

N E W S R E L E A S E

News Release

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**Annual forum provides students with disabilities the avenues to
become tomorrow's leaders in business and community**

High school delegates gather for 23rd Youth Leadership Forum

SACRAMENTO – Forty-seven high school students with disabilities rallied this morning on the State Capitol steps in Sacramento to highlight a week of personal and professional encouragement and guidance from peers and mentors. The Capitol gathering and subsequent meetings today between the student delegates and their local legislators and their staffs concerning issues facing the disability community is part of the five-day California Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for Students with Disabilities.

YLF is held annually in Sacramento and is designed to help the student delegates recognize challenges and opportunities toward reaching their full potential through career and leadership training. This year's YLF, held July 21 -25 at California State University, Sacramento, marks the forum's 23rd anniversary – an event that began with a handful of delegates in 1992.

Student delegates come from around the state, their selection based on achievements and leadership displayed in their hometowns and their desire to improve the lives of the disability community at large.

"This year's delegates exemplify the fortitude, commitment and enthusiasm that will continue to define them as leaders in their communities," said Patrick W. Henning Jr., Director of the Employment Development Department, who addressed the delegates in a Governor's Office gathering. "Their personal victories will serve them well as they take what they've learned at this year's YLF forum and apply it to their personal, educational and professional lives."

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During this year's YLF, delegates met with YLF alumni to talk about personal and professional choices that lead to success. They attended leadership training, watched demonstrations of the latest technology, learned about each other's disabilities, discussed issues facing the disability community, and obtained advice from motivational speakers and mentors. YLF is coordinated by a partnership of public and private non-profit agencies.

"Never pass up an opportunity to learn from others," said Santi J. Rogers, Director of the California Department of Developmental Services. "Student delegates will have a great opportunity to meet interesting people at this forum – remembering that what you put into the lives of others comes back into your own."

Joe Xavier, Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation, added, "I am encouraged and inspired by this year's group of delegates. Participating in this forum will undoubtedly result in the building of fruitful relationships with mentors who have the ability to guide these youth toward employment, independence, and equality. I look forward to their bright futures ahead."

California created YLF in 1992 and was the first state to hold a YLF Conference. Since then, the YLF model of helping prepare students with disabilities reach their career goals, join the workforce, live independently and become involved in their communities has been replicated in 33 states and U.S. territories. To date, the California YLF boasts more than 1,000 alumni.

One of the delegates from the very first YLF in 1992 is Sarah Triano, now Executive Officer, California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

"YLF changed my life. When I was a student delegate at YLF, I met incredible mentors with disabilities who taught me I should never let anyone underestimate me or place limitations on me just because I have a disability," said Triano. "As a proud mentor to this year's group of amazing delegates, my goals are to promote civic engagement, disability pride, and to demonstrate that hard work and determination leads to success."

YLF student delegate selections were made by a partnership that included local independent living centers, YLF alumni, local school representatives and representatives of the major state departments who sponsor the project.

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YLF is coordinated by a partnership of public and private non-profit agencies, including the California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities; the California Department of Rehabilitation; the California Employment Development Department; the California Department of Developmental Services; the California Department of Social Services; the California Department of Health Care Services, Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development; the California Department of Education; the California Department of Education/Napa County Office of Education; State Council on Developmental Disabilities; State Independent Living Council; California Workforce Investment Board; and UC Davis/MIND Institute.

Major private donors include the Wells Fargo Foundation; Sutter Health; Molina Health Care; Northrop Grumman; Southern California Edison; Mission San Rafael Rotary Club; the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, Inc; Dayle Macintosh Center; School Psychology Student Association/San Diego State University; and Friends of Californians with Disabilities, Inc.

Editor's Note: Here is a list – by county - of the 47 delegates who are attending this year's forum:

Fresno County

Sammy Calderon, Auberry

Tulare County

Nathan Brown, Tulare

Glenn County

Claudia Dominguez, Willows

Sean Spence, Willows

Humboldt County

Amanda Harnden, Arcata

Los Angeles County

Nicholas Avalos, Whittier

Brendan Busch, El Segundo

Kalif Evans, Long Beach

Odalys Grijalva, Los Angeles

Jerome Horsely, Compton

Marissa Kroeze, San Dimas

Maria Luque Arellano, Sylmar

Mireya Ontiveros, Los Angeles
Brenna Stahl, Marina Del Ray
Agapito Turrubiarres, La Puente
Summer Valle, Sylmar
Apolonio Villareal, Signal Hill
Zachary Marks, Los Angeles

Orange County

Tyus Sawyer, Huntington Beach
Joshua Cuyler, Orange
Leanne Libas, Lake Forest
Samantha McIntire, Cypress
Brittany Murphy, Laguna Beach
Nicolas Neuville, Trabuco Canyon

Placer County

Zachary Campbell, Auburn

Sacramento County

Peter Fredenburg, Sacramento
Jacob Miller, Citrus Heights
Violet Ward, Sacramento

San Joaquin County

Yi-Onni Redmon, Tracy

Riverside County

Jennifer Corbett, Riverside
Laura Finkelstein, Moreno Valley
Kimberly Lopez, Riverside
Jamie Reynolds, Murrieta

San Bernardino County

Nena Jimenez, Twentynine Palms

San Diego County

Samantha Aguirre, San Diego
Christina Ellis, San Diego
Lillian Grossman, La Jolla
Lindsey Mercier, Encinitas
Isabelle Soto, Oceanside
Desiree Washington, San Diego

Santa Barbara County
Riley Barrad, Santa Barbara

Shasta County
Ariel Harrison, Redding

Siskiyou County
Mydnite Fogg, Yreka

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