



Testimony Before the New York City Council Committees on Youth Services and Community Development Regarding the Department of Youth and Community Development's Preliminary Budget

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Good afternoon, Chairmen Fidler and Vann, and members of the committees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and discuss the city's youth development, education, training and employment programs.

My name is Rebecca Brown and I am Deputy Director of the NYC Employment and Training Coalition. NYCETC is an association of over 200 community based organizations, community colleges, labor unions and educational entities that provide education, training, employment and youth development services to over 700,000 New Yorkers annually. Each year our members also place approximately 100,000 individuals into jobs. Approximately half of our members serve young adults. These include youth who are in-school and need additional support to graduate and become work ready, as well as youth who are disconnected from both school and the workforce. We envision a city where every resident has opportunities and access to gain the skills they need to become employable, and every business can attract and retain highly skilled workers.

I would first like to thank the Council for its ongoing financial support of youth development, training, employment and literacy programs over the past several years. Your investment has been critical to supporting the important work of our member community-based organizations.

Clearly, the most critical and timely issue for the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and its youth and community development programs, is the funding that the agency will receive through the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (or ARRA). Responding to the economic crisis and the structural changes that are happening to New York City's economy will require new approaches to youth workforce development services that not only deal with the immediate challenge of fewer available jobs, but also prepare our young people for the new demands that will come with economic recovery.

This is a critical time for New York City's workforce development system and there will be a new focus by the federal government on the youth development and job preparation services we provide and the value we create. We need to show that our city's workforce development system – made up of DYCD, SBS and other city agencies; community based organizations; community colleges; union affiliated programs, and private providers – is capable of providing high quality services to all New Yorkers, including youth and adults who are in need of assistance. We must do this all with a sense of urgency – not just for the people we serve, but because of the funding timelines and the need to show outcomes.

Reaching and serving all New Yorkers will require maximizing the existing capacity of the entire system, including the hundreds of community-based providers with strong existing connections to local businesses, many of whom will be critical to the city's economic recovery.

We commend the Department of Youth and Community Development for its active leadership in developing a response to this unprecedented employment crisis. New York City expects to receive approximately \$36.4 million in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth funds in the next few weeks and this new federal investment in the city's workforce development system is a tremendous opportunity. However, it comes with a number of constraints, including the need to show near immediate results. We have appreciated the opportunity to share ideas with DYCD and we look forward to seeing a final spending plan that is realistic, balanced and leverages the capacity of the city's youth workforce development providers.

We realize that ARRA places emphasis on serving youth through the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and agree that the City should structure a robust SYEP program this year. But, we also believe that it is to the benefit of our city's young adults that **year-round programming** also be supported with the new WIA dollars. Therefore, while DYCD's specific plans have not yet been detailed, we would like to make the following recommendations that we believe will enhance the City's overall approach to ARRA:

- **Expand the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP)** – Piloted through the City's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), the year-round Young Adult Internship Program has shown promising results and is a "shovel-ready" program model that could be expanded to create more year-round paid internships. A timely and targeted way to expand YAIP program services is to increase slots at provider organizations with good track records, as well as expand access to more young adults beyond specific Community Districts.
- **Enhance the Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Program** – DYCD should also expand the number of OSY program slots and create strong linkages with YAIP by allowing OSY graduates to enroll in YAIP, thereby creating a continuum of services for disconnected youth. The agency could improve the speed and efficiency of enrolling young adults in the program by making adjustments to the required documentation, especially as it relates to income eligibility and residency requirements.
- **Use Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Funding to Support High Performing Workforce Development Providers** – The workforce development needs of the city are vast and while new WIA investments are important, there are many community-based workforce development programs that will not see the help they need. These are organizations that are well-positioned to show immediate outcomes and have a proven track record of success in helping to train and place individuals with multiple barriers to employment. New York City expects to receive approximately \$47 million in Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funding under ARRA. Investing CSBG funding into education/literacy, training and employment services for youth and adults at well-established organizations who have existing capacity will go a long way in helping community residents to prepare for and find employment during this challenging economic climate. We also call upon DYCD to consider using, as other agencies have, alternative procurement mechanisms to both broaden the pool of eligible providers, as well as get this funding on the street as quickly as possible.
- **Build Employer Support for Youth Employment** – Maintaining and expanding employer engagement in youth employment during the economic crisis will be a challenge. We urge DYCD to convene key leaders from business and industry associations to develop a city-wide outreach effort that will raise awareness and build support for the youth employment programs. NYCETC would be a very willing partner in this effort, too!

- **Build Collaborations to Serve An Especially At Risk Population – 18-24 Years Olds** – The city’s large population of disconnected youth will only increase during this historic downturn. As more and more New Yorkers find themselves out of a job, young adults, especially those with little work history and other challenges, will be competing against more experienced workers for fewer available entry-level jobs. Building on existing programs and both public and private systems, there needs to be a young adult focused strategy that creates multiple entry points into the system and directs individuals to opportunities that best fit their needs – whether it is an adult or youth program, public or private. A collaborative approach between DYCD, SBS, other city agencies, and workforce development providers to focus attention on the 18-24 year old population, will make the best use of the entire workforce development system and the new resources.

- **Implement a City-wide Sector Strategy** – Sector strategies have been an important focus for city policy over the past few years, but the impact of this crisis, the ongoing shifts in the economy, and the new investments being made through the stimulus, are shifting the sector priorities. Publicly articulating a list of key sectors that will be the primary focus of workforce development efforts across city agencies during this crisis will provide important leadership for the entire public-private workforce development system. A key part of this strategy should be the human services sector – not just as a provider – but, as a key sector for the city’s economic recovery. The human services sector is well positioned to take advantage of new federal resources to create jobs quickly.

ARRA may provide two years for spending the money, but the message from Washington is clear - spend the money now and do so effectively. Congressional staffers have also sent the message that this new investment in workforce development is a test -- a test of the system’s ability to perform and show outcomes. Failure to perform could mean substantial changes to how the system operates and significant cuts to the federal funding available down the road.

We urge the New York City Council to play an active role in developing the city’s response and monitoring progress. NYCETC is available as a resource for your efforts and a connection to the “front line” of the workforce development system. In addition to our weekly updates through *NYC Workforce Weekly*, we have set up a special website www.nycetc.org/recovery to provide a portal for information and resources regarding New York City and State, as well as federal workforce development recovery efforts.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with our member organizations, city agencies, the Workforce Investment Board/ Youth Council, and the City Council in building a strong workforce development system that prepares New York’s young adults for careers and continues to change lives on a daily basis.