

High School Advisory Council Summer 2023

About the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is the chief legal office of the District of Columbia. OAG enforces the laws of the District, defends and provides legal advice to the District's government agencies and protects the interests of the District's residents. OAG also prosecutes juvenile delinquency cases.

OAG has 10 offices and divisions. You will learn about some of the work of the divisions as well as how they interact with each other. You will also participate in in-person and virtual field trips to the Superior Court for the District of Columbia, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, the John A. Wilson District Building, and the United States House of Representatives. Most importantly, you will be engaging in important conversations with Attorney General Karl A. Racine, Assistant Attorneys General, and staff members.

OAG's High School Advisory Council

OAG's High School Advisory Council (HSAC) is a program that brings DC students together to make important policy recommendations to the Attorney General and his staff. The purpose is to give our youth a seat at the table in making crucial decisions about issues that directly affect them. As an HSAC member, you will have opportunities throughout the year to discuss policy changes with the Attorney General. The program begins with a six-week boot camp where you will learn about advocacy, policymaking, and the inner workings of the Office of the Attorney General.

You will also have an opportunity to draft and propose policy recommendations to Attorney General Racine regarding issues directly affecting District youth. You will be given materials consisting of existing policies, articles, and videos that may help shape your recommendation, and you will also attend sessions on how to write policy recommendations, orally advocate for policy recommendations, and write legislation.

The Influence of Social Media

Social media has become an essential part of our daily lives, and while it has many advantages, it also has some concerns, particularly when it comes to children. The issue of children being influenced by social media is complex, and there are many potential issues that can negatively impact their development and well-being.

Apps such as Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are now ubiquitous and constantly growing. Even if one app becomes more restrictive, another social media app will emerge and replace it. For young people, it's essential to understand the impact of their digital footprint on social media and the importance of protecting themselves online.

Negative actions on social media, such as cyberbullying and participating in online feuds, can lead to physical confrontations, jeopardizing everyone's safety and leaving a lasting digital

footprint. Many teenagers are also vulnerable to fraud and scams due to their lack of awareness or naivety, making it essential to educate them about online safety.

Attorneys General across the country are taking different approaches to better understand social media apps and how to protect children from harm. They are investigating and litigating social media platforms, advocating for policy reform in state legislatures and Congress, and directly engaging with platforms to educate the public.

Research from the Pew Research Center shows that despite the recent public debate, teenagers view social media positively and believe it has a positive impact on their life and relationships. Therefore, it's essential to take an educational approach to address the issue of online safety rather than simply banning or restricting certain apps. By educating teenagers on the importance of their digital footprint and how to stay safe online, we can help prevent them from falling victim to scams or becoming involved in dangerous online behavior.

Summer 2023 Issue Areas

The Influence of Social Media – protecting children from harm

There are several potential issues with children being influenced by social media:

Cyberbullying: Children can be targeted by bullies on social media, leading to psychological distress and other negative effects.

Exposure to inappropriate content: Children may be exposed to content that is not age-appropriate, such as violent or sexual content, which can negatively impact their development and well-being.

Decreased face-to-face interaction: social media can lead to a decrease in face-to-face interaction, which can affect a child's social skills and ability to form meaningful relationships.

Unrealistic expectations: social media can create unrealistic expectations about body image, lifestyle, and material possessions, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

Addiction: Children can become addicted to social media, spending excessive amounts of time on their devices and neglecting other important activities, such as homework, exercise, and socializing with friends and family.

1. **Privacy concerns:** Children may not fully understand the consequences of sharing personal information online. According to a report by Common Sense Media, 81% of American teens aged 13-18 use social media, with 70% using it multiple times per day.
2. The Pew Research Center found that 95% of teens in the United States have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online almost constantly.
3. A study by the American Psychological Association found that social media use is linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and poor sleep quality among adolescents.
4. The Cyberbullying Research Center reports that approximately 34% of students in the United States have experienced cyberbullying, with girls being more likely to be targeted than boys.

5. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that the rate of suicide among young people in the United States has increased by 56% in the last decade, with social media use being one possible contributing factor.
6. The Cyberbullying Research Center reports that approximately 15% of high school students in the United States have been electronically bullied in the past year.
7. A study by the Pew Research Center found that 53% of teens in the United States are concerned about the potential negative effects of social media on their mental and emotional well-being.
8. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 10-34 in the United States, with social media use being one potential risk factor.

Connection, Creativity and Drama: Teen Life on Social Media in 2022

“Majorities of teens credit social media with strengthening their friendships and providing support while also noting the emotionally charged side of these platforms”

Some think music videos are accelerating violence in DC. Artists disagree.

