



**Testimony before the New York City Council Youth Services Committee
Oversight Hearing: "Addressing the Needs of New York City's Latino Disconnected Youth"
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On behalf of the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce**

Good morning. I am Sierra Stoneman-Bell, Co-Director of the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC). I am testifying today on behalf of the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW) regarding the barriers facing Latino youth and the need for public policies that support their transition adulthood. I would like to thank the City Council Youth Services Committee and Chair Fidler for the opportunity to testify today.

As part of its work advocating for quality youth services in New York City, NFSC helps lead the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce, a coalition of more than 40 organizations dedicated to advancing policy solutions to improve and expand opportunities for "disconnected youth" to re-engage in education and employment. NFSC coordinates this Campaign jointly with United Neighborhood Houses and Community Service Society.

I will highlight key findings from the recent Community Service Society report on Latino youth and outline CTW's policy recommendations for supporting young adults in New York City.

Important trends emerge from the CSS policy brief entitled, "New York City's Future Looks Latino":

- Latinos make up **the largest share (33%) of the population under age 25** in New York City. There are 327,000 Latino young adults ages 16-24, representing the future adult majority.
- Latino youth have the **lowest school enrollment rates and educational attainment** of any racial or ethnic group in NYC. A higher percentage (56%) of Latino youth live in poor or near-poor households than any other racial group. Nearly 1 in 5 Latino youth is neither in school, nor working.
- Latino young adults are **largely English-speaking** -- 85% report strong English proficiency, and the majority (64%) were born in the US.
- Latino youth represent an **extremely diverse group** with varied employment and educational indicators. The three largest subgroups – Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Mexicans have very different patterns of participation in education and employment. **Puerto Rican males make up the most disadvantaged group** of youth in NYC, in terms of poverty, school enrollment, educational attainment, and employment.

To create policies that support their success, it is important to understand the strengths, needs, and diversity of Latino young people, as well as the social and economic contexts in which they live. This includes communities and institutions shaped by structural inequality and racism, the effects of which are felt by the rising generation. Latino youth make up a large portion (about 37%) of the broader group of young people who are not engaged in school or work – even before the recent recession, there were over 175,000 "disconnected youth" in New York City. This leaves a young generation largely disenfranchised from mainstream paths to economic independence and civic engagement and forecasts a City with a weaker workforce and citizenry.

New York City is home to several successful young adult program models, including the Learning to Work (LTW) initiative in the NYC Department of Education (DOE), and the Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Program and the Young

Adult Internship Program (YAIP) under the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). The Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) has prioritized young adults in its portfolio of anti-poverty initiatives. Still, there is much more to do to reach the scale that is needed.

Recently, the City has taken new steps that could improve and expand opportunities for young adults, including a full review of its workforce development system and the new Young Men's Initiative focused on improving outcomes for black and Latino young men. These represent opportunities for examining and improving the structures of support for young adults. To inform the City's policy approach, the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce makes the following recommendations:

1. Improve the current system of opportunities for young adults:

- a) **Design and expand programs models that work for young adults.** Successful models are comprehensive, flexible programs that emphasize education and basic skills, combined with career training and work experience, all within a youth development framework and supportive community. Community-based organizations have unique strengths in supporting youth in transition.
- b) **Better connect disparate services to develop pathways for young adults along the skills and goals continuum.** An improved system would be oriented to successfully transition young people to the next level, no matter where they start. More programs are needed that bridge literacy, work experience, and personal development.
- c) **Better align funding levels to address the service gap for young people with the highest need.** The majority of young people who have left school without a diploma are low-skilled and read below an eighth grade level. Yet most public funding is for the GED preparation level or higher. Program models making gains with low-skilled youth should be expanded.
- d) **Better target funds currently used for youth in adult programs.** One example is the NYC Human Resources Administration's Back to Work program, which serves large numbers of young adults and focuses narrowly on job placement. CTW recommends that HRA establish a separate service option for youth that would provide education and career services tailored to participants' needs and goals.
- e) **Support an accessible GED preparation and testing system.** Increase the number of GED passers, and ensure that efforts to raise GED standards are met with adequate resources and supports to do so.

2. Create a new city jobs program for young adults. With high unemployment and the likelihood of a continuing recession, now is the time for a vigorous jobs program for New York City, with specific emphasis on young workers. President Obama's American Jobs Act includes \$5 billion nationally for training and work opportunities for low-income youth and adults. CTW is ready to work with the City to support the American Jobs Act, which could result in jobs for over 30,000 youth in New York State. New York City should add local investment for a more robust effort to get young adults to work and college. CTW proposes a new effort that maximizes current opportunities and expands what works:

- **NYC Youth Service Corps:** Build on the success of models like the Civic Justice Corps and YouthBuild to launch a NYC Youth Service Corps to engage disconnected young adults in skill building, work experience, and civic engagement, while producing valuable service to the community. This could be paired with other resources, such as federal funding to renovate affordable housing, improve the City's infrastructure, and support human services.
- **Expansion of re-engagement models that work:** Learning to Work, Young Adult Literacy Program, Young Adult Internship Program, YouthBuild, literacy and career pathways, and college bridge programs like CUNY Start. Add a Learning to Work component to adult literacy and GED programs that serve young adults. Expand **summer jobs and year-round subsidized employment** with structured supports for young adults.

The need to improve education and employment prospects for New York City's youth has never been more pressing. Latino young people deserve heightened policy attention, as the largest and growing group of young New Yorkers. These are recommendations that we believe will support Latino youth and the larger young adult population to develop and apply their talents in this great city. Thank you for putting attention on this issue.