

**TESTIMONY OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Good morning, Chairman Miller and Members of the Committee. Thank you for extending the invitation to appear before the Committee to discuss youth employment – an issue with critical implications today, as well as for our nation’s economic future.

America’s youth often face significant barriers to education and employment. Our schools struggle to keep young people engaged; and we applaud the efforts of Secretary Duncan to focus on high school reform and on ensuring that all students are prepared for education beyond high school and careers. However, the Department of Labor shares a responsibility to increase the number of youth attaining degree and certificates, to re-engage out of school youth and to connect the learning in school with opportunities in the job market. According to Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies published in August 2009, “The nation’s teen labor markets have been in a steep, nearly continuous decline over the past nine years, establishing new historical, post-World War II lows during the past three summers” and teens will continue to face declining employment rates through 2010. It is important that we focus on our economic future by ensuring that young people are prepared for, and have opportunities to experience, the world of work.

Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis has articulated a clear vision to guide our work – “good jobs for everyone.” To achieve this goal, young people need to acquire the work-readiness skills and knowledge to prepare them to succeed in a knowledge-based economy. Ensuring that all young people are well-prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce is a critical factor for their future. It is not always easy for youth to find good jobs on their own. Young workers historically have the poorest employment prospects, and those prospects are worse during difficult economic times. Current data indicate that there are a number of challenges facing America’s youth.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement data, approximately 5.3 million 18- to 24-year olds are living in poverty. In addition, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment and Earnings April 2009 data:

- 3 million youth ages 16 to 24 years are not in school and do not have a high school diploma;
- 4.3 million out-of-school youth ages 16 to 24 who have not gone on to college are not working; and
- 1.7 million out-of-school youth ages 16 to 24 who have not gone on to college are unemployed and looking for work.

President Obama is committed to addressing the challenges facing youth, both in school and out of school. To reach his goal of being first in the world in college completion by 2020, we must keep students on track to graduation, raise graduation rates, and ensure students who have disengaged have opportunities to re-connect to education and jobs. Blending work and learning makes education relevant and helps to prepare youth for successful careers. In addition,

the President supported providing additional funds to provide work experience opportunities and other employment services to our country's youth through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act).

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I youth formula program allocates funds to state and local areas to deliver employment and training services to low-income youth ages 14 to 21 years who face barriers to employment. Through the Recovery Act, the Department of Labor invested an additional \$1.2 billion in WIA youth formula funds to provide subsidized work opportunities to over 280,000 low-income youth as of the end of August 2009. The Recovery Act also allowed ETA to increase the age of eligibility for youth services to 24 years of age and support other services to this population. .

By the end of August 2009, approximately \$400 million of Recovery Act youth funds had been spent, a majority of which supported summer youth work experiences. In line with President Obama and Secretary Solis' belief that green jobs will be a key driver of America's economic revitalization and sustained economic stability, ETA encouraged summer youth programs to develop work experiences that would expose young people to jobs in the emerging "green" economy. For example, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, many youth received a combination of postsecondary training with worksite experiences in green jobs. Some of these youth participated in a partnership with Temple University, which provided them with Environmental Research Internships and experience working with researchers in the field. In another project run by Congreso de Latino Unidos and Harcum College, 40 youth were exposed to training and work experiences that promoted energy efficiency.

Local workforce areas across the country met the challenge to implement summer youth employment programs in an extremely limited timeframe. By the end of August, over 280,000

youth had participated in summer employment funded by the Recovery Act. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently completed a review of the implementation of the WIA summer youth program funded under the Recovery Act. GAO found that states were generally successful in serving increased numbers of youth despite having only four months to get the program running. Most states met or exceeded their target numbers for youth to be served by mid-August. However, GAO also found limited instances where local areas faced challenges in implementing summer programs, including determining and documenting youth eligibility and failing to pay youth on time. The Department is working to address these issues. GAO had two recommendations for the Department. First, they suggested that we provide further guidance on what constitutes a green job and, second, that we provide more clarity on work-readiness outcomes. We always appreciate GAO's work and continue to use their suggestions for improvement.

The Department is encouraging exposure to green industries, including green construction, through all DOL youth programs – YouthBuild, Job Corps, and the WIA formula program – as well as Registered Apprenticeships, which can provide a pathway for youth into good jobs. While the Job Corps program is not currently administered by ETA, it provides an important strategy for serving youth, and the Department has proposed to move the administration of the Job Corps program into ETA prior to the start of Program Year 2010 to foster a comprehensive approach to youth programs. The Recovery Act funding has enhanced our efforts in these areas with youth programs and will continue to impact our curriculum.

