Youth Caucus in Olympia

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - This week is a mid-winter break for some Washington schools, but the learning will continue for almost 100 kids at the State Legislature in Olympia. On Tuesday, they'll gather from around the state for a Youth Caucus, part of the annual "Have a Heart for Kids" advocacy day at the State Capitol. The young people participate in a rally and attend workshops about legislation and how to speak up for issues that concern them.

It's the first time at the Capitol for Zalia Cook from Seattle, and the 12-year-old already has her topic in mind to share with lawmakers.

"Well, I'm really passionate about homelessness. I just can't imagine not having a home, and I just feel bad for all of those people. And I think that's one of the main things that people are worried about, too."

Kyla Lackie, who helped coordinate the event for the youth advocacy coalition "SOAR," says some of the pupils have been researching legislation in school, and are excited about the chance to share their views.

"We're really trying to help youth learn about the legislative process and then, find ways that they can express their voice to lawmakers. I know last year, the room that had the Youth Caucus looked like the most fun: lots of energy, excitement and engagement with the different topics."

At Exline Middle School in Seattle, Zalia Cook is in a group called "Penny Harvest," collecting spare change from students to donate to worthy causes. She says even kids who can't be in Olympia this week can find ways to improve the lives of others.

"One thing that every kid needs to know: that no matter how old you are, how strong or big you are, you can make a difference in your community."

Among the topics at this year's Youth Caucus are legislation that some call "anti-gang," but others see as racial profiling, as well as efforts to maintain state food assistance, improve funding for after-school programs and keep the "Apple Health" kids' insurance program in place.

The Youth Caucus meets at 10:15 a.m. Tuesday, February 22, at United Churches, 110 11th Ave. S.E., Olympia.