



## YOUTHBUILD COALITION

58 Day Street, P. O. Box 440322 • Somerville, MA 02144

Tel: (617) 623-9900 • Fax: (617) 623-4331

April 24, 2012

Michele

The Honorable John Kline  
Chairman  
House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable George Miller  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
2205 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

We are writing on behalf of our 800 member national coalition to express our grave concerns about HR 4297, the Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012.

While we applaud the efforts of your committee to update the workforce investment law, to build on its success and to ensure that it is producing the desired results, we believe the consolidation of WIA funds will lead to the elimination of funding for important workforce programs that serve our nation's out-of-school, out-of-work youth who lack both education and career credentials, and who, without targeted attention and investment, promise to be a permanent economic drain on society. On the other hand, the full development of their talents and skills is sorely needed, as employers find themselves facing a serious skills gap for the jobs available. An investment in their education and training will yield significant economic returns and contribute to America's global competitiveness.

The federal YouthBuild program is a competitive grant program, authorized in 1992 and first administered by Housing and Urban Development (transferred to Department of Labor in 2006) has a strong history of bi-partisan support among members of Congress, and has received the backing of four successive administrations because it is based on challenging young people to take responsibility for their lives and communities. Since its inception, over 110,000 young people, ages 16-24, all from low-income rural and urban areas and over 90 percent of whom had left high school without a diploma, have reclaimed their education and acquired job skills, and a sense of purpose in life.

Statistics pointing to the program's success are strong: 78 percent complete the YouthBuild program in which they enroll; and 62 percent of these move on to higher education or a job with wages averaging

above \$9/hour. The recidivism rate for youthful offenders who experience YouthBuild is forty percentage points lower than the national rate.

The YouthBuild model rewards the American principles of hard work and responsibility. It is an excellent investment that independent research has shown to return a minimum of \$7.80 for the education gains resulting from every dollar spent, and up to \$43.90 return for every dollar spent on a court involved YouthBuild student. YouthBuild costs less per person per year than the other full-time options for unemployed young adults: Job Corps, college, the military, conservation corps, and prison. Its demonstrated effectiveness is why 76 members of the House signed a bi-partisan YouthBuild support letter led by Representatives Robert Dold and John Lewis for Fiscal Year 2013 funding last month, and 43 Senators signed a similar letter.

Participants have built 20,000 affordable housing units in almost every state in the country. Recently, DOL moved to expand the program beyond housing and construction to help participants develop skills in the emerging sectors of health care, green jobs and technology. This new development underscores the successful record of this program and its graduates and it will help YouthBuild prepare American youth for gainful employment and self-sufficiency in the key sectors of our future.

Rep. Shelly Moore Capito recently described YouthBuild's impact on the Appalachian community in her West Virginia district: "YouthBuild has been successful in reconnecting young people with their education and providing them with training that will enable them to become productive, tax-paying citizens. In low-income communities, where our young people have fewer options, YouthBuild has been an important resource."

Through massive consolidation, HR 4297 will dismantle this program that was enacted into federal law, is run by nonprofit and faith-based organizations in 46 states, is supported by mayors (last year the National Council of Mayors unanimously passed a resolution in support of YouthBuild's federal appropriation) and the business sector (last year 100 businesses expressed support for YouthBuild), and has served as an important resource for America's most disadvantaged communities.

This evidenced-based model with its highly effective delivery system, established over the course of 20 years, is one which has been closely monitored by the federal government. DOL has effective systems of accountability to performance standards through data collection as well as systems of training and technical assistance. Decentralizing both the decision to fund YouthBuild programs and the process of insuring their quality would be highly inefficient and wasteful.

There are enormous ancillary benefits to the YouthBuild program. Programs have generated significant private funding from foundations and corporations (there is a required 25 percent non-federal match), derived from partnerships that have taken years to cultivate. YouthBuild programs produce jobs in their local communities: 2,000 for construction supervisors, counselors, and teachers, as well as approximately 10,000 transitional jobs for unemployed young adults building and renovating affordable housing in their neighborhoods.

Moreover, YouthBuild has helped to make communities safer places for their residents. Law enforcement officials consider YouthBuild a deterrent to crime, and independent research has shown that recidivism rates for court-involved YouthBuild students are 40 percentage points lower than the national average.

If HR 4297 were enacted, many states would certainly attempt to address the needs of disconnected youth by launching similar programs. However, it is unlikely that a seamless hand-off of the YouthBuild program from federal to state government would occur, given the time and cost involved in establishing necessary regulations and oversight to administer and ensure the quality of programs at the state level.

Disruption of the kind that is sure to result from HR 4297 would be extremely detrimental, effectively ending a resource that is in great demand (some 18,000 young people were turned away from YouthBuild programs in 2011 due to lack of funding), causing programs to close their doors entirely and leaving local communities stranded and a needed segment of our population under-developed.

Finally, in this era when we have become increasingly aware of the disparities that exist between and among various populations that make up our great nation, creating a skills gap and limiting upward mobility, it would be unfortunate to make a decision that would perpetuate a well-recognized problem rather than take steps towards an effective solution.

Simply stated, DOL YouthBuild works and contributes to America's global competitiveness.

We appreciate this opportunity to share with you our views. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your staff to provide additional information (student success stories, outcome data, conversations with program leaders and students) to aid you in your efforts to develop and advance a carefully crafted bill that will address our country's workforce challenges and at the same time meet the needs of 6.7 million out-of-school, out-of-work young adults who deserve our attention and support to become productive contributing citizens through study, hard work, and service to their communities.

Sincerely,



Dorothy Stoneman  
Chairman



Charlotte Golar Richie  
Co-Chairman