
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation

Lower Mainland youth join inaugural provincial leadership council

SURREY – Five young local leaders have been named to the StrongerBC Young Leaders Council and will provide direct and ongoing feedback to government on priorities and policies that matter to youth.

Harry Bajwa, 22, from Surrey, Noor Shaker, 14, from Port Coquitlam, Ripdaman Malhans, 19, from Delta, Alexandra Mandewo, 17, from Coquitlam, and Jeanna Pillainayagam, 20, from Vancouver, were appointed to the 18-member council. The inaugural council received more than 250 applications.

“Young people across B.C. deserve to have their voices heard,” said Fin Donnelly, MLA for Coquitlam-Burke Mountain. “This new council will give youth like Alexandra Mandewo and others the opportunity to share their unique perspectives and contribute to decisions being made today that will affect generations to come.”

Mandewo was born in Oklahoma and has Zimbabwean roots. She is passionate about diversity and inclusion, advocating for the IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, people of colour) community as vice-president of her school’s anti-racism club. She has also established an initiative to provide career representation and mentorship for female students of colour.

“I am delighted to be on the StrongerBC Young Leaders Council and am looking forward to collaborating with my fellow council members,” said Mandewo. “I believe being on the council and bringing forward issues relating to racism, youth mental health and the recent flooding in the Lower Mainland will help the youth in my community.”

Bajwa immigrated from India at age four. He has a bachelor of commerce degree in finance, as well as a certificate in early years education from the University of British Columbia. Through his work with Mannkind Charity, he helps impoverished children in orphanages and palliative care centres in developing countries.

Shaker identifies as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and has lived with cerebral palsy all her life. She is committed to raising awareness of the issues faced by youth with disabilities, as well as gender identity and diversity. Shaker is interested in addressing the challenges faced by young people in areas including mental health, the climate change and affordability.

Malhans is a recipient of the Vimy Pilgrimage Award in recognition of his community work and leadership. He has worked with the Guru Nanak’s Free Kitchen to help distribute hot meals on the Lower Mainland and developed its website. Malhans interns with GrantMe, an educational consultancy group that helps post-secondary students graduate debt-free.

Pillainayagam is passionate about removing the stigma surrounding mental health. She

advocates for increased support for refugees, sustainability in business and eliminating systemic racism. Pillainayagam is pursuing a degree in science at the University of British Columbia.

The council will be chaired by Brittny Anderson, the premier's special adviser on youth. They will discuss issues that matter most to young people in areas such as education, employment, income, mental health and the environment. Issues affecting the Lower Mainland will also be brought forward to the council table.

"I'm looking forward to working with these remarkable young people to hear first-hand what is needed in the Lower Mainland to help improve their lives and opportunities," said Anderson. "These young leaders represent some of the most community-minded young people in our province. Their input will make a difference for their peers and communities, now and for generations to come."

Council members will serve one-year terms with the option to remain on the council for up to three terms. The first meeting is planned for spring 2022 and will be held quarterly.

"I'm glad to see the diversity of our province reflected in the membership of our first StrongerBC Young Leaders Council," said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation. "The pandemic has exposed inequalities that we can't ignore. I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and getting to work with the council to tackle the pressing issues they care about, including building an economy that works for more British Columbians in every corner of our province."

The StrongerBC Young Leaders Council supports the B.C. government's commitment to an inclusive, innovative and sustainable economic recovery for everyone who lives in B.C.

Learn More:

Find out more about the StrongerBC Young Leaders Council:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/economic-recovery/youth/young-leaders-council>

Read the biographies of StrongerBC Young Leaders Council members:

<https://www.bcpublicsectorboardapplications.gov.bc.ca/s/tribunaldetail?boardNum=A-24243>

Contact:

Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and
Innovation
Communications
778 587-3237

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