

Helping to Encourage Real Opportunities (HERO) for At-Risk Youth Act

Sen. Dick Durbin & Rep. Robin Kelly

A significant percentage of our at-risk youth have become disconnected from the education and labor market. Research shows clear evidence of a strong correlation between communities where high rates of poverty, gun violence, and chronic unemployment among youth are prevalent. These factors suggest that increased engagement of at-risk youth in the labor market can have a considerable impact in lowering recidivism and violent crime among youth while improving their long-term health, economic, and educational outcomes.

The Need in Our Communities

Nearly 5 million low-income youth in the United States between the ages of 16-24 were neither employed nor in school in 2015. For youth of color in Chicago, joblessness is chronic and concentrated.

- Among youth ages 16 to 19 in Chicago, 12.9 percent of Black youth and 8.2 percent of Hispanic youth were out of work and out of school in 2015.
- Among youth ages 20 to 24 in Chicago, 39.1 percent of Black youth and 20.8 percent of Hispanic youth were out of work and out of school in 2015.

These startling figures reflect a long-term trend in our communities nationwide that was exacerbated by the recent recession. Many of the youth living in neighborhoods with highly concentrated poverty and unemployment are stuck in a vicious cycle that finds them lacking the necessary job experiences that prevent them from getting hired by potential employers. These barriers to employment result in economic conditions that may motivate these young people to engage in criminal activity. These factors also make at-risk youth significantly more likely to become victims of violent crime.

The Solution: Nothing Stops a Bullet like a Job

Ensuring that our at-risk youth have access to economic opportunities will help them develop the knowledge, skills, discipline, and sense of determination to live productive and rewarding lives. Further investment in targeted federal programs is necessary to provide meaningful employment opportunities for at-risk youth.

The HERO for At-Risk Youth Act

Recognizing that economic opportunity is critical to addressing the underlying causes of violence in our communities, the bill would encourage the business community to become a partner in addressing this crisis by hiring at-risk youth that reside in communities with high rates of poverty.

- *Expand job opportunities for disconnected youth*: Provides a tax credit of up to \$2,400 for businesses that hire and train youth ages 16-25 who are out of school and out of work.
- *Encourage employers to retain youth from economically distressed areas as long-term employees*: Expands the summer youth program under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), which provides a tax credit to businesses who hire summer youth ages 16-17 who live in highly distressed 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 bill also would limit the number of hours eligible youth can work while in school to no more than 20 hours a week.