

Area Students Participate in Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition Lobby Day Before Coronavirus Shutdown

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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SPRINGFIELD - In March before the coronavirus shutdown, Alton students participated in a lobby day hosted by the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition (ICJC) in Springfield. The day was made possible due to the support ACES 4 Youth organization in Alton received from Alton Superintendent, Mark Cappel, Assistant Superintendent, Kristie Baumgartner, Principal Mike Bellm and his direct representative Lisa Lovett, the instructor over the Alton High School Minority Excellent Program.

Lovett worked closely with the ACES 4 Youth Executive Director and was instrumental in reaching the high school students which was the targeted audience, even though the middle school students were welcome to attend. Lobby day is for any age or grade. Ms. Kenya Leonard of East Saint Louis and area coordinator of the ACES 4 Youth-Environmental Youth Group, road the bus sponsored by ICJC from East St. Louis to Springfield State Capitol, with four students. Both groups, linked upon arrival at the State Capitol for a group photo.

“After the rally Alton we were able to meet with State Representative Monica Bristow,” Greg Norris, ACES 4 Youth Director, said. “Both Alton and East Saint Louis students met with Senator Chris Belt to advocate for Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA).”

Lovett said because of the field trip, students were able to understand that the goal is to have 100 percent renewable energy by 2050, reduce gas and diesel vehicles from the transportation sector, tackle carbon pollution from the electric sector by 2030, and create jobs and economic opportunity.

“They recognized the fact that anyone who is interested in new job opportunities or is concerned about pollution or climate change had a right to be in attendance,” Lovett said. “We ended up meeting people from different parts of the state since there were buses from different areas bringing people up to meet with their state senators and representatives. Upon entering the State Capitol, we went and picked up our T-shirts and was then given a tour of the Capitol by a Capitol Building tour guide. After stopping to eat lunch in the cafeteria, we went and met with other CEJA participants on the first-floor rotunda and had a rally. There were several speakers, including a teenager from Cahokia, who shared what the Clean Energy Jobs Act meant to them. All of the ACUSD students who were there participated in the rally as well.

“After the rally, the students met with State Representative, Monica Bristow, and shared concerns about CEJA. She agrees it is something to look into further. Still, she is waiting to see what changes will occur before signing her name to the list of supporters right now since we have quite a few people in our district who rely on the industries that would have to make changes to comply with the current demands of the bill. We were excited to learn Governor J.B. Pritzker is a supporter of tackling climate change, expanding renewable energy, and committed to make clean energy legislation a priority this year.”

Participants included Alton Middle and High School students, Kenya Leonard-East Saint Louis, with three high school students and one middle school student, Taylor Brown, a senior at SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School; Chad Gray, Jr., a sophomore at Metro East Lutheran High School; Ayonn Gray, a freshman at SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School; and Armani Gray, a seventh-grader at Unity Lutheran Christian Elementary School.

These were comments by the various individuals who participated:

Comments from Alton Students in Minority Excellence

Here is what two Alton High School’s Minority Excellence freshmen had to say about the experience, **Donald Holliday, Jr.** said, “Lobby Day was a crazy, but interesting day. In all honesty, I didn't know what I was getting into once I stepped into the Capitol. It was uncomfortable at first to deal with the huge crowd, but because of Lobby Day, I was able to learn much more about the history of our state.

“I was also glad that I was able to learn a great deal of information on climate justice. I believe that we, as young adults, should have our voices heard. Climate change is affecting our earth negatively, and it should not be ignored any longer. Since passing the Future Energy Jobs Act of 2016, our state has gone from having some of the highest

energy bills in the country to having some of the lowest. However, because of this, big companies that control coal and natural gas power plants have been losing profits. Now, these companies are working with Springfield and Washington to bring a stop to our progress. We can't let them cause more damage to the environment so that they can make more money. We need to pass CEJA and change our ways before it's too late."

Kaunyé Gray said, "I feel having a day dedicated to laws and bills is cool because parts of the Illinois community are getting together and passing their ideas on to our state leaders. The only thing that I would change is how crowded it was, but other than that, it was a really good trip, and it would be cool to go next year."

After going up to Springfield, something exciting all of us realized was, the only thing that you needed to be an expert on was your own story and how the clean energy jobs act would impact you, your family, and the community."

Malia Esquivel, and AHS senior said, "I felt that going to lobby day was a great experience because it showed me a side of campaigning that I had never known before. It gave me a chance to get to know who was representing the state of Illinois and where they stood on certain ideas. I had a great time and I'm glad I had the chance to go."

When East Saint Louis students were asked what they learned about this experience; Taylor Brown stated, "If you want change, let your voice be heard and be consistent." Armani Gray said, "It was pretty awesome to see so many other young people." Chad Gray Jr. said, "It was good to learn how CEJA can help us save money." Ayonn Gray said, "I think more people need to know about CEJA."

Rosetta Brown Alton School Board Member with four middle school students

Rosetta Brown, Alton School Board member said, "It's good for students to experience meeting the legislators and decision makers, Darrion and Elijah thought the trip was great! Felt really good that they were able to meet new people, Darkari enjoyed the many youth that attended, Anthony liked the excitement of all the young students in attendances."