

Legislative Report from the Commission on

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER EDUCATION

New York State Assembly • Sheldon Silver, Speaker • Karim Camara, Chair

Message from the Chair



Dear Friend:

With the 2014 legislative session now concluded, I am pleased to share with you accomplishments of the Commission on Skills Development and Career Education.

Throughout this past year, I focused Commission efforts mainly on youth who are disconnected from the workforce and school. These are youth aged 16 through 24 who are not in school and are not working, who in New York City alone totaled 350,000 last year. This population includes an inordinate number of youth who have aged out or who are aging out of foster care. I believe helping these youth get connected to meaningful education and work is important for their well-being, to the health of their communities, and for the economy of New York State as a whole.

I held several forums where I learned from workforce development and social service professionals about the problems and possible solutions for connecting youth to the workforce. Just as importantly, I met with many youth who daily bang right into or jump over many hurdles. I plan to continue these conversations and try to find ways to help this population. As a start, I have introduced legislation directing state agencies to work together to help improve the chances of success for disconnected youth and to raise housing subsidies for youth who are in foster care.

This year, New York State increased funding for the highly successful Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). The extra funding will support higher salaries and help more youth gain needed skills and experience. I was pleased to speak about SYEP, which I took advantage of as a youth, at a New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals, Inc. (NYATEP) conference.

I also met with NYATEP and many other workforce development professionals from all around the state to talk about issues they confront, and ways we can improve procedures statewide. Priorities included identifying local barriers to funding for youth employment programs, and examining the effectiveness of youth works tax credits and the national workforce readiness credentials.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve you, and if you have ideas or concerns you would like to share, please contact me or Commission staff at (518) 455-4386.

Sincerely yours,



Karim Camara
Assembly Member
Chair, Commission on Skills Development and Career Education

Focusing on Disconnected Youth and Youth Aging Out

Skills Commission Roundtable: Youth Aging Out of Foster Care and Existing Skills Training Employment and Programs, October 24, 2013

In partnership with my Assembly colleagues Carl Heastie, Chair of the Labor Committee, and Donna Lupardo, Chair of the Children and Families Committee, I held a roundtable to discuss youth aging out of foster care and existing skills training and employment programs available.

Youth aging out of care, aged 18 through 21, are largely left to their own devices to secure employment. Studies show that while about one-fifth are consistently working well into their 20s, most do not have steady employment: about 20 percent are homeless at the onset, and half have no job at age 21, a percentage that increases by age 24. As a group, they are largely under-educated, have no diploma or GED, and do not have the familial support so many young adults now rely on. (Pew Research estimates more than 50 percent of **all** youth aged 18-24 now live with their parents.) Making their situations even more challenging, foster youth often suffer emotional difficulties, hindering their capability to maintain employment.

The State does not track the performance of former foster youth once they leave care, but various studies from across the country indicate such youth are much more likely than their peers to be involved with the criminal justice or mental health system, and are reliant on public assistance. About 40-60 percent of young women were pregnant within 12-18 months of leaving foster care.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that, on average, for every young person who ages out, taxpayers and communities pay \$300,000 in social costs over that person's lifetime. Social costs include taxpayer-funded costs such as public assistance and incarceration, as well as costs absorbed by the community, such as wages lost as a result of dropping out of high school.

About 1,200 to 1,400 youth age out of care each year throughout New York State, and it is in everybody's interest to help support these youth and help them find meaningful connections to educational institutions and to the workforce.

The purpose of the roundtable was to better understand public policy issues related to youth aging out of foster care and the training and services available to help them obtain and keep jobs. We learned that, for the most part, existing state employment programs are not tailored to support this population's needs, and workforce funding streams do not encourage agencies to work with these young people.

From the discussion, it appears that some individual nonprofit programs are tailored to support these group's special circumstances, but they are few and far between, and are mainly privately funded, offering targeted services at low costs. Among the most successful programs include two in the South Bronx: the Academy, operated by FECS Health & Human Services, and the Next Generation Center, operated by Children's Aid Society. Their unique characteristics include consistent mentoring with the same individual over a long period of time, no rejection policy so that youth are always welcomed back, and paid internships. These groups estimate annual costs per youth are about \$5,000, and their data shows high success rates situating youth in meaningful jobs.

We also learned that there is a need to track employment information to identify which programs work. (Hopefully, this last finding will be addressed through legislation I sponsored this past session and was enacted, see sidebar about Chapter 456 of the Laws of 2013.)

Legislation

A.9811: Creation of the Task Force on Disconnected Youth

This bill would create a task force comprised of relevant state agencies and youth advocacy groups to thoroughly consider issues important to bettering the lives of disconnected youth.

