



CONNECTICUT SOCIAL EQUITY COUNCIL

The 2025 Council Market Outlook Working Group

Youth Champions Subcommittee - Second Working Session

Wednesday, November 19, 2025 at 4:30 pm

Youth Subcommittee Co-Chairs:

Eddie Brown **Hartford Communities That Care, Inc.**

John Torres and Angel Bruno **Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders**

Council Membership: Andréa Comer (Chair), Kyle Abercrombie, Fanita Borges, Tina Beamon, Corrie Betts, Greg Davis, Avery Gaddis, Andréa Hawkins, Michael Jefferson, Daniel Karpowitz, Melvin Medina, Ojala Naeem, Edwin Shirley, Shirley Skyers-Thomas, Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Charles Venator, and Kevin Walton.

CT Social Equity Council Staff: Brandon L. McGee, Jr. (Chief Executive Officer), Tiffany Araujo, Georgette Cicero, Jessie Coleman, Mariedy Collazo Cruz, Kristina Diamond, Jennifer Edwards, Vera Lembrick, Jennifer Stevens, and Caesar Valentin.

*The SEC Mission is to **promote equitable economic prosperity** by supporting **Social Equity Entrepreneurs** and reinvesting in communities **most impacted** by the war on drugs.*

Notes:

This subcommittee meeting focused on identifying the root causes of youth cannabis use and developing policy recommendations to support prevention, education, and community engagement. Participants emphasized that youth often use cannabis as a coping mechanism for trauma, stress, and economic hardship, while also highlighting concerns around productivity, workplace safety, and misuse of edibles.

Discussion centered on creating equitable and effective funding models for community-based organizations (CBOs), particularly grassroots organizations led by people of color that have direct relationships with youth. Key recommendations included increasing culturally competent mental health services, creating paid youth employment and peer leadership opportunities, enforcing regulations on illegal smoke shops selling to minors, and providing stipends and workforce development pathways for youth.

Breakout sessions focused on defining criteria for Official Youth Champion Partners and establishing accountability measures for organizations receiving funding. Participants

stressed the importance of balancing accountability with flexibility by using shared performance metrics alongside organization-specific goals. Strong emphasis was placed on peer mentoring, culturally competent education, collaborative partnerships between large and small organizations, and honest, science-based cannabis education that resonates with youth experiences.

