



Testimony of

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Oversight: Examining the Implementation of the Young Men's Initiative.

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Good morning. My name is Moira Flavin and I am the Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 68-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chair Fidler and Chair Recchia, Jr., as well as the members of the Youth Services and Finance Committees, for holding today's hearing to examine the implementation of the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative (YMI).

In Mayor Bloomberg's 2010 State of the City Address, he asked David Banks of the Eagle Academy Foundation and Ana Oliveira of the New York Women's Foundation to chair a task force charged with identifying how the City could tackle the disparities faced by Black and Latino young men. In August 2011, the task force co-chairs submitted their report to the Mayor, which not only documented the significant disparities existing in outcomes across many well-being domains for Black and Latino young men when compared to outcomes for other racial and ethnic groups, but advanced a series of recommendations in the areas of education, mentoring, employment, justice and health. On August 4, 2011, Mayor Bloomberg launched the Young Men's Initiative, a cross-agency, comprehensive plan to tackle the disparities in achievement for young Black and Latino men through changes in policies and practices and the investment of resources.

As has been well-documented, including in the task force report, New York City's Black and Latino young men are more likely to live in poverty than their peers, live in homes without fathers present, drop out of school, and have more interactions with the City's social service and criminal justice systems.¹ Citizens' Committee for Children applauds Mayor Bloomberg for focusing the City on these disparities, Co-Chairs David Banks and Ana Oliveira for their comprehensive report and recommendations and Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs and Family Services Coordinator Melanie Hartzog for their work to implement the Young Men's Initiative.

The Young Men's Initiative is a multi-agency effort to support the advancement of Black and Latino young men. The initiative focuses on education, employment, juvenile/criminal justice, health, and responsible fatherhood. In addition to combining public and private funding to support programming in the above areas, the Young Men's Initiative requires City agencies to work together to identify barriers that youth face in accessing needed services and to develop strategies to overcome such barriers.

CCC agrees that it is imperative that we invest in programs for Black and Latino youth. We appreciate the initiative's ambitious focus on system change and are hopeful that the plans outlined in the Young Men's Initiative will help to improve outcomes for the City's Black and Latino young men.

Recent data from CCC's 2010 edition of *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, our bi-annual book detailing over 400 child well-being indicators, also provides a snapshot of the disparities confronting Black and Latino youth in New York City.²

¹ Young Men's Initiative: Report to the Mayor from the Chairs. August 2011. p8.

² The data from *Keeping Track* is also available at www.cccnewyork.org.

Juvenile Justice

- In 2009, males made up 80% of youth entering juvenile facilities.
- That same year, 58.3% of youth entering facilities were Black and 25.4% were Latino.

Education/Employment

- Though the drop-out rate for boys decreased from 2005 to 2008, it is still 15.9%, which is higher than city average (13.5%), and also higher than girls' rate in the same class (at 11.1% in 2008).
- The drop-out rate for Black and Latino students in the class of 2008 was 13.1% and 17.6% respectively.
 - Both percentages are higher than the rates for White students (9.8%) and Asian students (7.4%).
- The citywide average for youth unemployment was 7% in 2008. Black youth had an 8.4% unemployment rate, and Latinos had a 7.4% unemployment rate.

Health/Family

- As of 2007, 57% of teenage mothers were Latina, while 33% were Black.
 - These are the groups with the highest teen pregnancy rates.
- Latina and Black mothers are less likely to receive regular prenatal care.
 - 6.6% of Latinas and 9.5% of Black mothers receive prenatal care late in the pregnancy or not at all, compared to only 2.8% of White mothers.
- 43% of the 1.8 million children in New York City live in households headed by a single adult.
- 64% of Black and 59% of Latino children live in households headed by single adults.³

The Young Men's Initiative is a public/private partnership that includes an investment of over \$127 million total in programs targeting Black and Latino youth. Specifically, over the next three years there will be an investment of \$60 million of private funding (\$30 million from Bloomberg Philanthropies and \$30 million from the Open Society Foundation). In addition, \$23 million CTL has been baselined for the YMI. Thus, for the next three years, \$43 million is available annually. While detail on how all of the funds will be allocated is not yet available, \$24 million of the Open Society Foundation funding will be used to launch the Expanded Success educational initiative, \$18 million is designated for mentoring and literacy initiatives, and \$25 million will be to expand JobsPlus to five more public housing facilities, given its demonstrated success in one such facility as part of the CEO. In addition to the investment of resources, the YMI includes policy and practice changes that do not require new funds, such as the Mayor's Executive Order requiring agencies to assist youth in obtaining identification cards, a critical requirement for obtaining a job.

While not all of the details and specifics of all YMI programs are available today, in part because many of the YMI initiatives are still in development, CCC thinks that the key components are important to address the needs of these youth. Notably, many of the initiatives emphasize

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: Public Use Microdata Sample, 2010.
<http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

mentoring and literacy. CCC supports these core components as essential springboards that will help confront disparities and improve achievement for Black and Latino youth.

First, education is a critical component of the YMI. The YMI focuses on improving the graduation rate for youth of color and improving the career and college readiness of graduates. For example, the YMI supports the Expanded Success initiative, which focuses on college readiness in schools where principals have already employed successful strategies to improve graduation rates. This initiative aims to develop school-specific strategies that incorporate principals of “readiness” into the curricula. Building on what is learned in targeted schools; successful curricula can then be shared citywide. In addition, the YMI supports mentoring middle school students during OST, mentoring within Expanded Success, and peer mentoring in adult literacy programs to help young adults prepare for the GED. Furthermore, policy and program changes for the education component of YMI also include new data that DOE will be releasing; data by sex and race that will enable education officials, government officials and advocates to assess progress and areas of need.

Another component of the education portion of the plan is supporting the Young Adult Literacy Program (YALP), which will receive \$3 million dollars over the next three years. YALP was launched in 2008 as a partnership between the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the City’s public libraries. Since its inception, the program has successfully combined academic support with job readiness and case management services, many of which are components of the Young Men’s Initiative. CCC is pleased that this program will receive funding to help youth ages 16-24 reading below grade level prepare for the GED and pursue additional education and/or job training.

Second, a key YMI initiative designed to boost employment of young men is the expansion of the JobsPlus initiative to 5 more housing authority projects. JobsPlus had demonstrated success in one housing authority project as part of the CEO. In addition, CCC was pleased to see the YMI include Summer Youth Employment as a critical component of ensuring career opportunities. CCC urges the Mayor’s Office to ensure as many SYEP slots are funded as possible, even in the face of budget cuts.

Third, in addition to YMI’s focus on ensuring a seamless transition to school for youth transitioning from the juvenile justice system, the YMI advances several ambitious juvenile justice reforms. Central to the YMI initiative are the City’s efforts to realign state and city control such that the city would also be supporting the programs and services for youth placed in facility care post-disposition (which is now currently controlled by the state). The YMI also moves probation officers into the communities. Furthermore, the Justice Scholars and Justice Community programs would expand education and career exploration for court-involved youth. Finally, via Executive Order, the YMI will decrease barriers to employment for those who have committed crimes and help young men take steps to clean up their rap sheets. CCC is very supportive of the efforts the City has taken and will continue to take under YMI to produce better outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system and to prevent youth from coming into contact with this system.

Fourth and finally, regarding health and fatherhood initiatives, the YMI seeks to address the health needs of Black and Latino youth through pregnancy prevention initiatives, fatherhood initiatives and violence prevention programs. According to the plan, Project CeaseFire will create three violence prevention programs similar to programs that currently exist in Chicago and Brooklyn. This initiative is designed to address gun violence through interventions that start at the hospital after a shooting. In addition, Project REDRESS will work with young fathers to help them be better fathers and partners.

CCC agrees that tackling disparities facing Black and Latino youth requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses education, employment, juvenile justice, and health, and we are pleased to see that all of these aspects are included in the YMI. Ideally, youth should have strong connections to schools, families, communities and/or work places. Both preventing disconnection and addressing disconnection for youth are critical for their success and achievement.

As additional components of YMI are implemented, CCC would suggest that the City explore initiatives that keep young men connected to their families of origin (through family-inclusive services for teens and parents) and prevent these young men from being suspended from school. With regard to suspensions, data has shown both the disparate impact of suspensions on youth of color and that youth who are suspended from school are much more likely to drop out of school. Therefore, decreasing the use of suspensions is a critical component of addressing school achievement.

Furthermore, CCC believes we must do all that we can to preserve the services known to be effective in producing positive outcomes for children and youth overall, such as early childhood, after-school, alternatives to incarceration/detention, education/employment programs, and family support programs, many of which are included in the Young Men's Initiative. To that end, beyond the programmatic emphasis and initiatives already identified through the YMI, consideration should also be given to support and expansion of the following:

- Community-based alternatives to incarceration programs that already operate throughout the city.
- Youth development programs that include civic engagement as part of the curriculum.
- Young Adult Internship Program, which provides opportunities for low-income youth ages 16-24 who are not working and not in school to complete paid internships and receive assistance with job placement and/or educational placements.
- School-based health centers, which bring primary care into the schools and provide a safe place for students to go for health and mental health services.
- STEP-UP programs (School-based Treatment and Education Programs for Urban Populations), which reach teenage students in schools throughout the City and provide education about violence and disease prevention, testing, and treatment.

There is no doubt about the critical need for services to address the disparate outcomes facing young Black and Latino men in New York City. Citizens' Committee for Children is supportive of the Young Men's Initiative. Given the disparate outcomes that exist for too many Black and Latino youth, it is clearly time for the City to do more, not less, for children. As so many essential programs have faced dramatic decreases in funding, and there will be more difficult

decisions to make in the coming months, CCC urges the City to make consistent investments in child and youth programs to provide New York City's children and youth with a solid foundation for success and prevent disconnection and disparity.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.