The task force would make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on ways New York State can help improve the outcomes of disconnected youth regarding: health, education, living arrangements, skills training, employment preparation, mentoring, and their general well-being. The task force would be required to evaluate existing programs, statutes, and rules, and make recommendations on how the State can improve them. The task force would also be mandated to report within one year of its establishment on how the State can continue, on an ongoing basis, to collect data on disconnected youth.

In a 2005 report, the Community Service Society identified a large cohort of "disconnected youth" in New York City, youth not connected to work or school. The proportion of youth who are "disconnected" continues to grow throughout the State. In the New York City metro area alone, last year the estimate was 350,000—greater than the national average. These teens and young adults are isolated from society and need supports and connections to help them reintegrate. Among this population are youth who are in foster care or who have aged out, youth who do not have traditional support systems often necessary for young people to succeed, and youth who have been involved in the criminal justice or the mental health system. While many nonprofit groups, especially in New York City, are striving to build a support system, there needs to be a statewide effort to make state programs work for these youth as a whole, so they are not solely dependent on the generosity of a few community-based organizations or compassionate social service workers.

of Foster Care and Their Involvement in the Workforce

Skills Commission Roundtable with The Children's Aid Society, FECS Health & Human Services, Take the Mic: Youth In Foster Care & Workforce Roundtable Discussion, April 17, 2014

I was very pleased to help organize and host this unique and inspiring event at the Children's Aid Society's Next Generation Center in the Bronx, at which seven foster youth aged 16 through 24, spoke openly about their experiences in foster care and in the workforce, the employment and training services they have accessed, and the hurdles they have faced. They shared their stories with an audience of foster youth, state and city government representatives and employment, workforce development, and foster care agency professionals.

The youth attributed their successes to having long-term mentors, either through foster care agencies, which they reported varied tremendously in quality and retention of staff, or at workforce centers like the Next Generation Center and the Academy. These mentors helped provide emotional support and practical guidance. Another important factor in their success was paid internships, which gave them experience and a leg up in finding work.

Some of the obstacles and problems they experienced and witnessed others encounter included the high turnover rate of social workers and lack of interested adults, not getting jobs because they lacked experience, and not being able to attend college after spending all their money on rent.

Hats off to youth participants, who spoke eloquently and candidly about their experiences: Shavonn Wheeler, Tavin Johnson, Sheniqua Roberts, Maurice Reid, Angelique Salizan, Demetrius Johnson, and Crystal Cameron. Workforce Development & Foster Care Professionals included representatives from The Door, The Workplace Center, the Community Service Society, the Jewish Child Care Association, FECS Health & Human Services, and the Children's Aid Society.



Assembly Member Karim Camara with youth who participated in the April 17, 2014 Take the Mic event at the Next Generation Center in the Bronx.

Chapter 456 of the Laws of 2013

Enacted bill A.7911-B (S.5773-A) will allow the use of unemployment insurance data by certain state agencies.

I sponsored this bill with the intent of using this data, never before shared with even state policy experts, to evaluate workforce development programs. For too many years, we as public policy makers have been unable to examine the effectiveness of workforce development programs to determine which are worth investing more money in and which should be eliminated. This made no sense, and I am pleased that we should be able to change that course and make data available to state agency professionals who can now request the data from the State Department of Labor and study the effectiveness of these programs.

Legislation *(continued from page 2)*

A.9806: Housing Subsidy for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

This bill would increase the housing subsidy from a maximum of \$300 a month to \$600 a month for foster youth who are living independently. The subsidy is authorized when a social services official determines that a lack of adequate housing is the primary factor preventing the discharge of a child or children from foster care.

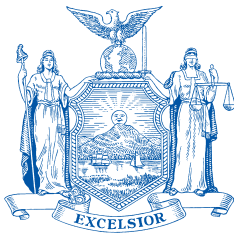
This housing subsidy has not been increased in more than 20 years, during which time rents throughout New York City and the State have increased many times over. The public housing for which foster youth qualify is severely limited and is shrinking, and there are not enough supportive housing units.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Expanded

I am so pleased to report that we were able to increase funding in the most recently enacted State budget for the highly successful Summer Youth Employment Program. Upon the Assembly's recommendation, we increased funding by \$2.5 million bringing the total amount to \$27.5 million.

The SYEP helps introduce youth into the workforce, and assists them in acquiring skills that can be used to improve school performance and help them become responsible adults. Since many low-income youth face the prospect of a difficult transition into work or college, constructive workforce experiences can provide great benefits. In addition to the income it produces, experience in the workforce and interaction with working adults can help youth recognize the importance of educational achievement, and help expand their education and career goals.

I will continue to fight for more funding and expansion of this program as it benefits many youth and the State as a whole.



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