

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Victoria Cunningham
Telephone: 202.587.0616 ext. 30
Cell: (202) 262-0771
E-mail: victoria@dc-aya.org

AUGUST 18, 2008**PRESS RELEASE****COMMUNITY SPEAKS OUT ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF THE SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM***Citywide coalition offers recommendations to improve the issue-plagued system.*

Washington, DC – Providing approximately 11,000 of the more than 20,000 job placements for the District's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), community based organizations have a significant stake in the success of the program. The DC Alliance of Youth Advocates, a citywide coalition of more than 95 youth-engaged organizations, has called for a community meeting on the troubled SYEP on August 19 at 4pm in the Eaton Room of All Soul's Church at 1500 Harvard Street, NW. Providers, parents, and youth will share their experiences with and concerns and recommendations for the SYEP. In addition to the community, representatives from the Department of Employment Services, the Office of Contracting and Procurement, and the City Council are expected to attend.

In the spring of 2007, DCAYA and the Youth Action Research Group appealed for and won a special Saturday hearing on youth employment, held by Councilmember Schwartz and the Committee on Workforce Development and Government Operations. On May 5, 2007 youth and youth providers testified about their experiences with the Agency. During the hearing both short and long-term recommendations were made in regards to improving SYEP as were promises that the community concerns would be taken into consideration. Some of the short-term recommendations were implemented in the 2007 and 2008 SYEP, while the long-term recommendations, focusing on measures to target longstanding contracting, management, and issues of program quality were not instituted.

DCAYA members are first and foremost committed to serving youth and providing positive work experiences to SYEP participants. The group will present recommendations addressing the following major areas of concern:

21,000 SYEP Participants

The minimal OYP staffing increases did not meet the need for exponentially increased capacity. All youth were not placed in quality job placements, nor were job placements necessarily matched to youth interest or skill level. Providers were encouraged to build capacity quickly to meet the need of OYP to place more youth.

A 10 Week Program -The additional weeks of programming made it difficult to run programs out of schools and hire instructors. Organizations were not notified that the 10 week period was optional until the SYEP had already begun. Questions are on the table about whether youth want to work for nearly the entire summer.

Automated Payroll Processing System -Many providers did not feel adequately trained to use the cumbersome system. Some were instructed to submit hours both manually and through the new system. Due to glitches in this system nearly 10,000 youth were underpaid or not paid at all.

Training and Orientation – An expected contract with Junior Achievement to administer soft skill training and workforce orientation to SYEP participants was not solidified before the start of the program. Instead a week before the SYEP was to begin, providers were instructed to teach the Junior Achievement curriculum onsite, again, disrupting the set curriculum. Additionally, participants were accepted on a rolling basis and youth joined jobsites throughout the weeks, making training and orientation nearly impossible to implement.

Communication with DOES and the Office of Contracting and Procurement - Contracts were not confirmed in many cases until the days before the SYEP was set to start. One provider shared that a participant showed up to start work on the first day of SYEP, but the organization has never contracted with DOES. Organizations who specifically work with younger youth were sent older youth, and scrambled to modify their program. Some providers experienced a "refusal to communicate" with multiple calls and emails going unanswered. In addition to SYEP concerns, providers have had issue with contracts for year round programming. One provider has not received payment for services rendered to DOES since April.

The DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DCAYA), founded in 2004 is a citywide coalition of more than 95 youth-engaged organizations, youth, and concerned residents that work together to ensure policies, programs, and practices within the District of Columbia that promote and propel youth into positive, healthy adulthood. For more information, visit our website at <http://www.dc-aya.org>.

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