

Assisting in Developing (AID) Youth Employment Act

Senator Dick Durbin

Opportunity youth face barriers to employment, including discrimination, childhood poverty, homelessness, and involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system, and are less likely to find and keep a job later in life. Employment between the ages of 16 and 24 can significantly improve adult employment prospects, including higher earnings, lower rates of poverty, and better health, making it imperative to improve the job prospects of youth at these ages.

The Need in Our Communities

During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 4.8 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 were neither employed nor in school in 2020. While the national rate of youth disconnection has since returned near pre-pandemic levels to about 4.3 million, the recovery has not been evenly felt. For youth of color in Chicago and nationwide, disconnection is chronic and concentrated:

- As of 2024, roughly 12% of youth ages 16 to 24 in Chicago are disconnected from both work and school.
- Among youth ages 16 to 24 in Chicago, more than 24 percent of Black youth and 10 percent of Hispanic youth were out of work and out of school in 2022.
- Among youth ages 16 to 24 throughout the U.S., nearly 17 percent of Black youth and 13 percent of Hispanic youth were out of work and out of school in 2022.
- A 2017 study found that among youth participating in Chicago's youth summer employment program, violent crime arrests decreased by nearly 33 percent.
- More than 90 percent of youth shooting victims in Chicago are not enrolled in school.

The Solution: Nothing Stops a Bullet like a Job

Too many young people who are faced with chronic unemployment are living in communities that lack the resources to help them stay in school or find a job. The federal government needs to be an engaged partner by providing resources that make it easier to create and expand summer and year-round youth employment programs that serve youth in disadvantaged communities.

The AID Youth Employment Act will:

- *Invest in Summer & Year-Round Youth Employment Opportunities.* Establish five-year, competitive grant programs that provide financial support for communities seeking to create, improve, or grow summer and year-round employment opportunities for youth.
- *Encourage Innovation.* Planning grants would provide eligible entities with up to \$250,000 for 12 months to plan new summer or year-round employment programs for eligible youth.
- *Expand Employment Services.* Implementation grants would provide recipients with up to \$6 million over three years to expand or enhance summer or year-round employment programs.
- *Encourage Mentorship.* Require grant recipients to provide or connect youth with positive, supportive adult relationships, including mentors trained in trauma-informed care, job coaches, or peer mentors.
- *Help youth develop lifelong employment skills.* Grant recipients will assist eligible youth in developing core work-readiness skills, including financial literacy, technical skills, and soft-employment skills such as communication and problem solving.
- *Encourage Partnerships.* Require grant recipients to partner with other state and local entities in implementing the program and would give preference to recipients that have developed a plan to increase private-sector engagement and job placement in summer or year-round employment opportunities.