

**Testimony to the Committee on Business, Consumer, and Regulatory Affairs
For Performance Oversight Hearing
Department of Employment Services**

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Good Morning Chair Orange and members of the Committee on Business, Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Marcia Huff. I am the Director of Youth Poverty Programs at the Young Women's Project (YWP). We are a DC based nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. Since 1994, YWP has developed thousands of youth leaders and has worked in partnership with a number of DC agencies to develop policy and implement programs in sexual health education and services, foster care rights and opportunities, youth employment, and other issues. YWP programs cover a broad range of interventions -- from after school leadership programming to youth employment, peer education, youth-led research, and policy development.

YWP also runs the Peer Health and Sexuality Education (PHASE) Program that works to improve DC teens' reproductive health by expanding comprehensive sexuality education, ensuring access to community and school based reproductive health care, and engaging teen women and men as peer educators and decision makers on reproductive health issues.

The Young Women's Project (YWP) is a youth employer, with more than 200 part-time youth workers on the ground. We are a national expert in youth development and adult-youth partnership. Locally, have spearheaded successful advocacy and policy initiatives in health, education, and child welfare. We understand the challenges they face in preparing for and entering the workforce, the failure of the education system in preparing them with basic reading and math literacy, and the poverty that they face. We also work closely with the youth serving agencies charged with preparing youth for adult life -- DOES, DCPS, CFSA, and OSSE and have experienced firsthand the lack of program effectiveness, poor outcomes, and excessive spending.

YWP has been employing youth for 20 years -- working side by side to develop them as trainers, educators, and advocates. Teaching them problem solving, communication and decision making skills and at the same time writing, reading, research, team work, how to show up on time, and skills that should have been mastered in school but were not. We work with youth on three levels. First -- we develop them as workers, educators, trainers, advocates who have specific skill sets and issue expertise. Next -- they use these skills and expertise out in the community to solve problems.

I am here for the following reasons:

- 1. To request a budget allocation of \$1 million within the DOES FY2017 budget for a year-round subsidized employment program for 500 District high school students.**

2. **To request that the Committee require that the DOES-OYP make quarterly reports on spending and enrollment.**
3. **To request that the Committee require DOES to submit a comprehensive analysis on the Career Connections Program**

Large numbers of youth and young adults ages 14-24 are living in poverty. According to the Kids Count Data Center, in 2013, there were 21,000 youth ages 18 to 24 and 7,000 youth 14-17 living in poverty. DCPS estimates that there are 4,000 homeless youth and children in the public school system (a number that has grown 37 percent in two years). There are upward of 28,000 youth 14-24 who need intensive educational interventions, workforce preparation, and other kinds of support (food, transportation, clothing). There are about 2,000 each year who turn 18 and leave the school system without graduating.

Youth are facing exploding housing costs and increasing metro train and bus fares. Lack of access to transportation is a major barrier to youth seeking employment and job training opportunities. Many job training programs such as the UDC Workforce Development & Lifelong Learning program where youth have the opportunity to receive vocational training and certifications do not offer any transportation assistance for participants. Youth need to be able to access these training programs so that they can get living wage jobs. The majority of youth who are employed are making minimum wage. There is no way to maintain an apartment, pay for transportation and other life needs in DC making minimum wage; even if a youth is getting forty hours a week.

Youth are unemployed in large numbers. Although the Washington Area economy has remained strong and regional unemployment is low, youth unemployment is at an all-time high at 50 percent for 16 - 19 years olds - twice the national average. Further, 32 percent of low-income youth without college degrees are not working compared to 22 percent nationally (according to a report by the Brookings Institution). Unemployment is so dire in some areas such as the Ward 7 communities of Eastland Gardens and Kenilworth -- only 13.2 percent of youth 16-24 are even employed.

Youth are not ready to be employed. Many DC youth need help getting to the starting line. Many are facing significant barriers that prevent them from succeeding in the workplace. Some lack a high school degree or GED and others struggle with low literacy and numeracy. Others are homeless or experiencing stressful and unstable housing situations. This is not an issue of resumes or professional dress or polishing up the rough edges. This is an issue of major reeducation. Youth spend all of their time in youth spaces. Many don't even go to school much and so they are on their own with their peers in a very peer-based culture. Youth need the essential skills such as email writing, interacting with colleagues, communicating work absences, and maintaining a professional deportment. Youth need to learn how to communicate assertively, advocate for themselves, and effectively resolve conflicts.

