a job, and the opportunity for the workforce to expand. Young people work and pay into the system just like every other employed individual. An hour worked by a student is just as valuable as an hour worked by an adult. There's no reason why high school students should be prohibited from accessing the benefits available to others that are associated with employment, other than discrimination based on age. Additionally, the lack of access to unemployment benefits for Minnesota high schoolers is an issue of equity, both in terms of race and class. Because eligibility for unemployment benefits is based on enrollment status, students would become eligible if they were to drop out of school. Further, lack of unemployment benefits can be a barrier to low-income students and families when it comes to pursuing higher education. Relevant to the opportunity gap, the lack of unemployment benefits available to young people is yet another factor that decreases the likelihood of success for low-income students and students of color.

Providing high schoolers with unemployment benefits only goes to strengthen our economy and prevents opportunity gaps from widening further. We ask that you vote in support of SF 1044, and the young people of Minnesota.