Testimony of

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Before the
New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services

Oversight: The Summer Youth Employment Program Request for Proposals

November 30, 2012
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 69-year old, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring New York City’s children are healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chair Fidler, as well as the members of the Youth Services Committee, for holding today’s hearing to examine New York City’s Department of Youth and Community Development’s Request for Proposals for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).

CCC appreciates the commitment the City Council and the Administration have made to SYEP, given that participation in the program enables youth to gain job experiences, earn much-needed income, explore their career interests, interact with adult role models, and learn competencies that will help them transition to responsible adulthood, while reducing youth unemployment during the summer and providing families with supplemental income.

Unfortunately, while year after year many more youth apply for the limited number of SYEP slots available, DYCD’s SYEP RFP actually reduces the number of youth who can be served. Notably, while there are some programmatic enhancements to SYEP in the RFP, CCC is extremely concerned that: a) fewer youth will be able to participate in SYEP; b) the youth who participate will make less money for the whole summer than they currently do; and c) participating youth will actually be engaged in this positive youth development program for fewer hours during the summer months.

It cannot be understated how critical it is for SYEP to reach more, not fewer, youth. For instance, in the summer of 2012, DYCD received 132,500 applications, but only about 29,336 youth participated in SYEP. The enrollment of under 30,000 youth in the summer of 2012 follows a consistent downward trend: 30,628 children were enrolled in the summer of 2011; 35,725 in the summer of 2010; 52,255 were enrolled (with the assistance of ARRA funding) in the summer of 2009; 43,113 were enrolled in the summer of 2008; and 41,804 youth were enrolled in the summer of 2007. The RFP projects enrolling only 23,207 youth in the summer of 2013. This is clearly a large step in the wrong direction.

Furthermore, while the youths’ income from SYEP has been shown to alleviate some of the burdens on struggling families, youth are slated to earn less money in the plan outlined in the SYEP RFP. Currently youth ages 14-24 participating in SYEP work 175 hours (25 hours a week for 7 weeks) at minimum wage ($7.25)—making their total income approximately $1268.75. In the summer of 2013, youth will earn significantly less. Youth ages 14 and 15 in Option 1 would earn only $870 (20 hours per week for 6 weeks at minimum wage). Youth ages 16-24 in Option 2 and vulnerable youth in Option 3 would earn $1,087.25 (25 hours per week for 6 weeks at minimum wage). Given the economic issues facing many families, cutting SYEP participants’ summer income is also a step in the wrong direction.

In addition, not only will the fewer youth served make less income, but the participating youth in Options 1, 2 and 3 will also be engaged in positive programming for fewer weeks, as the

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program (including the educational components) is being reduced from seven weeks to six weeks. Keeping youth engaged in positive activities during the summer months, when school is out, not only enhances their development and well-being, but also prevents youth from engaging in risky behaviors.

Finally, as a general matter, CCC has questions about whether creating separate SYEP options for youth ages 14-15 and youth ages 16-24 is the best way to implement SYEP in the future. Separating younger teens from their older peers may well deprive both age groups of important educational and social opportunities that come with interaction between age groups.

Beyond CCC’s general concerns about SYEP serving fewer youth, paying youth less, and engaging youth for fewer hours, CCC has specific comments about the four service options outlined by DYCD. These comments are discussed in detail below.

**Service Option 1: Youth ages 14-15**

Apart from our expressed concern regarding the potential drawbacks of separating older and younger youth, CCC is pleased that DYCD is making efforts to respond to the developmental needs of younger youth by focusing on education and work readiness training for youth ages 14-15. We also appreciate the focus on service-learning outlined in the RFP, as it is a meaningful strategy to integrate community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. CCC appreciates that DYCD is giving providers the flexibility to develop age-appropriate programming and work placements to foster skills such as communication and decision-making, rather than requiring a certain program model. With that said, we hope that the options proposed in the RFP give providers enough resources to do the program planning necessary. CCC is also pleased to see that DYCD has not restricted which days of the week younger youth may work (as was originally proposed in the concept paper), and is continuing to compensate youth in Option 1 for their educational time (apart from the unpaid orientation youth are required to attend).

