

## Levesque, Jennifer

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**From:** John Flores [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, October 18, 2021 12:59 PM  
**To:** cityclerk  
**Subject:** Support for youth funding

Hello city clerk of Merced,

I am commenting on Agenda Item B.1 ARPA Study Session. I stand in solidarity with youth leaders urging Merced leadership with the city council and other city leaders, to direct \$2.5 million dollars towards a guaranteed income program for young people and \$500,000 to create a jobs program specifically for Merced High School Youth.

As a former Merced and Merced County resident for 30+ years I have seen what the priorities of this city council over the years and unfortunately youth services are always put on the back burner. As a social worker and consultant who is a UC Merced and Berkeley Alumni, I would say if Merced leadership wants to further divest from youth services and ignore their constituents, you will have more people leaving the Merced area like myself in the future.

Throughout much of my life as a Merced resident, I was unable to find stable employment and adequate housing like I found in the Bay Area over the last 3 years of moving from Merced. As a Merced area youth and adult, I struggled to find both housing and employment over the years even with a degree. If you do not want your city to continue to be a place that has a bad reputation outside of the area - not because of issues like homelessness, drugs or housing problems - but the lack of effective and honest leadership who put youth and their communities first, then continue down the path you are on.

Instead police, juvenile corrections and other entities get large amounts of funding and priority, yet do not contribute to youth getting out of poverty or going to UC Merced and becoming a future consultant. The youth programs I was a part of, the teachers who taught me to value my education, those are the people who are moving this community forward, not more punitive and outdated measures that do not help communities grow or be more sustainable for future development. Please listen to our youth. Thank you.

Best,  
John Dovalos Flores MSW

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