

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



Vincent C. Gray

Mayor

Testimony of Lisa María Mallory

Director

Before the

COMMITTEE ON JOBS & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, Chairperson

Public Oversight Hearing

on

The Department of Employment Services' Summer Youth Employment Program

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Committee on Jobs & Economic Development Public Oversight Hearing:
The Department of Employment Services' Summer Youth Employment Program

Good afternoon Chairperson McDuffie and members and staff of the Committee on Jobs & Workforce Development. I am Lisa María Mallory, Director of the D.C. Department of Employment Services (DOES). Joining me today is Gerren Price, the Associate Director of Youth Programs and Curtis Lewis, the agency's fiscal officer. I am pleased to be before you to testify about the Department of Employment Services' Summer Youth Employment Program.

The Council is very familiar with the difficulties SYEP has had prior to 2011 due to lack of adequate scaling of the program which grew from an average of 7,000 to 21,000 youth in a relatively very short period; lack of program structure; failure to establish enrollment policies; significant cost overruns; poor visibility regarding program deadline dates; youth being assigned to sites without the employer's knowledge; youth being paid too little, too much, not on time, and even being paid for not going to work; and other major difficulties resulting in poor youth summer experiences. The Council under Chairman Gray quickly acted once these problems surfaced by enacting at least five (5) key changes to the law in recent years, including setting parameters for the number of youth from a minimum of 10,000 to a maximum of 21,000, limiting the number of weeks the program can run to 6, setting salaries of younger youth to \$5.25 per hour (older youth remain at federal minimum wage \$7.25 per hour), limiting the hours per week to 20 hours for younger youth and 25 hours for older youth, and including studies to ensure that the impact of this important program is evaluated.

As you know, once elected, Mayor Gray continued his efforts to fully revamp the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) in 2011 with three central goals in mind: (1) to ensure that youth and employers have meaningful summer experiences, (2) to run an efficient program where program dates and deadlines are clear and fair, and (3) to ensure the program would not go over budget as it had in years past.

For the last two years, major administrative enhancements have ensured that SYEP was well run. In both years, over 480 employers participated in the program,

employing over 14,000 youth, 67% of which live in Wards 5, 7, and 8 – areas where we see historically high unemployment rates.

This year, youth were offered a diverse range of opportunities to match and pique their career interests and to help prepare them for future work experiences. Youth were placed in private sector jobs such as hospitals, hotels, and restaurants; internships in various federal and local government offices and law firms; and work readiness programs with non-profits and programs in the arts.

This program could not happen without the many employers who contribute so much of their time and energy into ensuring that all youth have a meaningful experience. I would like to thank all of our SYEP partners for their amazing work this summer.

Many have referred to the last two years as the best run Summer Youth Employment Program because both years provided a job to every youth who was eligible. SYEP was structured so that employers, parents, and youth knew what was expected at every turn. Every youth who participated since 2011 submitted the documents necessary to prove eligibility. Improvements to the pay process ensured timely, accurate pay, and the hours were verified by supervisors. The process for addressing pay concerns has so significantly improved that 100% of them were resolved within 48 hours of reporting. Even with a city-wide power outage occurring over the summer that caused many supervisors to enter youth time behind schedule, SYEP staff contacted each supervisor by phone to ensure youth did not experience delays in pay.

SYEP also witnessed major improvements in the experiences for youth and employers. Youth created their own resumes or profiles prior to starting the program. SYEP increased the job matching experience by making these resumes and profiles available to our employers to review. Youth were able to apply to job positions that interested them and employers were able to select youth for their opportunities. We held our SYEP Career Exploration Fair during the DCPS Spring Break at the DC Armory and at the National Building Museum where we enabled youth to meet with and interact with participating employers, many of whom conducted interviews and selected youth on-the-spot. Additionally, youth attended a mandatory orientation where they learned what was expected of them.

As all programs require, we are also interested in ensuring we properly evaluate the program and measure its impact. In 2011, the Children's Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC) and George Washington University worked together to conduct an independent evaluation of the SYEP. They found that 96% of our supervisors and 98% of our youth participants were satisfied with the program. For both groups, 96% stated that it would be likely that they would participate again, further indicating that there has been increased satisfaction with the program.

We are particularly proud of SYEP since its reform, including the fact administrative costs for the program is only at 8%, 2% below what is allowed by law and below best practices for a program of its size. We have managed to come in under budget in both 2011 and now 2012 by nearly \$2M each year while still managing to serve a remarkable 14,000 youth, making the DC SYEP the second largest in the nation only behind New York City.

We implemented a "do more with less" attitude to align with the Mayor's fiscal responsibility priority through cost-savings measures such as in-sourcing all of our IT payroll functions, which has saved the agency nearly \$1M while improving the payroll process. I'd personally like to thank the Mayor for his leadership and vision to reform SYEP and to the many DOES employees who help to run such a successful program.

But while we celebrate these accomplishments, we know that SYEP is not a panacea to address all the employment concerns faced by young people. In fact, it's just a start, although a very important start. Developing solutions to youth unemployment are important to all of us, and we must continue to develop and perfect citywide partnerships among District government agencies and the Council, community and faith-based organizations, and private-sector groups.

For example, in 2011 and 2012, Mayor Gray introduced the comprehensive program, "One City Summer Fun...Something for Everyone," to provide safe, wholesome, fun activities for the summer. The program is a major initiative of his safe communities agenda to engage youth in fun, athletics, creativity, reading, learning, exploration, healthy living, volunteerism, and employment opportunities while school is out of session. This was the first time the Summer Youth

Employment program was supported by a coordinated effort by our city's recreation centers, libraries, and community-based groups to engage youth who may be too young or old to participate in SYEP or otherwise are not eligible.

Additionally, DOES launched Path2Career, designed as a series of recruiting events and training opportunities for distinct populations to connect unemployed residents to viable and sustainable employment opportunities with *One City • One Hire* partners in specific industries. As you know, *One City • One Hire* asks area employers to hire just one unemployed District resident. This hiring initiative has helped DOES match 4,700 unemployed District residents to new job opportunities since the launch of the initiative.

We know that there is a large youth population that is not connected to school and work—research indicates there could be as many as 9,000 youth who are disconnected. We want to see all young people connect to educational opportunities as long as they can to ensure better outcomes because we all know we are all competing not just locally for jobs, but globally as well. We also know that youth are ready to enter the workforce and if given a chance and support, they can succeed. DOES held two major events this past summer to encourage disconnected youth to enter into the Armed Forces and public safety fields on July 31. Chief Cathy Lanier, Brigadier General Barry Price (United States Army), Brigadier General Kenny Ricket (National Guard) , and Assistant Fire Chief Kenneth Jackson, shared their personal stories and inspired young people to enter into law enforcement careers, many of which do not need advanced degrees and will train while working.

Additionally, we held a separate Path2Career event for young people. From these efforts, we were able to connect 131 youth to full-time career opportunities with employers such as CVS, Potbelly's, AutoZone, and Hospitality Staffing Solutions and to higher-paying seasonal jobs with partners such as the United Planning Organization and the Department of Parks and Recreation. We were even able to connect 19 youth to a sheet metal apprenticeship opportunity. We look forward to expanding this work even further to ensure that we are doing everything we can for those young adults who are seeking full-time, long-term employment now and not just a six-week summer job.

I'd like to end my remarks by thanking the Mayor for his leadership in reforming this very important program. Without the commitment of the Mayor, the enhancements I have laid out in this testimony would not have taken place.

Recently, the Mayor shared with me some of the enhancements we will be planning for the 2013 Summer Youth Employment Program to ensure youth are supported and are chiefly focused on building the workforce skills required in the workplace, including technical skills training like Word, Excel, Internet search, how to write a proper email in the work environment, in addition to building a strong work ethic, demonstrating teamwork, ensuring punctuality, and other soft skills. We are exploring ideas to strengthen the program to ensure it is a workforce training program above all else. We are exploring ways to increase the diversity of employers to reduce reliance on DC government, connect school attendance to SYEP eligibility to discourage truancy, incentivize youth who perform well in the program year after year—mirroring what happens to employees in the real-world—and implement strategies to increase participant retention such as requiring youth to sign a participation commitment and conducting exit interviews when youth drop out of the program after the first week or so. Finally, we will expand the Path2Career hiring events for older youth to get them full time jobs prior to the start of SYEP to engage youth in full-time careers. These are just some of the ideas we have, and we will be hosting focus groups over the next few weeks to solicit feedback and to plan for 2013.

I'd also like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your commitment to workforce development, your leadership, and for holding this hearing. This is the first public hearing under this new Committee, and I'm very excited to work with you to create the best workforce development outcomes for our youth and the city as a whole.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.