Part-time jobs help keep youth in school, prepare them for the workforce, stimulate college interest, and provide much needed financial support for school and family expenses. There are close to 12,000 youth 14 and older in our public school system (DCPS and charters) who are considered at-risk (homeless, in foster care, on public assistance or one year behind) -- and could really use a part time job. Part time employment, especially under-resourced youth, has many benefits. Part time work is associated with a greater chance of finding a job after graduation, longer spells of employment, and higher income. Part time work helps youth determine a career field and develop contacts and relationships with people in their field of interest. Employment during high school is linked to higher incomes as

they become adults (The Brookings Institute 2014). Youth who do not have early work experience are more likely to endure later unemployment and less likely to achieve higher levels of career attainment. Youth—especially those who are black, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged—who have some employment experience while in school are less likely to drop out than those who do not work during high school. Finally, youth report a wide range of beneficial attributes, such as the capacity to take responsibility, develop time-management skills, overcome shyness with adults, and handle money

DOES In-School-Youth Program

Unfortunately, DOES has not had a viable in-school program in the past four years. The program is small, exclusive, expensive, and poorly managed. According to DOES oversight documents, in FY12 the in-school program served 67 youth with a budget of \$315,017; 16 youth with \$1 million in FY13, 123 youth with \$1 million in FY14, and 10 youth so far this year (the budget is unclear). Not engaging school-aged youth in work force readiness and employment is a missed opportunity. The earlier we can engage youth in career opportunities – before they become disconnected, homeless, young parents – the better our chances of succeeding at connecting them to meaningful employment. And—this type of programming gives us the biggest bang for our buck. Most high functioning youth employment cities (San Francisco, Philadelphia, Hartford, Los Angeles, Baltimore) have several in-school programs up and running that offer a range of choices to youth -- and intentional outreach for disconnected and under-resourced youth (models are listed below). Under the new WIOA guidelines, 25 percent (we estimate \$2.5 million) of federal funds can be allocated to in-school programs. We recommend moving forward immediately with the following measures:

In-School-Youth Recommendation:

We recommend the allocation of \$1million dollars for a year-round ISY program that will employ 500 high school students and uses the existing SYEP infrastructure. As part of this program, students will work 6-12 hours a week for private and nonprofit employers in positions that build youth work readiness capacity and expose them to careers in growing industries. There are a number of high quality programs who employ hundreds of youth (Brainfood, Urban Alliance, Young Women's Project, Mary's Center, and others) in meaningful, industry-focused part time work that improves grades, keeps youth in school, prepares them for workforce entry, and contributes resources to their families.

The ISY program would offer open enrollment to youth across the city with more slots allotted to underserved wards. Youth and employers would register in manner similar to SYEP. DOES would vet youth positions to ensure an acceptable level of work readiness training, youth development, academic support, career exploration, and core skills development in a viable industry. Employers would input youth time on a weekly basis and youth would be paid monthly through debit cards. The wage support and payroll services would be a significant support to organizations that have job opportunities but do not have the infrastructure or funding to put youth on payroll. This program would enable 500 youth to stay in school, earn wages, and prepare for careers. This is the smartest and easiest investment we could make right now.

As a part of this ISY program DOES should develop common infrastructure to support a range of employers that includes benchmarks for youth growth and development in work readiness, academic growth, and other key areas and a common curricula and tools for engaging youth workers.

DOES-OYP Oversight

In FY15 OYP served 26 youth in the Out-Of-School Program, 115 youth in the In-School-Program, 150 youth in the Pathways for Young Adults Program and 183 youth in the Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute (MBLI). WIA and WIOA federal dollars were significantly underspent during the years between 2013 and 2016. In three years only \$1,601,689 was spent out of the \$6,071,330 that was awarded. This means that \$4,469,641 was left unspent.

During the past few months we have met with DOES Director Carroll and members of her leadership staff as well and with Deputy Mayor Snowden. We appreciate their willingness to receive input and even criticism from the advocacy community. We are encouraged by their determination and commitment to improving the DC youth workforce system. We are also encouraged by the work of the new WIC Executive Director Odie Donald and WIC Chair Andy Shallal. After years of poor outcomes, low participant numbers and unspent money it truly feels like change is on the horizon. Despite all of the positive indicators of change it is vital that this Committee closely monitor and provide oversight over the transformation process. During the past two years there has been a remarkable lack of transparency. It has been extremely difficult to get clear numbers of spending and participant participation. We understand allowing the District workforce leaders the room to work, create and renew the youth workforce system but we have lost too much time to allow this process happen without oversight and guidance. We cannot afford to have yet another year pass with poorly planned programs, under spending and poor performance.

OYP Oversight Recommendations

- We request that the Committee require the DOES-Office of Youth Programs to submit quarterly reports on the number of youth enrolled in programming and served by the OYP including but not limited to the Year-Round Youth Program, Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute, Pathways for Young Adults, Career Connections and the Youth Earn and Learn Program (YEALP).
- We request that they Committee require the DOES-Office of Youth Programs to provide a comprehensive analysis on the Career Connections covering program operations between November 2015 and December 2016. This analysis should include:
 1. Complete logic model for the program
 2. Overview of evaluation process including target outputs and outcomes including job readiness, skills gains, program completion rates, and permanent employment placement
 3. Progress made on all outputs and outcomes and program satisfaction data from participating youth and employers;
 4. Overview of approach and support mechanisms for participating youth and employers
 5. Details on all program costs including--wages, transportation stipends, bonuses, and any other related costs.
 6. Number of participants who enrolled in educational or vocational programs
 7. Number of youth who exited the program before completion and the reason for exit.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions and serve as a resource for the Committee.