

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and,
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and,
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Mikulski, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

We write to express our strong support for the U.S. Department of Labor's YouthBuild program in the Senate Fiscal Year 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Bill. We request that you increase funding to the greatest extent possible for this critical program that was recently reauthorized in the bipartisan *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014*, and that has been instrumental in reconnecting thousands of unemployed and undereducated youth nationwide.

The nation's ability to reconnect unemployed and undereducated young adults is essential to our economic productivity. There are at least 2.3 million low-income 16 to 24 year olds in the United States who are neither in school nor employed. Every year hundreds of thousands of young people, half of whom are from low-income communities, leave high school without a diploma. A 2012 analysis from Columbia University reported that every disconnected young person would directly cost the taxpayer \$236,000 over his or her lifetime and would generate social costs of \$704,000.

YouthBuild programs engage disadvantaged, low-income youth in a holistic, full-time program with equal emphasis on education and hands-on, productive job training, coupled with personal counseling and mentoring, leadership development and service to the community. Young people ages 16 to 24, who left high school without a diploma, enroll full-time in the program for an average of ten months, working toward their GEDs or high school diplomas for 50 percent of the program time, and spending the remainder learning hands-on job skills through building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people in their communities. In addition to construction, some young people train for jobs in other growing sectors, such as healthcare, technology, and customer service.

The Department of Labor manages this program with a heavy emphasis on performance, providing ample evidence that YouthBuild works. Since YouthBuild began as a federal program in 1992, over 130,000 students in 45 states have built more than 28,000 units of affordable housing in low-income communities. In the last completed grant cycle, while nearly all YouthBuild participants entered the program never having completed high school, 77 percent of them obtained their high school diploma, GED, and/or industry-recognized credentials. Additionally, 61 percent of enrollees were placed in post-secondary education and/or jobs within one quarter after graduating from the program, with a 71 percent retention of those placements for at least nine months. YouthBuild has also shown impressive results in putting court-involved youth on a path to success, helping to address the astronomical and growing cost to taxpayers of incarceration. Given this impressive track record, the program's effectiveness has received bipartisan endorsement.

The demand for this program's critical services far exceeds what current funding can deliver. In fact, despite there being 143 grantees across the country currently, three times more young people have applied for program slots than could be accepted over recent years. With increased funding, YouthBuild could open up additional opportunity for disconnected youth seeking a chance to rebuild their communities and their lives. We believe this effective federal program merits significant investment.

We thank you in advance for your careful consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Gillibrand

Jack Reed

Art Hays

Sherrod Brown

Tommy Baldwin

Maria Cantwell

Jeanne Shaheen

Robert Menendez

Chuck Schumer

Mark F. Berry

Debbie Stabenow

Richard Blumenthal

Diana Durbin

Eric Schlotz

Ben Cardin

Shirley

Elizabeth Warren

Mazie Hirono

Dennis P. Stein

Paul Marchant

Angela Kuban

Elizabeth

August King

Walter Peterson

Kathleen Leahy

G. W. Miller

Al Franken

Jon Tost

J. C. B.

Ron Wyden

Edward J. Markey

James