



TESTIMONY

Selena Gonzales Jones
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates
Before Councilmember Marion Barry

January 16, 2008

Good Afternoon Councilmember Barry and members of the dais. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Selena Gonzales Jones. I am the Assistant Director of the Martha's Table Teen Program located in NW D.C. I will be reading my testimony on behalf of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates.

Martha's Table Teen Program is an after school program that provides local teen aged youth with character and social development, job training skills, academic support, and college preparedness, through group discussions, workshops, educational trips, and other engaging activities.

Martha's Table Teen Program has been a host site for the Department of Employment services Summer Works Program since 1997; and in 2003, became a part of DOES' Passport to Work Program, ultimately enabling us to have served over 450 summer youth in the District since 1997. In fact, several weeks ago, all council members should have received a package from our youth which exhibited just a glimpse of some of the things our young people learned during this year's summer works program.

With all the above being stated, I believe its fitting that my testimony focus on the importance youth employment in relation to the poverty in the District; more specifically why

- + Job Training and
- + Education

Should be seriously considered as effective strategies in the poverty reduction plan.

Importance of Job Training

1. In a city where amid the economic boom, poverty rates remain at their highest in nearly a decade, I believe that we can all concur that



a lack of job training skills and placement opportunities, leaves people financially disenfranchised, ultimately resulting in unemployment, and poverty for many the District's families (Moreno, 2007).

Strengthening and expanding youth employment programs would ensure that our young people are provided with basic job training skills concerning personal appearance, punctuality, and conduct in the workplace, in addition to an opportunity to learn valuable and transferable skills and work experiences that will allow them to successfully enter into higher education, vocational training, or the workforce following their high school graduation.

Importance of Education

2. According to educator Mwalimu Shujaa (1998), education is the process of transmitting knowledge of values, aesthetics, and spiritual beliefs from one generation to the next. Using Shujaa's definition, it is through education that we must combat the poverty issues facing the District's families.

With only 51% of the District's residents who only have a high school diploma being employed, it is obvious that there is a strong relationship between educational attainment, and employment opportunities.

As such, it is imperative that we strengthen and expand employment programs for D.C youth, in order to provide them with both job training and education; because it is only through these mediums that we will not only prepare our youth for success in all their future endeavors, but also equip them with the knowledge and tools to break the cycles of poverty within their families and local communities.

I thank you for this opportunity to testify before your committee today, and I am open to answering any questions you may have.

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References

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