



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACTS:

State Selection questions: Mr. Paul J. Castiglione at Paul.Castiglione@ct.gov
United States Senate Youth Program: USSYP@hearsstfdn.org Program Director: Wendy Wilk

Connecticut Students Selected for United States Senate Youth Program ***Students Headed to Washington, D. C. and to Receive \$10,000 College Scholarship***

January 12, 2026, Washington, D.C. — The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) is pleased to announce that high school students Ms. Rania Mrinaalini Das and Ms. Esther Kwezi Nabisere will join Senator Richard Blumenthal and Senator Christopher Murphy in representing Connecticut during the 64th annual USSYP Washington Week, to be held March 7 — 14, 2026.

Rania Das of New Haven and Esther Nabisere of Greenwich were selected from among the state's top student leaders. They will join the delegation of 104 outstanding high school students - two from each state, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity - for an intensive week-long study of the federal government and the people who lead it, meeting with Senators, the President, a Supreme Court Justice, and other high-level officials. Each delegate will also receive a \$10,000 undergraduate college scholarship with encouragement to continue coursework in government, history and public affairs.

About the 2026 USSYP Delegates:

Rania Das, a senior at Hopkins School, serves as a Youth Representative on the New Haven Youth Commission and the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, where she elevates young people's voices in city policymaking. As a contributor to Connecticut's 119K Commission, she testified before state leaders and advanced recommendations to strengthen community recreational hubs, redesign the state's 211 informational and referral system, integrate social-emotional learning into school curricula, and expand access to supportive environments for youth. In 2024, Rania earned First Place in the Human Rights category of the Pulitzer Center's Local Letters for Global Change competition for a letter advocating stronger police accountability. She currently serves on the Connecticut DataHaven Youth Action Council, and has worked as a Public Policy and Advocacy Intern at the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, where she analyzed issues related to housing, municipal governance and youth policy. She has Co-Chaired the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee's Community Expertise Workgroup, collaborating with justice-involved youth and families to ensure lived experiences guide policy solutions. In college, Rania plans to study how economic policy can better support thriving, equitable communities.

Esther Nabisere, a senior at Greenwich High School, serves as President of the National English Honor Society. In this role, she led an international book drive collecting more than 1,500 books within two weeks on behalf of a Ugandan special-needs integrated school and presented this project to the Ugandan First Lady/Minister of Education. Interning at Congressman Jim Himes' office, she worked with staff to address constituents' concerns and facilitated town hall events. Esther has also interned at the Permanent Mission of Uganda to the United Nations, researching and drafting reports for representatives during the annual UN Women, Peace and Security Council Debate. She served as a Student Representative on the League of Women Voters of Greenwich's Get Out The Vote Committee, increasing youth civic involvement through community outreach. At American Legion Auxiliary Girls State Connecticut, she ran for multiple offices and earned the Sportsmanship Award. As a member of Greenwich High School's We the People team, she debated Constitutional ideals, returning as an alumna mentor. She also co-founded a six-piece string chamber group that performs at community events. Esther plans to study political science and international relations in college, attend law school, and continue her commitment to public service.

UNITED STATES SENATE YOUTH PROGRAM

2026 Connecticut Delegate Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Page 2

Chosen as alternates to the 2026 program were Ms. Linda Li Chen, a resident of Woodbridge, who attends Hamden Hall Country Day School and Ms. Kayla Tai Lin, a resident of Mansfield Center, who attends Edwin O. Smith High School.

Delegates and alternates are selected by the state departments of education, including the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activities, after nomination by teachers and principals. The chief state school officer for each jurisdiction confirms the final selection. This year's Connecticut delegates and alternates were designated by Charlene A. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education.

About The United States Senate Youth Program

The 2026 United States Senate Youth Program Co-Chairs are Senator Katie Britt of Alabama and Senator Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts. The full USSYP Senate Advisory Committee consists of the Vice President of the United States and the Senate Majority and Minority Leaders who annually serve as the program's Honorary Co-Chairs; two Senators, one from each party, serving as acting Co-Chairs who each have keynote speaking roles, and an eight-member bipartisan Senate panel, four Senators from each party, who lend their names in support. Serving on the Advisory Committee for the upcoming program are: Senator John Barrasso, M.D. of Wyoming, Senator Steve Daines of Montana, Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, Senator Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, Senator Andy Kim of New Jersey, Senator Angus S. King, Jr. of Maine, and Senator Elissa Slotkin of Michigan.

The USSYP is a competitive, merit-based program created by Senate Resolution 324 in 1962 by the sons of William Randolph Hearst and the Senate leadership of the day - Senators Kuchel, Mansfield, Dirksen, and Humphrey. The USSYP is designed to encourage America's most talented young people to consider public service as an important, life-long, and noble pursuit. Senate Resolution 324 passed unanimously.

The Hearst Foundations have fully funded the program since inception, as stipulated in SR 324, no government funds are utilized.

USSYP alumni now number more than 6,300 and many go on to build legacies of public service. The distinguished alumni include Senator Susan Collins, the first USSYP delegate to be elected U.S. Senator; former Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, the first to be appointed as a Cabinet Secretary; Representative Sarah McBride, the second to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; former Senator Cory Gardner, the second alumnus to be elected U.S. Senator and the first to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, the first to be elected Governor.

For more information, please visit ussenateyouth.org

###