



BUDGET CUTS WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT YOUTH

Statement by Kisha Bird at the Children's Leadership Council News Conference

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(Washington, D.C.) Following is a statement by Kisha Bird, project director of Campaign for Youth and senior policy analyst at CLASP, the Center for Law and Social Policy. Ms. Bird made these remarks today during a press conference sponsored the Children's Leadership Council in response to a congressional proposal to slash non-defense, discretionary spending by \$61 billion.

“Good morning. I’m Kisha Bird, project director for the Campaign for Youth, a national coalition co-chaired by CLASP and the Corps Network. The campaign seeks to improve outcomes for the more than five million young people in this nation who are disconnected from education, employment and opportunity by raising awareness of the disconnected youth problem and increasing federal investment in effective programs that can improve their outcomes.

It’s important to note that the program’s we are talking about today do a lot of good things for a lot of people. These programs are not merely abstract numbers in a federal budget. They have significant purpose. They help people access education and other opportunities. They provide a solid foundation for low-income children. In many instances, they alleviate immediate hardship. These are the things that collectively make this nation stronger. These are our shared values.

Slashing billions from programs in many instances means slashing numbers served or slashing quality of needed programs that make a difference in the lives of children, youth and families. Simply put, this isn’t the conversation we should be having, and these aren’t the choices we should have to make. Republicans and Democrats alike have said the budget shouldn’t be balanced on the backs of the vulnerable. They should stand up and show they mean it.

I would like to talk about two proposed cuts that could adversely affect young people. HR 1 proposes to virtually eliminate funding employment and education training programs operated under the Department of Labor and authorized by the Workforce Investment Act or WIA. It eliminates funding for WIA youth activities, DOL’s Youthbuild program, re-integration of ex-offenders as well as the green jobs innovation fund and the career pathways innovation fund. And it cuts job corps by more than \$990 million which includes a decrease in FY 2010 funding and an additional rescission for FY 2010.

As I already said, slashing programs means slashing services. Under HR 1, the workforce investment system would receive no allocation for this upcoming program year through WIA, which would result in a loss of services to more than a quarter of a million vulnerable youth.

U.S. Department of Labor programs for youth provide low-income and out-of-school young people access to important work experience, jobs, and educational activities - ranging from summer and year-round employment, to year-round education and apprenticeships and links to secondary and postsecondary credentials.

Opportunities for youth employment and training are critical to putting youth on a path to self-sufficiency. We know from research that early work experience matters. The more teens work this year, the more they work next year and that less work experience today leads to less work experience tomorrow and lower earnings down the road. In many cases, youth programs funded by the Department of Labor provide both low-income- in-school and out-of-school youth their only lifeline. Local programs leverage this important source of funding with other public and private revenue sources to create jobs, provide education and training services, leadership development and civic engagement activities, all of which prepare young people for the world of work today and tomorrow.

At a time when youth unemployment rates stand at an astounding 24.1 percent for youth ages 16 to 19 and 16.1 percent for youth ages 20 to 24, much higher than the overall national average of 8.9 percent, these programs are critical to their economic futures as well as the nation's.

HR 1 also will affect access to postsecondary education.

The US house is proposing devastating cuts to programs that allow low-income students to access postsecondary education, including the largest cut to the Pell grant program in its history. The bill would fund the Pell grant program at the same level as FY 2010 (\$4,705). But the proposal actually cuts \$845 or over 15 percent from the current maximum Pell grant, which was increased to \$5,550 by the American Recovery and Reinvestment act. Experts estimate this cut would make 1.7 million students ineligible for Pell grants, which represents almost a fifth of current recipients. Given that tuition and other college costs continue to increase significantly every year, *defunding* an education grant program like Pell forces students to go further and further into debt. This is ironic considering that one of the justifications for the harsh cuts in H.R. 1 is to not saddle future generations with debt. Many more students will not be able to attend college at all because the debt burden will be too much to bear.

In closing, big cuts to youth employment and education programs may satisfy some lawmakers' need to slash the budget at any cost. But I must emphasize that these budget cuts undermine America's current and future economic engines and simply don't make sense if we want to make sure more of our young people have the opportunity to get or stay on track and have hope and promise for bright futures."