

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

July 10, 2017

The Honorable R. Alexander Acosta
Secretary of Labor
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta,

As Secretary of Labor, you have spoken about the need to invest in on-the-job training programs. However, the President's Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request significantly cuts federal job training programs, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) formula funding that supports youth workforce development. I urge you to prioritize funding for youth job training programs in areas experiencing high levels of poverty and community violence and that provide our nation's most at-risk youth with meaningful pathways to long-term employment.

In June, the President signed an Executive Order to strengthen apprenticeship programs that at the same time asked agencies for recommendations to eliminate workforce development programs that are "ineffective, redundant, or unnecessary". Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in the administration's articulation of its workforce priorities, I am deeply concerned about the impacts these cuts will have on youth across the country, in particular youth in underserved communities that rely on federally funded employment programs for economic opportunity.

Chronic unemployment at a young age decreases potential for employment later in life and increases the likelihood that youth will become involved in the criminal justice system. In Chicago, and in communities all across Illinois, high rates of poverty and unemployment correlate with higher rates of violent crime. Youth job training programs offer an opportunity for young people to escape a vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment, and violence. The One Summer Chicago Plus youth employment program, which reduced violence by 43 percent among youth participants in 2012, is a clear example of this. The federal government must continue to build on this success and be an engaged partner in addressing youth unemployment, especially in high-poverty, high-crime communities.

I support robust investments in apprenticeship programs, but these investments should not come at the expense of other skills development programs that keep youth safe and engaged. The Department of Labor's (DOL) Summer Jobs and Beyond Grant program, for example, allowed the City of Chicago to expand its One Summer Chicago program to provide year-round work and skills development opportunities for 300 of the most-at risk youth in Chicago. I urge you to continue supporting programs like Summer Jobs and Beyond that aim to reduce the number of youth experiencing violence, connect disadvantaged youth to evidence-based job training, and allow at-risk youth to establish long-term career pathways.

Last month, I invited you to come to Chicago to see how the President's proposed budget cuts will impact job training programs that help youth escape a vicious cycle of poverty and violence. I encourage you to learn about these programs first hand and meet with youth whose lives have been changed because they were given an opportunity to prove themselves through a job. I look forward to discussing how DOL can be a strong federal partner in efforts to reduce gun violence.

The best anti-poverty, anti-crime, anti-violence program is a job. I urge you to ensure the Department's resources are directed to the urgent problem of youth unemployment, especially in communities with high violent crime rates.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator