



Kelly, Durbin, Duckworth Introduce Bills To Increase Youth Employment Opportunities

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WASHINGTON— Today, Congresswoman Robin Kelly (IL-02), Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), and Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) introduced two bills to expand and increase access to employment opportunities for underserved youth. The Helping to Encourage Real Opportunity (HERO) for Youth Act and the Creating Pathways for Youth Employment Act will increase federal resources for communities seeking to create or grow employment programs and provide tax incentives to businesses and employers to hire and retain youth from economically distressed areas.

“Investing in better employment options for our youth helps to break a cycle of poverty and address a lack of opportunities that prevents so many young people across the country from reaching their full potential,” said Congresswoman Kelly. “The HERO Act and the Creating Pathways for Youth Employment Act will help prepare youth for the good jobs of our modern economy and increase the prosperity of our communities.”

“Increasing youth employment opportunities can help address poverty and crime across communities in Illinois. I’m proud to join Rep. Kelly and Senator Duckworth to introduce a pair of bills to boost federal resources for youth employment programs and incentivize businesses to hire and retain disconnected youth. As we recover from the pandemic, ensuring this generation of Americans has a fair shot at employment will increase the likelihood our youth will build safe and successful lives and improve the communities they call home,” Durbin said.

“Far too many young Americans live in neighborhoods that lack good jobs and economic opportunity while struggling with all-too-commonplace violence and danger. It doesn’t have to be that way, but it’s not going to get better unless we work together to do something about it. That’s why I’m so proud to join Senator Durbin and Congresswoman Kelly to introduce these bills to help open up new economic

opportunities for every American, no matter where they live or what community they grew up in,” said Duckworth.

In 2020, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 10.3 million 16- to 24-year-olds in the United States were both out of school and out of work. In Illinois in 2017, the number of unemployed and out of school youth ages 20 to 24 was 15.3 percent, and in Chicago, the rate was 19.4 percent. This issue affects communities nationwide – in rural areas, 19.3 percent of youth were out of school and unemployed in 2017. 17.4 percent of Black youth and 12.8 percent of Hispanic youth between the ages of 16-24 were out of school and out of work nationally in 2018.

These statistics reflect a long-term trend in communities nationwide. The recession generated by the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening youth employment opportunities. Barriers to employment at a young age can have devastating consequences on the long-term employment prospects of disconnected youth, including lower lifetime earnings, higher rates of incarceration, and opioid addiction. These factors also make disconnected youth significantly more likely to become victims of violent crime.

The HERO for Youth Act would encourage the business community to become a partner in addressing this crisis by hiring underserved youth who reside in communities with high rates of poverty. Specifically, the bill would provide a tax credit of up to \$2,400 for businesses that hire and train youth ages 16-24 who are out of school and out of work and youth ages 16-21 that are currently in foster care or have aged out of the system. The legislation would expand the summer youth program under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), which provides a tax credit to businesses that hire for summer employment youth ages 16-17 who are enrolled in school and live in highly distressed rural and urban communities known as Empowerment Zones, by doubling the amount of the credit to \$2,400 and expanding the program to include year-round employment.

The Creating Pathways for Youth Employment Act will make it easier for local governments and community organizations to apply directly for federal funding to create and expand summer and year-round employment programs for young people. The legislation would establish a five-year, \$1.5 billion competitive grant program for youth summer employment and a five-year, \$2 billion competitive grant program for youth year-round employment that will provide financial support for communities seeking to create, improve, or grow summer and year-round employment opportunities for youth ages 14-24. Fifty percent of funds would be reserved for programs serving in-school youth, and fifty percent would be reserved for programs serving out-of-school youth. Both grant programs would provide planning grants of up to \$200,000 for 12 months or implementation grants of up to \$5 million over 3 years.