



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



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Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee,

My name is Kevin Flood, I am the communications director of the Connecticut Commission on Children, and I'm here today to testify on behalf of the Commission in support of SB 291, An Act Establishing a Youth Employment System.

As you may know, the bill springs in part from a public forum the Commission held in this building with the Connecticut Workforce Development Council on January 10. We heard from labor experts, employers, legislators (including Representative Ackert), and youth from across the state who've had difficulty in finding employment. Actually, "difficulty" may be an understatement. While the overall unemployment rate hovered around 8 percent last summer, it stood at 17.3 percent for those between the ages of 16 and 24. In other words, a teen-ager or new college graduate finds it twice as hard to find a job as the rest of us. As one researcher puts it, the Great Depression isn't just a history lesson for them – it's a current event.

With adult unemployment such a pressing problem, why should we concern ourselves with summer work for young people? One of our experts, John Twomey, of a workforce

development organization in New York, provided the answer in very blunt terms: “We are sending a whole generation of high school and college graduates into the workplace without any work experience or understanding of what a J-O-B requires.” He noted that teen-age participation in the U.S. labor force stood at 29.5 percent last year – the lowest since at least 1948, when tracking of this statistic began.

You can imagine the consequences of this shift. When they finally enter the workforce, young people will have to learn on the job what it means to *have* a job. They’ll be less efficient and less competitive – something Connecticut and the rest of the country can ill-afford.

The benefits of an employment track record, meanwhile, are manifold. One of the leading experts on this issue, Dr. Andrew Sum of Northeastern University, writes that:

“The more a teen works this year, the more likely he is to work next year and in the following years. Cumulative years of work experience during the teen years tend to raise both employability and weekly wages in their early 20s. and cumulative work experience in the teens and early 20s increases the likelihood that workers will receive formal training, including apprenticeship training, from their employers as they move through their 20s.”

That’s where SB 291 comes in. Under it, the Labor Department and other state agencies would build on the present State Youth Employment Program to develop a more comprehensive youth employment system. It would direct public and private resources into creating summer and year-round employment opportunities for youth and supporting career pathways that would provide youth and young adults with the skills and access necessary to secure good jobs and successful careers.

This system would provide (1) a range of training and employment options, (2) in-depth support services, and (3) the flexibility to connect youth and young adults to the most appropriate set of services, which shall include integrated education, skill training and access to work experience leading to secondary or occupational credentials, postsecondary

educational training opportunities and skills such as teamwork, leadership ability, oral and written communication proficiency and ethical responsibility.

Further, the Labor Department would:

- establish a public-private partnership, as defined in section 4-255 of the General Statutes, to support the youth employment system I just described
- expand private sector involvement in summer and year-round employment opportunities for youth, and
- consider a tax credit program to provide tax incentives to qualified employers for employing youth and young adults in part-time and full-time positions.

Microsoft's Steve Ballmer often argues that it's important during downturns to increase worker training in order to be ready for the recovery. That exactly sums up the thinking behind this bill.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss this critical issue.