



**Testimony to the New York State Assembly  
On the Workforce Investment Act and Summer Jobs for Youth**

**March 1, 2002**

Good morning. My name is Patricia Villaseñor and I am the Legislative Advocate for United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH).

UNH is the umbrella organization for 36 settlement houses in New York City. Our member agencies comprise one of the largest human service systems in New York City and the largest group of settlements in the nation. 8,000 employees operate over 500 programs and activities in over 335 locations, reaching 500,000 New Yorkers each year.

Services provided by the settlement houses include: youth employment programs, early childhood education, after-school programs, teen centers, ESL and GED classes, job training, tutoring, recreation, meals for the elderly, mental health counseling, drug prevention, housing for formerly homeless individuals and families, art, music and drama.

I would like to thank Chairman Scarborough, Chairwoman Glick, Chairman Green, and Chairwoman Nolan and the other Assembly members present here today for calling this hearing today.

I am here today to discuss how the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) has affected summer youth employment opportunities in New York State and City. I will be focusing on three main issues:

1. Since the implementation of WIA, there has been no legislatively mandated stand-alone summer jobs program;
2. Since 2000, New York State and City have had to provide funding to run a summer jobs program to meet the needs of youth seeking employment;
3. The eligibility criteria for WIA programs and summer jobs programs are different.

**New York State needs a summer jobs program**

As you know, after Congress passed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, federal funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) was eliminated. This change in federal law meant a loss of approximately \$75.5 million for federally funded summer jobs for New York State. In 1999, the last year the federally funded Summer Youth employment Program (SYEP) was in place, the State received approximately \$75.5 million to run the statewide summer jobs program. New York City received around \$53 million for summer jobs.

While WIA enables more flexible funding, it does not have a stand-alone summer youth employment component, and therefore does not allocate separate funding for summer employment. WIA mandates year-round programs for youth, of which a summer job is just one of 10 possible activities that a locality could provide, including: tutoring, occupational skill training, adult mentoring, and other activities. While year-round programs may be valuable for some youth, these programs may be unnecessary for many teens who simply need a summer job.

### **Struggle to secure funding for a summer jobs program**

Since 2000, the first year federal funding for SYEP was no longer available, the summer jobs programs has not had a separate and dedicated funding source. As a consequence, there has been an increased dependence on state and local dollars to maintain New York State's summer jobs programs. The State and City have struggled to pull together money from different sources in order to run the summer jobs program.

In the summer of 2000, the Campaign for Summer Jobs, a coalition of over 70 organizations, came together to secure \$35 million in State funds (thanks to the leadership in the Assembly) for summer jobs, as well as approximately \$10 million in New York City funds. The State's funds paid for 23,000 summer job slots statewide, 18,000 were in New York City.

In the summer of 2001, due to the persistence of the Campaign for Summer Jobs, the commitment of the State Assembly and the eventual agreement of the Governor, the State allocated \$25 million for the summer jobs program. New York City invested an additional \$47 million (combined TANF and City tax levy funds) for the program. The State's funds paid for 18,000 summer job slots statewide, 11,000 were in New York City (The City funded an additional 35,000 slots).

Unfortunately, for this summer, the Governor has proposed only \$15 million for a statewide summer jobs program. Once again, New York State and City are struggling to secure additional funding to run a full-scale summer jobs program. UNH has been working with the Campaign for Summer Jobs to advocate for the State to allocate \$40 million to a stand-alone New York summer jobs program, which would allow New York teens to have a reliable summer job opportunity regardless of changes in the federal law. Furthermore, we have been urging New York City to secure funding to run a full-scale summer jobs program for 50,000 youth this summer.

In order to avoid this yearly struggle for summer jobs funding, we encourage New York State to create its own summer jobs program to provide this important employment opportunity for our State's youth. Therefore, we urge the State to pass a summer jobs bills (A8372 and S5254) that would establish a permanent summer jobs program for the State. In addition, we ask that the State continue to make TANF funds available for this program.

### **Difference in eligibility for WIA and summer jobs programs**

The Governor stated in his Executive Budget that the \$15 million in State dollars allocated for summer job programs is “. . . the third and final year of TANF funding provided to allow localities sufficient time to phase-in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program requirements.” We want to emphasize that WIA programs were never meant to replace a summer jobs program. Two major differences distinguish the two programs.

First, WIA’s income eligibility criteria are different from the summer jobs program. Whereas, under the summer jobs program eligible family income must not be greater than 200% of the federal poverty level. This means that for a family of four the annual income cannot be greater than \$35,000. However, under WIA, eligible family income must not be greater than 70% of the Lower Living Standards Income Level. For example, for a family of four, their annual income cannot be greater than \$22,140.

Secondly, WIA requires that eligible youth have at least one barrier to employment such as being an offender, a drop out, pregnant or parenting, basic skills deficient, homeless, a runaway or in foster care, or in need of help to complete an educational program or to secure and hold a job. On the other hand, young people in the summer youth employment program are only required to be income eligible and in need of a summer job. Due to the WIA requirement, many youth who may benefit from WIA’s services are excluded from participating in WIA programs because they do not face one of the recognized barriers.

While my comments have been limited to how WIA has affected summer youth employment opportunities in the State and City, I want to remind you that the summer jobs program also provides valuable child care for working families in New York City. Every year, over one half of the teens employed through the summer jobs program work in summer camps as counselors. Without this source of staff, many of the camps would have to scale back their programs or raise fees, leaving working families with few or no options for structured, affordable and safe activities for their younger children during the summer.

We need to make sure that all youth have the opportunity to gain valuable employment skills. It is imperative that New York State work to preserve summer youth employment opportunities and that the State pass the summer jobs legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue.