



**Testimony of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Before the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
April 3, 2017**

**Re: Strategies to Improve Employment Outcomes for District Youth:
B22-0054, “Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Expansion Act of 2017”
B22-0111, “Safe Way Home Act of 2017”**

Chairwoman Silverman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on effective strategies to advance youth employment outcomes for low-income and vulnerable youth. I am Kisha Bird, a resident of Ward 7 and the director of youth policy at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), an anti-poverty organization that promotes effective federal and state policies for low-income families and individuals. In my role, I work to expand access to education, employment, and support services for out-of-school and other vulnerable youth. We also facilitate a learning exchange, the Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth (CCRY) Network, comprised of local youth development and workforce leaders who are invested in low-income and out-of-school youth and the cross-systems solutions needed to ensure their education and economic success. In addition, I bring to this testimony experience at the state and local level advancing quality youth development programming in Pennsylvania and as a policy advocate, funder, and practitioner.

Youth employment is an important part of youth development and the successful progression into young adulthood.

Ages 14 through 24 are critical developmental years, a period of discovery as young people prepare to take on adult responsibilities. We know from brain science research that this is a significant time period when the adolescent brain is still developing. This is also a time when young people can—and should—gain positive long-term impacts through early work experience and youth employment. A key predictor of consistent employment in adulthood is early exposure to the world of work in the teen years. Among the many outcomes of youth employment:

- Teens who work are 86% more likely to be employed the next year.¹
- Older youth have almost a 100% chance of being employed if they worked more than 40 weeks the previous year.²
- Working teens, especially for those at risk of dropping out, benefit from improved school attendance and educational outcomes.³

Beyond the many developmental benefits, youth employment also improves the quality of life in communities. Dollars earned by these youth are most often spent within the community, so the ripple effects can improve the local economies of entire neighborhoods.

Yet, nationally there are not enough opportunities for the young people who need them. Due to the tightening of the labor market, increased competition for entry level jobs from older adults,

and a divestment of public resources, labor market participation rates for youth and young adults remain low. For opportunity youth, those ages 16-24 who are out-of-school and out of work, the lack of opportunities is especially alarming. While the overall national youth disconnection rate has improved, there are still nearly 5 million opportunity youth across the country. Persistent and troubling gaps also exist among youth of color.

The good news is that we know what it will take to ensure all young people, in particular low-income youth of color and those who face barriers, have access to employment and work experience opportunities. Within the youth employment field, decades of experience and research-informed practice informs local, state, and national policy, funding strategies and programming.

In my time, I would like to emphasize three key points from best practice research:

1. Effective local youth employment systems provide a continuum of progressive career, employment, and work experiences based on age, experience, and ability. These should align and coordinate with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and youth-serving systems.

- Providing a range of work experiences expose youth to a variety of work environments and career options, and also fosters the development of appropriate workplace skills. This approach operates on the premise that there is no one “right” or “best” approach to getting youth connected to the labor market.
- While many major cities in the US operate summer jobs programs, a critical element to ensuring a systems approach is determining how summer employment experiences connect to year-round, age-appropriate opportunities. In our work, we’ve found that cities, in strong partnership and alignment with workforce development boards, are implementing work experiences that enable young people to progress along a continuum.
 - The starting point is often the most sheltered experiences (for example, community service or subsidized employment at non-profits for younger youth during the summer months as a first experience).
 - From there, young people can move to unsubsidized private sector workplaces (this can include internships for teens and young adults who have already had summer or year-round try-out employment opportunities and have demonstrated readiness); or some young people are engaged in subsidized employment (such as transitional jobs that have demonstrated effectiveness for youth with multiple barriers to employment, including those with criminal histories or who have experience homelessness, and/or mental/substance abuse issues).
 - Another option for youth in communities includes integrated education and training opportunities (particularly for older and out-of-school youth to “earn and learn” by embedding occupational and academic skills building into work experiences). For example, in Massachusetts, the Commonwealth Corporation focuses on getting youth on a pathway with long-term goals. They emphasize solid, transferable, foundational or early work skills, academic persistence with

career aspirations, a clear pathway plan that includes “now,” “soon,” and “future” jobs, and healthy decision-making and reduction of risky behaviors.⁴

2. A focus on early work skills and mastery should be embedded in the workforce system delivery model and should include partner organizations and partner systems, such as the secondary and postsecondary education systems.

