

Summer Youth Employment and Learning (SYELP)

“Open Letter”

We write regarding the importance of Connecticut’s \$5-million Youth Employment Program, which \$1.4 million supports summer youth employment programs in the Capital Region.

Major communities in Connecticut, including the Capital Region, have long realized high levels of youth unemployment, opportunity youth and the stark reality that only one out of four students in our urban communities gain a post-secondary degree. This fact coupled with area business and industry requiring two out of three individuals to have post-secondary degree skills and work-readiness experiences has resulted in an opportunity gap that continues to grow in the Region’s urban communities.

While steps have been taken to act on this skills gap, with the onset of the COVID 19 public health crisis these issues will likely only exacerbate, with the most immediate impact on high school seniors leaving with a significantly reduced capacity to enter a successful post-secondary college/career pathway. The SYELP program has been updated to include a comprehensive virtual instruction program, as well as some in-person work experiences, community-service projects and other SYELP experiences.

It is critical that the State of Connecticut continues its investment of \$5-million statewide, which further leverages an additional \$4 million from public/private sources, to support up to 5,000 positions for summer youth employment throughout the state. In the Capitol Region these funds support 800 of 1500 positions for summer youth employment and learning.

SYELP funds and activities engage youth in support of a 6-week, 120-hour program. This year’s SYELP program is being further supported by a planning effort of up to 25-30 organizations in Hartford to support new innovative programs, and also providing a virtual venue of summer youth employment options, given the COVID requirements by the State of CT, which reduces the availability of in-person work experience for youth.

Faced with these realities, considerable attention must be given to assure that significant public/private investments are made to a quality SYELP for this summer. Leading the list of concerns is that the well documented high urban youth unemployed and disconnected youth issues will only be further compounded by the impact of COVID-19 on urban communities that are disproportionately impacted. Urban youth are far less likely to have access to the technology and remote educational and workforce supports for their academic and college/career readiness. The sectors of retail, hospitality, culinary and other occupations hit hard by COVID-19 are the most frequent jobs for urban youth, which have now become scarce. This coupled with fragile community and family supports points to the potential that a significant worsening of urban youth disconnection will result unless immediate, aggressive public/private sector action is taken.

We encourage you fully support the youth employment needs of our communities to make these investments in summer youth employment.

Signed By: