

**Testimony to the Committee on Business, Consumer and Regulatory Affairs  
For The Performance Oversight Hearing on the**

**Department of Employment Services**

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Good Morning Chairman Orange and members of the Committee on Business, Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Latonya Anderson. I am currently living in Ward 1. I am in the 11th grade at Cardozo Education Campus. When I graduate from high school I plan on going to Spelman College or Morgan State and becoming a family lawyer. I am here to talk about the value of gaining work experience while in high school and the need for the Department of Employment Services (DOES) to have more programming for in-school youth.

I have been working as a Youth Advocate on the Foster Care Campaign at the Young Women's Project (YWP) since November of 2014. I have been working as a Peer Educator since the Fall of 2015. I was fifteen and in the tenth grade when I started working with YWP. There have been many benefits to having this job--many benefits outside of the money that I make. I started working at YWP at the same time that I left foster care so the timing was great. Leaving foster care meant that I was responsible for paying for more of my personal items and food and money at home was limited. My mother is working at a fast food restaurant and the money that she brings home is not enough to pay for everything. Last year I was able to go on a college tour trip using the money that I made. I have been able to afford outing with my little sister like going to the movies or bowling. Having a job allows me to pay my cell phone bill and purchase shoes and uniforms for school. I am also saving up for my senior fees, senior trip and a summer study abroad program that I was accepted into. Without the job I would not be able to pay for these things. Just buying clothes in general is hard and having a part-time job helps. I am also able to pay for the fun extras in life such as getting my hair and nails done. What woman doesn't like to look good?

I have also learned many life skills by having a job. I have learned to keep calm and manage my temper. I have learned how to effectively communicate and other important skills such as how to "fake it until you make it." I have learned the importance of being reliable and completing work assignments. Even when things are not going my way I have learned to how better deal with things--not every day is going to be good.

This summer I had the pleasure of speaking with Councilmember Grosso and getting his perspective on things that are going on in the school system and how we can make them better. I was also able to improve my time management skills because in the real world there are deadlines for everything. I am grateful for my job because many jobs prefer people who are 18 and older. Some places do not want to hire inexperienced teenagers. I filled out applications to places like The Green Turtle, Chipotle, and Target and never heard

back from them. Sometimes I feel like these type of jobs prefer older people because they are not in school and can work full time. Summer jobs might not be enough experience for employers. Lots of teens do not have the skills to succeed at jobs yet like communication, knowing how to show up regularly and on time. Many also do not have good time management skills nor do they know how to balance things. It is good to have a job where I can learn and make mistakes.

I participated in the Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP) for two years. The first year I worked at a fashion and design program. Even though it wasn't my ideal placement it was not so bad. We completed fashion sketches and arts and crafts projects. We had a fashion show at the end of the summer. We spent most of the six weeks working on teams planning different parts of the fashion show. At times it was boring and felt like a waste of time because many of the other youth were loud and rowdy and it was hard to focus. Last summer I worked at YWP writing for the website blog. We interviewed DC City Council members and various leaders at youth serving agencies. My writing improved a great deal since the summer.

SYEP is great but it is only during the summer. Six weeks is not enough. Last year SYEP was very well run. I didn't have any issues with my pay and the transportation money was amazing and beneficial. I was able to get a job that will help build my resume.

DOES need to increase the number of year round work opportunities for youth who are still in school. We should be able to work and participate in employment workshops for interviewing, career exploration, work readiness skills and other things.

DOES also needs to work on how they communicate with youth. Last fall we emailed and called DOES and it was hard to get information. The youth from YWP sent over 200 emails to the address that is listed on the Office of Youth Programs website ([does@dc.gov](mailto:does@dc.gov)) asking about programs and not one email was returned. We also called the DOES office and while most of the staff were nice they did not know basic answers about programs or told us that they did not have any program that were up and running at the time. They did not tell us to check our youth portals nor did they ask for our contact information. Many of us were put on hold and it took a long time to actually talk with someone.

**I have the following recommendations:**

- There need to be more employment opportunities for high school students outside of SYEP. Students need employment options year round.
- There should be more employment outreach programs for youth and young adults so that they can build work readiness skills, explore careers and set goals.
- DOES needs to make improve the way that they communicate with youth. The staff should respond to emails and create an email specifically for youth programming. There should be clear and detailed information on the website with specific contact information for the programs.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions.