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**EUGENE FAMILY YMCA LAUNCHES YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT
PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

*The new Y program, a nationwide civic engagement experience, serves
students from any Lane County high school*

Eugene, Ore., Jan. 24, 2024 – The Eugene Family YMCA, in partnership with the Lane Council of Governments, has launched a YMCA Youth and Government program for Lane County high school students.

“Youth and Government provides first-hand experience and critical knowledge to our future leaders about the democratic process,” said Marisa Fink, the Oregon Alliance of YMCAs Executive Director and the State Director of Oregon’s Youth and Government Program. “Every year, over 100 students in schools and YMCAs across the state take part in the important work of creating new laws and establishing relationships with lawmakers.”

Youth and Government is a nationwide civic engagement and servant leadership program that provides students in high school with the opportunity to represent and serve their communities through model government, leadership and professional development, advocacy, and service learning.

The program is new to the Eugene area for the 2023-24 academic year.

“We are thrilled to offer this opportunity for teenagers to understand the legislative process, how laws are created and how they can make a real difference in the world,” said Llew St. Clair, Eugene Family YMCA’s Youth, Teen and Families Program Coordinator. “These students will build confidence as well as increase their civic literacy awareness.”

The program culminates with the teens serving as delegates at their state conference, debating bills on the floor of the legislature. Participants learn about the democratic system and are trained in parliamentary procedure, legislative committee process, debate, press relations, and lobbying techniques.

This year, 85 students from across Oregon will participate in the legislative session. Four South Eugene High School students will represent Lane County in the next legislative session. Lily Yao, Samuel Claassen, Zev Wacks, and Charlie Von Ammon will bring two bills to Salem for consideration in February. They will serve as part of the House or Senate, co-sponsoring their legislation. Yao and Claassen are co-sponsoring a bill that proposes a minimum annual salary of \$50,000 for teachers in Oregon. Wacks and Von Ammon are co-sponsoring a bill to expand bike helmet laws to include bike and scooter share systems.

At the January 13 Pre-Legislative Assembly, sophomores Yao and Wacks were elected to serve as Sergeants at Arms at the 78th Youth Legislative Conference to be held at Willamette University and the Withnell Family YMCA in Salem from February 21-24, 2024.

"We have made strides in creating spaces for young people to participate in policy locally, and I see this program as an opportunity to expand those efforts to statewide legislation and process," said Ellen Currier, Principal Planner for LCOG. "We are fortunate to step into a strong history of Youth and Government in Oregon, building off the knowledge and expertise of other delegations across the state. I'm excited to see our delegation grow next year."

Youth and Government collectively serves more than 55,000 students through 42 state programs across the country, including Washington, D.C.

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About the Eugene Family YMCA

The Eugene Family YMCA is one of the region's leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Each year across Lane County, the Y engages more than 18,000 people regardless of age, gender, income or background—to nurture the potential of children, teens and seniors; improve health and well-being; and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. In 2022, the Eugene Family YMCA awarded \$473,282 in financial assistance. The YMCA has been serving Lane County since 1887.

About the Lane Council of Governments

Lane Council of Governments is a voluntary association of cities, counties, and special purpose districts within Lane County. LCOG serves as regional planning, coordination, program development and service delivery. Key program areas include urban planning services, technology planning and broadband coordination, and Senior and Disability services coordination. Since 1945, LCOG has been serving the public interest and enhancing the quality of life for residents of Lane County.