



TESTIMONY

Budget Hearing for DOES

April 22, 2008

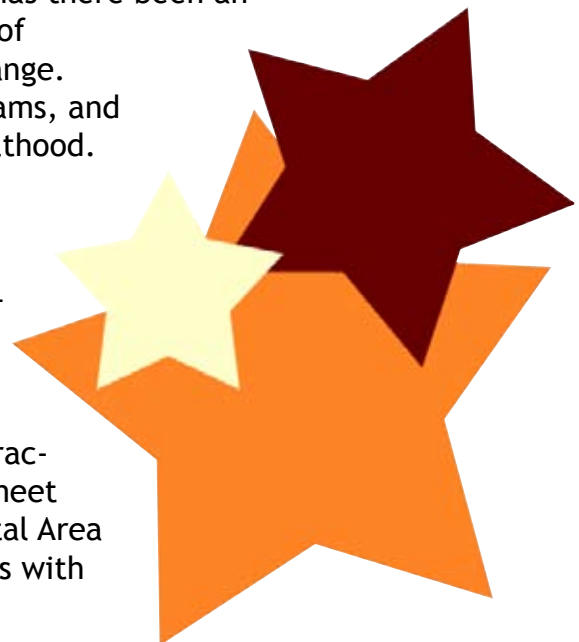
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Good afternoon, Council members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Veronica Nolan I am speaking today as the Executive Director of Urban Alliance, a high school internship program for DC youth. I am also speaking to you today as a board member of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates, a coalition of youth-engaged organizations, youth, and concerned residents formed to ensure that all District of Columbia youth have access to high-quality and affordable developmental opportunities.

Let me begin by saying that Urban Alliance and the DCAYA appreciates and values the Council's tangible efforts to ensure that youth employment and training are critical components of the city's workforce development system. For the last 12 years, Urban Alliance has been employing youth in order to develop their untapped potential. Urban Alliance, and so many amazing programs in this city, positively impact the lives of DC youth everyday. The difficulty for those of us at DC youth serving organizations has been finding the capacity to provide both direct services to alleviate the immediate needs, and to advocate for change to address systemic issues.

DC Alliance for Youth Advocates bridges this gap. Never before has there been an organization like DC AYA which organizes and directs the energy of like-minded youth serving nonprofits to affect real, systemic change. I wholeheartedly endorse their mission to ensure policies, programs, and practices within DC support youth in a positive transition to adulthood.

Urban Alliance is proud to be a member of DCAYA, because their work helps support our mission to prepare DC youth from under-resourced neighborhoods for the world of work and a life of self-sufficiency. Urban Alliance accomplishes its mission through paid employment, mentoring, life-skills workshops, and financial literacy instruction. Our youth development model is based on the Nation Youth Employment Coalitions standards for best practices, and has been continually refined over the last decade to meet the unique needs of DC youth. Through a partnership with Capital Area Asset Builders we have also been able to provide our participants with



matched savings accounts that allow our participants to use their savings to afford college.

Employing youth works. Our city-wide, intensive year-long program has produced

- a 99% high school graduation rate,
- 88% college enrollment rate,
- 8 out of 10 students significantly increase their job skills, which improves their employability,
- and 90% of UA students open bank accounts and begin saving for the future.

Of more impact, but less quantifiable, are the efforts of over 100 caring adult mentors and exposure to DC's booming business sector. Urban Alliance's program model has had such an impact that we have garnered major support from the DC business community. This year over 80 corporations, government offices, and nonprofits supported youth employment by providing paid internships and adult mentoring. Committed partners include the World Bank, Fannie Mae, Comcast, the Washington Post, Morgan Stanley and Bank of America.

In light of my experience and Urban Alliance's organizational history, the following are my recommendations to strengthen youth employment in DC are:

Thoroughly review the existing landscape. There are strong programs and partnerships already in existence in the city. However we currently do not have a clear sense of all of the different types of employment programs offered to youth. It would be beneficial to know the types of programs that exist and learn from the organizational knowledge of nonprofits like Urban Alliance, who have spent years perfecting recruitment and curriculum efforts that are specific to the needs of DC youth. Help these nonprofits grow to scale so that they can provide their quality services to more DC residents.

Increase opportunities to employ more out-of-school youth year round. We at Urban Alliance have seen a great difference between youth who have the opportunity for year-round employment versus summer only employment. In 2006, 227 youth participated in the District's year-round out-of-school youth jobs program. Preliminary studies show that DC may have between 8,000 and 12,000 disconnected youth. DC AYA calls for the creation of more slots to employ out-of-school-youth to help them reconnect with school and work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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