

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
123 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

We are writing to urge you to include \$120 million for the Department of Labor's (DOL) YouthBuild program in the Senate FY2011 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill. President Obama has also requested \$120 million for YouthBuild in FY2011.

Including an appropriation of \$120 million for YouthBuild in FY2011 would sustain the gains made in the stimulus package and provide a modest increase from the \$102.5 million appropriated in FY2010. Based on our concern about the deficit, we have asked for only a modest increase, despite the enormous need and demand for YouthBuild across the country in urban and rural communities.

YouthBuild has demonstrated the ability to stimulate economic development in low- and moderate-income areas. It helps bring the most disadvantaged youth, who have dropped out of high school, or have been adjudicated, into productive employment, higher education, and civic engagement. YouthBuild has now added training in green construction skills, preparing its graduates for the new opportunities available in the green economy of the future.

YouthBuild has contributed significantly to local communities: since YouthBuild's authorization as a federal program in 1992, nearly 100,000 YouthBuild students have built over 19,000 units of affordable housing.

YouthBuild is a uniquely comprehensive, full-time, non-residential, community-based program sponsored by non-profit or public agencies that offer unemployed low-income young adults an immediate and productive role in rebuilding their communities. Students spend half their time

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attending basic education classes and the rest of their time receiving job skills through training in the construction field.

YouthBuild is also on the cutting edge of education reform for drop-outs and effective re-entry for offenders. Forty YouthBuild programs have now been chartered by their states, or authorized by their respective superintendent of schools, to provide high school diplomas and receive public funds as successful public schools reclaiming high school drop-outs.

The federal YouthBuild program has the benefit of a public/private partnership with YouthBuild USA, through which major private investments are made for innovation, and synergies are created with other federal programs. For example, last year the WalMart Foundation contributed \$5 million for green-building and piloting career tracks to nursing and the Gates Foundation contributed \$11 million for post-secondary education follow-through. Similarly AmeriCorps education awards are supplied to local YouthBuild students for their community service through YouthBuild USA. Thus, YouthBuild USA has complemented federal DOL YouthBuild funds with over \$120 million in innovative funds. This makes for a more dynamic and successful federal program, combining the innovative energies of social entrepreneurs with the federal line item.

The need for additional resources for YouthBuild is critical. Over 32 percent of America's youth are dropping out of high school with no prospect of becoming gainfully employed. In inner-city communities, that percentage rises to 50 percent. States are spending at least \$36,000 a year, per person, to incarcerate 365,000 16 to 24 year olds; 65 percent of whom have dropped out of high school.

Research based on 900 YouthBuild graduates shows that these graduates have a positive impact on their communities. More than 75 percent of YouthBuild graduates are either employed at an average wage of \$10/hour or attended college. Of those who had previously committed felonies, the recidivism rate was a stunningly low 15 percent, significantly lower than the 68 percent recidivism rate for most prison systems. Additional research shows a minimum \$10.90 return on investment, and up to \$43.98, for every dollar spent on any court involved YouthBuild student.

Today, there are 273 YouthBuild programs in 43 states engaging 10,000 young adults. The size and number of programs could easily be expanded to meet an ever increasing demand. Each year, hundreds more communities apply for YouthBuild funding than can be funded. DOL received 544 applications in January 2009, of which they could fund less than 200, even with the additional stimulus funds. The demand is equally great from individual young people. Every year local programs turn away nearly 15,000 applicants due solely to lack of funds.

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For these reasons, we respectfully request that you provide \$120 million in the Senate FY2011 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill to support and expand the YouthBuild program in the US Department of Labor.

Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

John F. Kerry
Tom Udall

Ben Cardin

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Patrick Leahy

Bob Casey, Jr.

Blanche L. Lincoln

Barack Sanders

Byron Dorgan

Ron Wyden

Carl Levin

Jeffrey A. Merkley

Roland W. Burris

Chris Dodd

Frank R. Lautenberg

Chuck Schumer

Rebbie Staterow

Herb Kohl

Norm Feigl

Jay Runkler

Jack Reed

Sherrill Brown

Daniel K. Spaka

Mimi Cochran

Barbara Boxer

Jeanne Shaheen

Shirley

Rabert Menendez

John Test

Wendell F. Brown

Paul Begala

Byron L. Dorgan