



Capital District  
Tobacco-Free  
Communities



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## **Columbia High School Student and Reality Check Member Named Capital Region Youth Ambassador of the Year (YAYA)**

*YAYA is awarded annually to young activists who are leading the way to the first tobacco-free generation*

**EAST GREENBUSH, N.Y.-** Praaghya Meyyan, a rising Columbia High School senior, is the Capital Region Youth Ambassador of the Year (YAYA). The award, sponsored by Reality Check of New York State, honors the outstanding work of young people who have taken the lead in holding tobacco companies accountable for marketing to youth. These young activists are fighting to protect their peers and communities from the dangers of tobacco use through public education efforts, peer-to-peer training and outreach to policymakers.

***"I am involved in Reality Check because I love being a part of the movement that exposes the marketing lies of the tobacco industry. I am passionate about protecting my peers from trying flavored tobacco products that contain nicotine and keep them addicted for life,"*** said Meyyan.

Meyyan has been an active member of Reality Check since 2018 and has provided a vital youth perspective on the impact of tobacco marketing on young people on issues ranging from the mixed message of selling tobacco in pharmacies, the importance of raising the age to 21 for sale of tobacco products, and the youth appeal of flavored tobacco products. Her education efforts contributed to local and state adoption of Tobacco-Free Pharmacies, Tobacco 21 and a statewide ban on the sale of flavored e-cigarettes.

***"One of Praaghya's early contributions to local tobacco control education was presenting to families of the Capital District Boys and Girls Club. After seeing her in action---positive, energetic, well-versed--I knew she was going to be a powerful force for change,"*** said Cara Zampi, Reality Check Coordinator at Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities.

Meyyan's activities included providing public comment at local government meetings, providing interviews to the media, and educating community members.

***"The members of the Rensselaer County Legislature are honored to join in congratulating Praaghya upon her receipt of the Capital Region YAYA Award. We anticipate many great things from Praaghya in the many years and decades to come,"*** said Tom Grant, Rensselaer County Legislator (District 2).

Since 2001, youth from across New York state have worked to educate their communities about the harms of Big Tobacco. Four other Reality Check members were also recognized for their tobacco control activism: Peyton Taylor (Central NY), Amber Updike (Western NY), Ivan 'Chris' Zacatelco (MARO NY) and Miranda Bickham (Central NY).

**About Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities**

Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities (CDTFC) is a NYS Bureau of Tobacco Control grant funded program held by St. Peter's Health Partners. CDTFC works to increase support for New York State's tobacco-free norm through youth action and community engagement. Efforts are evidence-based, policy-driven, and cost-effective approaches that decrease youth tobacco use, motivate adult smokers to quit, and eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Visit [www.SmokeFreeCapital.org](http://www.SmokeFreeCapital.org) for more information.

**About Reality Check**

[Reality Check of New York](http://www.RealityCheckofNY.org) empowers youth to become leaders in their community in exposing what they see as the manipulative and deceptive marketing tactics of the tobacco industry. The organization's members produce change in their communities through grassroots mobilization and education. Visit [www.RealityCheckofNY.org](http://www.RealityCheckofNY.org) for more information.