However, CCC is concerned about the reduction in weekly hours from 25 to 20, and the reduction in the number of weeks from seven to six, for a total of 120 hours (reduced from 175) for youth ages 14 and 15.

**Service Option 2: Youth ages 16-24**

As noted earlier, CCC is concerned about the plan to separate older youth from their younger peers. In addition, while it is positive that DYCD plans to maintain the total number of hours per week (at 25 hours per week) for youth ages 16-24 in Option 2, CCC is concerned about the reduction in the number of weeks (from seven to six) that the Summer Youth Employment Program would operate. As a result, participants will work a total of 150 hours, rather than the 175 in the summer of 2012, and therefore earn less money.

Furthermore, the RFP requires that youth in Service Option 2 attend an eight-hour unpaid orientation prior to beginning work. There is no longer a paid education component for 16-24 year-olds, which is a significant change from the 17.5 hours of paid educational time currently
(which includes orientation). CCC urgesDYCD to include an ongoing paid education component in the program in addition to the orientation. The educational component is a vital part of the SYEP model.

Service Option 3: Vulnerable youth

CCC supports DYCD’s plans to increase the number of slots for vulnerable youth from 600 to 1,000. These youth, who are either in foster care, court-involved or homeless, are most risk of becoming disconnected and they face significant barriers when entering the workforce.

We are also pleased that DYCD has included youth receiving preventive services from ACS in the vulnerable youth category, as we suggested in our feedback on the concept paper. While it is positive that DYCD plans to maintain the total number of hours per week at 25 for youth in this service option, we are opposed to DYCD’s plan to reduce the number of weeks from seven to six (as was also done in Options 1 and 2).

Pursuant to the new SYEP RFP, Option 3 participants will work a total of 150 hours, which is a reduction from the 175 hours vulnerable youth currently get to work. This therefore means that in addition to having less work experience during the summer, these youth will earn fewer wages. As is the case with Option 2, there is also no longer a paid education component for youth in Option 3. CCC urges DYCD to include an ongoing, paid education component for this service option. Many of these vulnerable youth could really benefit from this educational component. Lastly, CCC hopes that “vulnerable youth” ages 14-15 served under this service option will be able to participate in the same age-appropriate educational and work readiness opportunities as their less vulnerable peers in Option 1.

Service Option 4: Unsubsidized Jobs for Youth ages 16-24

Option 4 links high school or college-age youth who have prior work experience, but who currently do not have the skills to secure these jobs on their own, to employer-paid opportunities. CCC believes that the intensive training on interview skills, resume preparation, and computer use, will be very beneficial to youth participating in this service option. Furthermore, youth participating in Option 4 will have access to many different types of worksites that may not currently be available through SYEP.

At the same time, CCC is concerned that there is no clear incentive for youth to participate in this service option, as they are not compensated for the 30 hours of pre-employment training. Since this service option is only available to youth in high school or college with prior work experience, the youth may not have time to participate in 30 hours of unpaid training. In 2011, the NYC Ladders for Leaders pilot, which provides valuable paid internship experiences to participating youth, had over a thousand applications. 390 youth were invited to participate. Of the 390 who were invited to attend the training, 58% completed it, and 55% successfully obtained internships.3

3NYC Ladders for Leaders 2011 Report.
Conclusion

In closing, CCC believes DYCD’s Summer Youth Employment Program is a valuable resource for youth throughout the city. Rather than moving forward with the proposed cuts to the number of youth served by SYEP and the reductions in wages they receive, we urge DYCD to serve more youth and to ensure that 2013 participants earn the same amount in wages as was possible in the summer of 2012. SYEP participants in 2013 must be able to benefit from ongoing, paid educational opportunities, as well.

CCC looks forward to continuing to work with DYCD and the City Council in your efforts to build the strongest Summer Youth Employment Program possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.