

March XX, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey:

The Reconnecting Youth Campaign urges you to ensure robust funding for the range of programs that provide *education, training, national service, employment opportunities, and supportive services* to 16- to 24-year olds who are not in school or work (Opportunity Youth) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill. The Reconnecting Youth Campaign is a diverse coalition of national organizations that calls for scaling up effective federally funded programs to provide one million opportunity youth per year a real chance to reconnect to education, employment and service.

Across the United States, 4.9 million 16- to 24-year-olds have been separated from pathways to productive adulthood. Federally funded programs that help Opportunity Youth gain the skills, tools and networks needed to reach their potential consistently demonstrate positive impact. Yet these highly effective programs lack the resources to meet the demand: in program year 2015 the core youth-serving programs at the Department of Labor – WIOA Youth, Job Corps, and YouthBuild – were only able to serve 216,103 young people. Every day, these programs turn young people away who are seeking opportunities to build their job skills and enhance their educational credentials.

Congress should fund programs that serve opportunity youth at levels sufficient to reconnect 1 million youth per year, which entails increased appropriations of approximately \$4.5 billion per year. For more details on this proposal, and the benefits that it would yield, see the *Bridge to Reconnection* report¹.

¹ <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BridgetoReconnection.2016.pdf>

Congress must at least make a make a down payment toward funding 1 million bridges to meaningful education, training, service and employment opportunities each year for Opportunity Youth. At minimum, we request:

Funding at *authorized levels* for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs that invest in Opportunity Youth, which include:

- **Title I Youth Activities**
- **Job Corps**
- **YouthBuild**
- **Title II Adult Secondary Education Programs**
- **Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation**
- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.**

Funding at *increased levels* for:

- **Department of Labor's Reentry Employment Opportunities**
- **Corporation for National and Community Service programs, including AmeriCorps State/National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps**
- **Department of Health and Human Services programs, including Chafee Education and Training Vouchers, and those authorized under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.**

Decades of research show that investment in Opportunity Youth more than pays for itself, by improving the futures of young people, families and communities by reducing persistent poverty; increasing civic engagement; and improving health, education and career outcomes. Businesses that invest in hiring and training Opportunity Youth report that they outperform other entry-level employees, including lower interview-to-hire ratios, higher retention rates, higher job performance scores and faster promotion rates.

To become productive adults, all young people need access to wide variety of experiences, opportunities, and supports. Opportunity Youth hold this same tremendous potential if given the chance – if we make the choice to invest in them.

We hope that the Committee will provide robust funding for these programs across Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations. We appreciate your consideration of our request.

If you have questions about this letter or would like additional information, please email RYC@nyec.org and one of our campaign co-conveners will respond quickly.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,