



***On the 2014 campaign trail  
for Michigan's children***

*Congratulations to forum attendees Sen. Steve Bieda who won his campaign for the 9<sup>th</sup> Senate District, Rep. Anthoni Forlini who won his re-election campaign for the 24<sup>th</sup> House District, Rep. Marilyn Lane who won her re-election campaign for the 31<sup>st</sup> House District, and Rep. Peter Lucido who won his re-election campaign for the 36<sup>th</sup> House District.*

## **Macomb County Teens Question Candidates about Drugs, Education and the Lack of Mental Health Services**

*Republican and Democratic candidates from seven area state House districts and state Senate districts were invited to attend the "Youth Voices Changing Public Policy Candidate Forum" on Oct. 21 in Macomb County. Attending were state Sen. Steve Bieda (Senate District 9), Kenneth Paul Jenkins (Senate District 10), state Rep. Anthony Forlini (House District 24), Philip Kurczewski (House District 24), state Rep. Marilyn Lane (House District 31), state Rep. Peter Lucido (House 36) and Robert Murphy (House 36).*



**MOUNT CLEMENS** – The teen-led candidate forum started with all the pomp and circumstance of a special occasion. Boy scouts formed a color guard and a student sang the national anthem to a hushed auditorium at Mount Clemens High School. Over the next two hours, a stream of middle- and high-school students from the youth advocacy group, Teens Talking Truth, posed serious questions to candidates for the Michigan House and Senate.

Many questions were inspired by the group's mantra to "Live Safe, Live Strong and Live Sober" with topics including the legalization of marijuana and new legislation allowing minors to purchase e-

cigarettes. Just as compelling were student questions regarding funding cuts to school art, music and athletic programs, gun control in light of school shootings and soaring college costs.

Some turned the tables on candidates who resort to negative campaigning: "With all the media attention on attack ads, at what point does this become a form of bullying?" a student asked.

Teens from a half dozen area schools participated, prepping questions and hosting planning meetings for weeks. A post on the group's Facebook page set the tone, "I hope our candidates are ready. T3 has come up with some tough questions."

"This was a pretty empowering opportunity for them to connect with legislators and realize they're just regular people running for office," said Monique Stanton, the CEO of CARE of Southeast Michigan, T3's sponsoring organization. Stanton said it was their intent to continue a line of communication with those elected on Nov. 4.



Rory, a middle school student, said he was "a bit nervous" when it was his turn at the microphone. He raised the issue of research tying poor academic performance to chronic lack of sleep among teens. When asked if they would support delaying the start of the school day to improve students' chances to be better rested, candidates weren't unanimous in their support for a later school start. "I was surprised by that fact," Rory said.

#### **Q & A: The need for mental health services for teens**

Allie, a student from Sterling Heights' Henry Ford II High School, asked the candidates to discuss funding mental health programs given the prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, panic attacks and suicide among today's teens, all while school social work positions are being cut.

Robert Murphy, Democratic candidate in the 36th District House race, said state mental health resources have plummeted over the years. "We have criminals on the street that should be in hospitals. The social media isn't helping a lot (with) internet bullying," he added. "(Mental health services) are things only money can remedy," he said.

State Sen. Steve Bieda, a Democrat in the 9th District, said a single suicide impacts individuals, families and entire school communities. He bemoaned cuts in the number of school social workers who could help

kids contemplating suicide. “We’re often lacking that first line of defense today,” he said. He suggested consideration of public information campaigns, directed at teens in trouble, and urged schools to find new ways to become involved in providing resources.

Democrat Kenneth Paul Jenkins, a state Senate candidate in the 10th District, blamed cuts in state education funding under the Snyder administration for losses in school supports for troubled teens. “We gotta put money in the programs,” he said.

Republican State Rep. Anthony Forlini, of the 24th House District, agreed funding mental health services should be a priority in state government. He referenced the Snyder administration’s focus on school bullying as a positive. “Today, there are fewer and fewer outlets for kids to get out and release some frustrations,” he said. “We’re internalizing too much. Social media isn’t helping. Sports and other activities are very important.”

Democrat Philip Kurczewski, seeking the state House seat in the 24th District, said schools need to provide better support for students who are bullied. “When I was younger, a bully was someone you just saw in school,” he said. Today, bullying that starts in school continues over social media and becomes a constant in a victim’s life, he added. “When it’s constant like it is today, there’s no substitute like the professional,” he said.

State Rep. Marilyn Lane, a Democrat in the 31st District, said the addition of autism spectrum disorder to the list of conditions covered by health insurance in Michigan was a positive recent development. However, funding for state Community Mental Health services in Macomb County is down, she said.

“Mental health counseling has been kicked to the curb,” said Democratic State Rep. Peter Lucido, of the 36th House District. This is particularly exasperating because families have become fragmented and teens aren’t always able to turn to their families for support, he added. “A concerted effort has to be taken first and foremost in the schools. A ‘no bullying policy’ should be enforced at school and the problem needs to be exposed,” Lucido added.

*Thanks to the organization sponsoring the young people leading this conversation:*

**CARE of Southeastern Michigan** is serving as our key local partner. CARE's mission is to educate, link and support individuals, families, businesses and communities affected by family concerns, workplace challenges, mental health conditions and the misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.



**T3: Teens Talking Truth** is a youth advocacy group at CARE that seeks to empower teens to develop strong leadership skills and encourage one another to stand strong against unhealthy behaviors.

*Michigan's Children presents this youth-led candidate forum as a non-partisan activity.  
Michigan Radio's State of Opportunity project is our media sponsor.*