



May 27, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate HELP Committee

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairman, Senate Budget Committee
Member, Senate HELP Committee

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Subcommittee
on Employment and Workplace Safety

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman, House Committee on Education and
the Workforce

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Education and the Workforce

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman, Higher Education and Workforce
Training Subcommittee, House Committee on
Education and the Workforce

The Honorable Ruben Hinojosa
Ranking Member, Higher Education and
Workforce Training Subcommittee, House
Committee on Education and the Workforce

Dear Senators Harkin, Alexander, Murray, Isakson, and Representatives Kline, Miller, Foxx, and Hinojosa;

On behalf of the thousands of young people served by the YouthBuild system each year, we would like to thank you for your dedicated work on the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. We applaud your commitment to producing a bipartisan, bicameral bill that will improve the nation's workforce development system for years to come. In particular, we would like to thank you for preserving the Department of Labor YouthBuild program as part of this reauthorization. We recognize that you were faced with many difficult decisions in this process, and we appreciate your recognition of YouthBuild as a program that continues to warrant federal investment.

There are an estimated 6.7 million disconnected young people in the United States, and an estimated 3 million of these young people are from low-income families and lack a high school diploma. Research produced in 2012 by Columbia University has shown that every disconnected 20-year-old will directly cost the tax-payer \$236,000 and will generate a social cost of \$704,000 over his or her lifetime. Employers report a skills gap, and need qualified employees to fill this shortage. At the same time, many young people face an "opportunity divide," as they lack access to higher education and career skills that are necessary to empower themselves in a 21st century economy. YouthBuild addresses both the skills gap and the opportunity divide by connecting young people with education and employment. This comprehensive, full-time, year-round program puts equal emphasis on education, hands-on experiential job training, leadership development, and service to the community for low-income students ages 16 to 24, who have left high school without a diploma. Through

YouthBuild, the most disadvantaged young people internalize the ethic of service and the commitment to taking responsibility for their own lives, their families, and their communities.

For more than two decades, YouthBuild has successfully encouraged economic development in low and moderate income areas, in hundreds of sites across the nation. Since YouthBuild began as a federal program in 1992, over 130,000 YouthBuild students in 46 states have built more than 28,000 units of affordable housing for homeless and low-income people in their neighborhoods while taking responsibility for their own education, employment, and families. They have contributed to the social and economic well-being of rural and urban communities across the United States. In the most recent completed cycle of DOL's grantees over 75 percent of YouthBuild enrollees attained their high school diploma or equivalent, and/or industry-recognized credential. Additionally, a robust 59.1 percent of enrollees obtained placements in college and/or jobs. According to all independent studies of YouthBuild programs, recidivism rates for court-involved YouthBuild students are 40 percentage points lower than the national average.

In recent years, DOL has successfully expanded the career tracks to include health care and other in-demand jobs. This enhancement is appropriately reflected in the new language in the authorization.

Clearly, the need and demand for these opportunities is enormous, and there is more work to be done. Across the nation in total there were three times more applicants than could be accepted into the DOL YouthBuild program over the past two years. We hope to work with all of you to ensure adequate federal appropriations are provided for YouthBuild in the coming years, to close the skills gap.

We thank you for your hard work and dedication to creating a workforce system that will include the most disadvantaged young people seeking a well-designed opportunity to become productive, contributing adults well prepared for important jobs in our society.

Sincerely,



Dorothy Stoneman
Founder and CEO, YouthBuild USA
Chairperson, National YouthBuild Coalition