

## YMCA Youth and Government

The use of the State Capitol's official chambers and meeting rooms adds a tremendous amount of dignity to the proceedings of the California YMCA Model Legislature and Court (ML/C), now in its 61st year. The ML/C is a statewide youth educational program involving more than 2,300 high school freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in a nine month "hands on" experience. Since its inception, the program has used a variety of activities to build, encourage, and strengthen those life assets and character traits that will help high school youth become involved responsible adults who are decent and respected citizens. The tool used is a high quality experiential and educational simulation based upon California's state government. The program is very comprehensive, and its impact on the youth participants is dramatic. The core purpose of this highly regarded program is exemplified in the motto "Democracy Must Be Learned By Each Generation."



Model Assembly Session  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, California

The program begins in September when 2,300 young people and 250 volunteers at approximately 80 locations throughout the state meet as individual delegations to discuss issues facing California. During a nine month period, the teen delegates write bills, select governmental positions to role-play, attend statewide training conferences, and run for various elected offices. The program reaches its peak in Sacramento at the State Capitol with the convening of the five day Model Legislature and Court each February. There, "real" government moves over and the teen delegates "take over," using the historic halls, chambers, and offices of our State Capitol, Supreme Court, and Governor's Office.

However, the program is by no means a government boot camp. A key focus of Youth and Government is the building of friendships among its participants. During free time at conferences (which can consist of dances, games, or just relaxing) relationships are built that last a lifetime. It is extremely common for participants to refer to their "Youth and Government buddies" as the best friends they ever had. The key here is that Youth and Government uses the tool of a Model Legislature and Court session to provide its participants with the life skills that they will use even if they decide to pursue a professional career outside of government.



Free time at the 56th ML/C  
Convention Center Bounce House  
Sacramento, California



Forum Court Hearing  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, California

The program is open to all interested high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors whether or not they are members of the YMCA. The sponsoring organizations, usually (but not exclusively) community YMCAs, form one or more delegations by recruiting teenagers at high schools or through teen outreach programs. In some cases, delegations are sponsored directly by schools or other organizations in order for the program to provide opportunities to all interested high school youth at any location in the State.