For example, the Recovery Act provided \$50 million for YouthBuild in the current and upcoming program years. YouthBuild provides job training and educational opportunities for low-income or at-risk out-of-school youth ages 16 to 24. They acquire academic and work-

related credentials while constructing or rehabilitating affordable housing for low-income or homeless families in poor communities. The YouthBuild program creates opportunities to re-engage out-of-school youth in education, skills training, and leadership development while serving their community.

About 20 YouthBuild programs are far ahead of the curve in providing training in green construction techniques, and knowledge and use of sustainable building materials. We believe that these experiences will help young participants compete for jobs in a changing construction sector.

In addition, the Department has introduced a new Apprenticeship Training Program, designed specifically for YouthBuild to support the transition of our young people into apprenticeship opportunities. In Portland, Oregon, the YouthBuild program created a registered apprenticeship with the Laborers Union to train its students in weatherization skills, and created green career tracks in several fields for its YouthBuild graduates in partnership with Portland Community College.

In order to maximize the effect of services to young adults, it is critical that we work with the Department of Education to build a solid foundation to support career pathways for all youth. The reauthorization of WIA presents an opportunity to build programs across funding streams to accelerate our progress. The Departments of Labor and Education have already been working to articulate a framework for discussion on WIA reform. While the Administration has not yet put forth formal reauthorization principles, the Department has held many listening sessions with stakeholders concerning WIA reauthorization. Here are some of the ideas we the agencies have about how best to serve at-risk youth:

- Exploring strategies that integrate compensated work activities and education.

- Emphasizing programs that are “proven” (through rigorous evaluation) or “promising” (based on a record with positive outcomes and operation to scale).
- Partnerships among the workforce system partners and secondary and postsecondary school systems. For example, State and locally-based employers, criminal justice systems, various social service providers, and others should be engaged to provide services to meet the wide variety of needs of at-risk youth.
- The collection of accountability performance measures that recognizes gains over time, avoids the selection of participants based on anticipated performance success, while serving those with employment needs.
- Serving in-school and out-of-school at-risk youth, aged 16-24, including: 1) young people in high school who are off track and at high risk of dropping out – especially those with poor reading or math skills; 2) youth who have already dropped out; and 3) high school graduates with poor skills who have failed to obtain jobs, noting these categories are fluid as individuals move in and out of school.
- Simplifying program eligibility and creating a convenient and easy ways to access programs.
- Sharing data related to State certification tests and other performance measures across Federal departments and programs; and supporting States in improving interoperable data systems that help identify strategies to increase student persistence and completion and better meet the needs of the labor market.

We are actively encouraging WIA youth program investments that address the needs of the hardest-to-serve youth, including a specific focus on high school dropouts and out-of-school youth disconnected from education and work. We need to develop strategies for serving these

youth that include a strong academic focus with an opportunity to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent and transition into alternative education and career pathways.

Finally, we need to direct resources to high-quality research and evaluations of youth programs. The Department is committed to rigorous evaluations and it is important that we use findings from research and evaluations to identify and disseminate successful strategies and promising practices, be brave enough to discontinue programs and approaches that are not working, find ways to improve existing programs, and create successful models or blueprints for replication. The Department is currently investing in a rigorous evaluation of the YouthBuild program as well as an implementation evaluation of the youth programs funded through the Recovery Act to better understand how these programs work and inform policy making. In addition, the Department is interested in data that will help us understand the long-term effects of youth training programs. In the FY 2010 budget request, the Department requested \$15 million for the new Workforce Data Quality Initiative which will leverage Department of Education investments to support the development of longitudinal data systems that track individuals' progress through the education system and into the workforce; a significant increase for ETA's research and evaluation, and a \$5 million Department-wide evaluation initiative.

Research is quite clear that this recession has had a huge impact on young people seeking employment. It was critical that we intervened in summer 2009 by providing summer employment experiences and other services for youth. The lessons we all learned in our first jobs made lasting impressions on our decisions about work over the course of our lifetime. For this generation of young people, the education and skills that they need to fully engage in meaningful work is fundamental to their success and the future of our country.

This concludes my prepared remarks, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.