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## **Fostering Tomorrow's Leaders: First Meeting of the Governor's Youth Council in American Samoa**



The Department of Youth and Women's Affairs (DYWA) hosted the initial Governor's Youth Council meeting on Saturday, December 17, 2023. This event brought together selected students representing each public and private high school. The establishment of the Governor's Youth Council stems from the first executive order issued on October 7, 2022. Recognizing the evolving needs and dynamics of youth engagement, an updated executive order was released on February 08, 2023, outlining revised membership criteria for the council.

The Governor's Youth Council is structured to be a representative body of the youth community in American Samoa. Comprising two students, one boy and one girl, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two from each public and private school offering high school classes, these representatives are selected by the respective principals of their schools. In addition, a representative between the ages of sixteen and thirty from the American Samoa Community College is chosen by the college president to ensure a broader spectrum of youth perspectives.

Furthermore, the council includes members appointed by the Governor, with two selected from each district, all aged between sixteen and thirty at the time of their appointments.

The Governor's Youth Council serves as an important platform for youth engagement, offering a space where ideas are cultivated, collaborations are forged, and impactful solutions are developed. This initiative reflects the commitment of the government to empower the younger generation and ensure their voices are heard in shaping the path of American Samoa.

During the meeting, each student council member introduced themselves and shared issues, ranging from youth mental health to cyberbullying, construction activities during school hours, inadequate sports equipment, a shortage in healthcare workforce, water scarcity, and drug use in schools.

Talauega Dr. Samasoni Asaeli, the Director of Education, delivered remarks, encouraging the young council members to think critically about solutions. He emphasized the importance of resolving the challenges and highlighted Governor Lemanu's vision to organize a council that collaborates, informs, and generates solutions to address pressing issues. Dr. Asaeli noted that some of the council members would become leaders in churches, communities, and the government, presenting a valuable opportunity for learning and leadership development.

Dr. Salote Aoelua-Fanene, Director of DYWA, expressed gratitude for the youth's prioritization of crucial issues. She commended them for their research efforts and proactive approach in presenting solutions. Dr. Salote encouraged the youth to take charge and invited them to select their officers at the end of the meeting.

In attendance, Shiki Leaupepe, the CTE Program Manager under the Department of Education, introduced and launched an entrepreneurship program. This program, tailored for high school students, provides them with an opportunity to experience the initial steps of becoming an entrepreneur. Additionally, the Department of Commerce's Urban Planning and Development Division presented an exciting initiative for startup businesses named "Pitch your Biz." Inspired by the Shark Tank concept, this program is exclusively available for individuals aged 18-30, aiming to foster innovation and business development within the youth community.

Following the discussions, the youth council members elected officers, demonstrating their commitment to active engagement. The newly chosen officers are:

**Apelu Mann** (Tafuna High School) - Chairman

**Lougeene T. Savini** (Peteli High School Academy) - Vice Chairman

**Tafa'ilagi Toelupe** (Fagaitua High School) - Secretary

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