- In an analysis of more than 380 studies from around the world, Child Trends and FHI 360 identified the skills most “frequently sought by employers,” which included social skills, positive self-concept, self-control, communication skills, and higher-order thinking.⁵ These are the skills that young people should master, regardless of the type of employment experience they are engaged in. This best practice was also emphasized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. But offering training in these areas is not enough; research is needed to assess the quality and effectiveness of these trainings. Nevertheless, there are bright spots in communities that have implemented a systematic approach to advancing early work skills mastery through career readiness. For example, in Hartford, CT, Capital Workforce Partners (CWP), the local workforce development board, in partnership with employers and community-based organizations, developed a comprehensive framework for competency attainment called the *Career Competency System* as the foundation for all youth programming and is a required model for all youth providers who are contracted through CWP. They have also partnered with local school districts to embed this approach within the schools.⁶

3. Youth employment delivery systems should pay special attention to populations that historically face barriers to labor market success.

- Youth populations that face barriers to labor market success includes but is not limited to young women and men of color, opportunity youth, court-involved youth, homeless and runaway youth, youth in the foster care system and those aging out, pregnant and parenting youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, and youth with disabilities. For example, because of over-attachment to the criminal justice system, geographic and social isolation, systemic education inequities, and low educational attainment, African-American young men face significant barriers to connecting to and staying connected to the labor market.⁷ “Special attention” manifests in a variety of ways. Many communities have expanded and tailored services to the needs of youth with barriers to employment, based on research and assessment. Examples include increased public-private investments and the adoption of policies and practice that target services to specific youth populations, such as opportunity youth, young men of color, and/or those with contact with the justice system. Another example is setting benchmarks and service goals for these populations and youth who face obstacles to entering the labor force.

Finally, we’ve found effective practice includes improving coordination with local workforce systems, maximizing opportunities in federal policy, exploring innovations in financial capability, and building the capacity of organizations and the workforce to advance quality improvement, share best practices, and develop standards.

CLASP commends members of the Council for holding this hearing on such an important economic and social issue. We look forward to being helpful as you continue to advance quality youth employment in the District. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Kisha Bird
Director, Youth Policy

¹ Pew Charitable Trust: Moving On Up: Why Do Some Americans Leave the Bottom of the Economic Ladder, but Not Others? (Brief – November 2003).

² Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Mykhaylo Trubskyy, and Martha Ross with Walter McHugh and Sheila Palma, The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults, The Brookings Institution (March 2014).

³ Andrew Sum, Joseph McLaughlin, Ishwar Khatiwada, et al., Still Young, Idle, and Jobless: The Continued Failure of the Nation's Teens to Benefit From Renewed Job Growth, Center for Labor Market Studies Northeastern University (2006).

⁴ Kisha Bird, Susan Lange, Clyde McQueen, "WIOA Expanding Opportunities for Low-Income and Out-of-School Youth," presentation, WIOA Gameplan for Low-Income People webinar, March 5, 2015, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/body/CLASP-WIOA-Youth-March-24-Webinar-.pdf>.

⁵ Laura H. Lippman, Renee Ryberg, Rachel Carney, Kristin A. Moore, Key "Soft Skills" that Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward a Consensus across Fields, Child Trends (June 2015).

⁶ Sara Hastings, Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt, Linda Harris, *Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery System: Examples of Effective Practice*, CLASP, 2010, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/Youth-Employment-Systems-1.pdf>.

⁷ Kisha Bird, Clarence Okoh, *Employment Pathways for Boys and Young Men of Color: Solutions and Strategies That Can Make a Difference*, CLASP, 2016, http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/BMOC_Employment.pdf.