



## The Republican.

### 28 teens to advise governor

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BOSTON - When a group of teenagers from Boston met with Gov. Deval L. Patrick to discuss street violence and other issues, Shanaya L. Coke, 19, asked the governor, "Do we have a statewide youth council?"

"No," said Patrick. "But we need one."

The governor followed up on his promise, signing an executive order in April to create the council. On Friday, Patrick swore in 28 members of the Governor's Statewide Youth Council, with two members from each county in the state.

The council will meet quarterly and give Patrick the perspective of youths on issues such as education and economic development.

The council members were picked from 293 applicants.

During a ceremony at the Statehouse Friday, Patrick told the members he wants them to be direct about their opinions. He said he wants their help to speed up the operation of state government.

"You will get out of this what you put into it," Patrick said.

Council members from Western Massachusetts said they were honored to be selected.

"It's a great opportunity to engage the youth of the commonwealth," said Salomon Moreno, 17, a senior at Amherst Regional High School.

Mirasia T. McGahan, 17, of Greenfield said she wants to develop ideas for improving education and the environment. She said she also would like to advise the governor on ways to reduce pregnancies among teenagers.

She said the council will be a great experience and should help the community.

Valerie A. DiCristoforo, 15, a sophomore at Monson High School, said the state needs to send more money to less wealthy school districts that are currently being shortchanged in state financing. She also said that Monson could use a teen center.

Christopher D. Alvarez, 17, a senior at Central High School in Springfield, said he wants to work on issues such as affordable housing and education reform. Alvarez said Springfield needs more programs to give youths an alternative to street violence.

"I can bring a lot to the table," said Alvarez, whose mother is a board member of the Alliance to Develop

Power in Springfield, a nonprofit group that organizes poor and low-income people to fight for their rights and benefits. "There's a lot of issues in Western Massachusetts I want to change."

Natasha L. Gonzalez, 18, of Easthampton, a student at Hampshire College in Northampton, said she is opposed to a current requirement that students pass the MCAS to receive a high school diploma. She said a single test shouldn't be the only way to gauge a student's abilities.

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