“A DC crime analysis pointed to music videos accelerating conflicts between neighborhoods.”

The Role of the Attorney General in Reforming Social Media for Children

“State attorneys general are equipped in three ways to serve the public interest and address the harms of social media against children:

- (A) investigation and litigation against social media platforms.
- (B) advocating for policy reform in their state legislatures, Congress, and directly to platforms.
- (C) educating the public.

Online Safety Tips for Teens

“We’re constantly connected – whether it’s text messaging, apps, social media, online games, website or emails – and that makes us all vulnerable to thieves looking to take advantage of us when we least expect it.”

4 Online Scams Teens Are Falling for and How to Avoid Them

Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/>

Common Sense Media: <https://www.common Sense Media.org/>

American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/>

Cyberbullying Research Center: <https://cyberbullying.org/>

National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

Gun Violence, Safety Issues

Gun violence and safety has been a leading issue on the agenda for years; however, this has not stopped the spike in gun violence over the last couple of years. Students are fired up about this issue and are desperate for immediate action.

The city of Washington DC recognizes gun violence as a crucial issue that demands attention. For years, The Mayor's Office and The Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia have prioritized this matter, as it requires consistent effort to make a difference. The youth in the city share the same sentiment, acknowledging that gun violence cannot be ignored. They call for more discussions and solutions, just like these offices.

In 2018, several student leaders and elected officials brought the issue of gun violence to the national stage, shedding light on the epidemic in Washington, DC. Five years later, in 2023, students remain persistent in discussing this matter for a good reason.

Unfortunately, homicide rates have increased significantly since 2018. The data provided by the Metropolitan Police Department shows that homicides rose from 160 in 2018 to 226 in 2021, with 203 reported in 2022. As of March 27, 2023, 50 homicides have been reported in DC, a 16% increase from 2022. Despite the efforts of youth leaders and the inclusion of homicide as a top priority, the rates continue to rise.

It is crucial to address this issue to protect the lives of young people in Washington, DC. We cannot view this issue as mere statistics; even a single life lost is one too many. The youth in the city deserve to feel safe growing up, and elected officials must provide meaningful support and effective solutions, especially when the youth call for help.

[District Crime Data at a Glance](#)

"One thing that we know is lacking in our approach is coordination between all of our offices," Bowser said during a Wednesday press conference.

The mayor said the issue of teen gun violence is at the top of her agenda for her third term as mayor.

[What's being done to address kids and crime in DC?](#)

"What the Office of the Attorney General is going to do under my leadership is figure out that intersection where love and power come together, where the power of the law and the power of love to make our city better and safer," Schwalb said. "The Office of the Attorney General thinks it's very important we tell those stories, that we lift up the kids. That's why we have programs in place. We do high school youth advisory committee, and we have right direction awards."

['We're talking about accountability': D.C. leaders discuss youth violence during panel](#)

"I'm tired losing people I love the most," said 12-year-old Andre Wilson.

"I lost 11-year-old Davon McNeal, died on July 4, 2020," said Wilson. "And I lost my father when I was three years old in 2015."

The summit does not focus only on talking about problems facing D.C.'s youth. It gives young people a chance to come up with solutions.

[Teens gather to tackle youth violence in DC](#)

Assignment

As the nation continues to navigate how best to address the challenges that affect kids and teenagers, DC is in position to showcase meaningful legislative policy changes and considerations that shape how we support youth. Accordingly, OAG is developing a plan to identify and advance our role on this front.

We need your help to ensure that our efforts to address trauma are informed by youth leaders in the District.

We request that you, as members of the OAG High School Advisory Council, draft and propose policy recommendations to the Attorney General weighing in on (1) mental health, (2) human trafficking, and (3) teen dating violence.

You will break into three groups and will be given materials consisting of existing policies, articles, videos, and podcasts that may help shape your recommendation. We will be discussing the materials in your breakout sessions.

OAG would like you to think through the following policy and program goals:

1. What measures have other Attorneys General used to educate young people about social media? What awareness strategies can OAG implement to address this issue?
2. How can OAG strategically bring awareness that gun violence is still an ongoing issue affecting thousands of individuals in Washington, DC? What are some unique ways OAG can partner with a student lead group to achieve this goal?
3. What support services would OAG advocate for possibly being implemented in schools, recreation centers, and community centers?
4. What organizations do you know of that are making a positive difference within the communities of Washington, DC?
5. Based on these topics, what legislative ideas would you propose?