

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative

Policy Issues Related to Recent State, Federal Budget Issues

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is compelling evidence¹ that recent budget inaction and decisions will result in increases in the population of Opportunity Youth in Hartford, which could significantly worsen over the upcoming year. This would reverse the trends of recent years where progress has been made in decreasing the number of Hartford Opportunity Youth to under 4000 individuals. Opportunity Youth are defined as 16 – 24-year-olds that are not at work and not in school, represent untapped human potential, where returning to school or work can reduce public expenditures, stabilize communities, and help keep jobs and revenues in Connecticut. Recent and projected state and federal budget cuts will lead to diminished capacity to support Opportunity Youth (OY) in Hartford and history shows that when investments in opportunity youth decline, the number of opportunity youth increases (see report). This tacit, distressing trend will likely add to the persistent, chronic structural poverty existing in many Hartford communities.

Given the breadth and depth of the cuts, we prioritize several areas for immediate attention, discussion, and action -- including the following:

1. **Workforce:** Passage of a new budget should include restoration of employment/training resources for this population. This includes restoring the **State Youth Employment Program, Second Chance IBEST Program**, and considerations of extending the **Apprenticeship, STEP UP, SNAP ET, JFES Subsidized Employment training funds** targeting OY. Existing, but dormant pools of funds from CRDA, Vocational Training Bond funds need to also be acted on. Inaction on the CETC recommended Industry Partnership Training funds needs addressing. Active attention to proposed federal budget cuts to WIOA must be given attention by the CT federal delegation.
2. **Education:** The fragmentation between adult education and higher education is a challenge that has yet to be resolved, and should be made a priority for action. College access, bridge and remediation programs have been given less attention despite high need. Connecticut lags behind other states which have recently enhanced contextualized education models to support credit-based and industry-recognized credentials for middle skills attainment. Early college can increase the retention of in-school youth, and have also lagged in support. Active attention to proposed federal budget cuts and changes to **Pell, SNAP ET, and Federal Student Loans** must be given attention by CT federal delegation.
3. **Support Services:** The Care4kids program needs to be restored to support young parents. The waiver for JFES should be extended to other WIOA and related populations to be eligible for Care4kids slots. Additional attention to behavioral health, homelessness supports and other support services need attention.

The implications of budget cuts to Hartford’s OY programs will create immediate increased pain, interruption, and challenges to OY, while the long-term implications are even more devastating. As indicated in a recent document released by Aspen Institute, “youth and young adults under 25, particularly youth of color, experience higher unemployment rates than adults. The costs of disconnection from education and the labor market are high, resulting in loss of individual lifetime earnings and costs to taxpayers. There are additional social burdens associated with disconnection, including increased likelihood of negative outcomes (such as incarceration) and reliance on government supports.”

A year ago, the Parthenon-EY 2016 report, warned that “in a state where some estimate a structural deficit of around \$1 billion per year, there is about that much lost from the budget each year due to the collective failure to meet the needs of disengaged and disconnected youth.’ The present state and federal budgets inaction fails to heed this warning.

Immediate action needs to occur to support the positive results for youth, families, communities and business and industry that occur when Opportunity Youth get reconnected to career pathways and achieve success. This is a critical turning point for the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative to respond.

¹ The research was undertaken by Capital Workforce Partners, Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative Members, City of Hartford, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, United Way of Connecticut, Partner Organizations of the State of Connecticut, Connecticut Association of Human Services, Voices for Children, Center for Law and Social Policy and other contributors.