

Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Bobby Scott
Full Committee Hearing
“Student Safety in the Job Corps Program”
Thursday, June 22, 2017

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for their testimony. Today’s hearing will discuss safety and security issues at Job Corps.

I certainly agree with Chairwoman Foxx that violence is unacceptable and the safety, health, and security of Job Corps’ students and staff is critically important. I appreciate the Inspector General’s attention to these issues over the years, and I believe the Department of Labor must continue to aggressively implement the corrective action initiated under the Obama Administration and make additional improvements as necessary.

We must work together to make sure Job Corps' students and staff are living and working in safe environments, but must not stop there.

We must also stand together in strong support of Job Corps and its vital mission. We must recognize and appreciate the opportunities it provides for approximately 60,000 of America's disadvantaged and vulnerable youth every year.

Madam Chair, as you know, an estimated 60 percent of Job Corps students dropped out of or were expelled from school. In addition, 56 percent enter the program reading at or below an eighth-grade level.

Virtually all Job Corps students are from low-income families.

Job Corp provides a safer environment for these young people and is transformational for the overwhelming number of students who finish the program. In 2015, more than 80 percent of Job Corps graduates found a job, went on to college, or entered the military and 71 percent

received an industry-recognized credential before graduation. Rigorous evaluations of the Job Corps have found that the program increases education levels and earnings, with youth over 20 finding the most benefit.

As the data and evaluations show, Job Corps is a ticket to helping disadvantaged youth achieve their educational goals, obtain a well-paying job, serve in the military, and build a better future for themselves. For some, Job Corps is a second chance. For others, it saved their lives.

So as we discuss the legitimate issues raised by the Inspector General and GAO regarding the safety and security with Job Corps today, I think it's reasonable to ask where these young people would be without Job Corps. Where and how safe would they be if not for this program?

In Mr. Barton's testimony, he notes that the national mortality rate for 16 to 24-year-olds between 2012 and 2015 was 70.88 per 100,000, while the comparable rate for Job Corps centers was 4.7. That means the risk of death for young people 16 to 24 nationally is 15 times greater than the risk for Job Corps students.

And what we pay for the Job Corps program each year pales in comparison to what we would be on track to pay for some of these young people if they are incarcerated, on public assistance, and on Medicaid.

Madam Chair, nearly 5 million of our nation's youth are both out of school and out of work. In 2015, 14 percent of youth ages 16 to 24 years old were unemployed—more than double the national unemployment rate. Twenty-two percent of our youth do not graduate from high school, and 40 percent of those who do are ill-prepared for work or higher education.

Whether they have personal barriers to college and career, such as involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system, or come from low-opportunity communities, our nation's disadvantaged youth deserve a chance to succeed.

To help make that happen, we should not undermine, consolidate, or eliminate education and vocational training programs such as Job Corps whose students – as Mr. Barton eloquently put it in his testimony – call him every single holiday break asking if they can return to the Job Corps center because they are concerned about violence in their community, the temptation to use drugs, or their own safety. Job Corps centers are their refuge.

So, yes, let's make sure the problems identified by the Inspector General continue to be addressed by the Labor Department, but let's not shoot at the wrong target here.

We need Job Corps more than ever, and we need more of it.

With that in mind, I am proud to say that our Committee has advanced bipartisan legislation to expand opportunities for young people. We have moved the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Reauthorization; and later today we will vote to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

I hope we will continue that tradition of providing opportunities for young people in the future as we work toward reauthorizing and strengthening Job Corps.

Before I conclude, I just want to say that it's unfortunate the Office of Job Corps withdrew from testifying at today's hearing. They would have been able to speak to how they have been addressing the problems and concerns identified by the Inspector General over the years.

I also would have asked them about Job Corps' zero tolerance policy. In the K-12 system, we've seen that zero tolerance policies are based on zero common sense and ineffective in promoting safety. Under Job Corps' current zero tolerance policy, a young person could be kicked out of Job Corps for being tardy for class or failing to adhere to dress code. This policy is counterproductive and fails to ensure that Job Corps students have a meaningful opportunity to succeed.

Again, I thank Chairwoman Foxx for convening this hearing. I yield back the balance of my time.