Testimony of:

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Before the
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Committee on Youth Services

Oversight: Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

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Good afternoon. My name is Ariel Savransky, and I am the Policy Associate for Food and Economic Security at Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York (CCC). Joining me today is Baldino Baldeo, who is a Youth Action Member with CCC.

CCC is a 72-year old, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. As part of our commitment to ensuring New Yorkers know the facts, can share the facts, and can advocate for change, our work includes Youth Action, a program that gives NYC’s youth the tools they need to become successful advocates for change. CCC is also a member of the Campaign for Summer Jobs.

We would like to thank City Council Youth Services Chair Mathieu Eugene, as well as the members of the Youth Services Committee, for holding today’s oversight hearing to examine the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).

CCC also wants to recognize and thank the City Council for your longstanding commitment to SYEP. Every summer, thousands more youth are able to participate in the program because of the funding the City Council adds to the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) budget. This past year was no exception with your tremendous allocation of $21 million to add 18,306 slots last summer-- one third of all of last year’s slots were funded by the City Council.

BACKGROUND ON SYEP
SYEP is a win-win for youth, their families, communities and the NYC economy. SYEP is a six-week summer program that provides youth ages 14-24 with work experience, training, income and lessons in financial literacy.

Wages earned help to supplement family income, youth learn about budgeting and saving, and much of the earned income is spent in the local economy. For many families, still struggling with low wages, unemployment, and poverty, this income is critical.

There are four SYEP program models: one for younger youth; one for older youth, one for vulnerable youth; and Ladders for Leaders, which is a nationally recognized program that offers outstanding high school and college students ages 16-21 the opportunity to participate in paid professional summer internships. Ladders for Leaders differs from the traditional SYEP model in that it involves a competitive application process in which applicants are evaluated based on academic performance, an essay question and resume, as opposed to the lottery system used for the other SYEP models. The model for vulnerable youth prioritizes youth who are in foster care, receiving child welfare preventive services, are justice-involved or who are in the runaway and homeless youth system.

Job placements for all youth include opportunities in the public, non-profit and private sectors. This past summer, private sector worksites comprised 35% of approved worksites, an increase of 7% from the summer of 2014, expanding the industries in which youth were placed. This past
summer also included a representation of 17 different industries including healthcare, technology, retail, city agencies, and the financial and industrial sectors.1

A key component of SYEP is the educational component, which is comprised of a formal orientation for all SYEP youth and weekly 5 hour workshops for younger youth. The educational component provides youth with the opportunity to learn how to participate in the work force and how to manage money. The Ladders for Leaders educational component involves a 30-hour pre-employment training in which participants learn workplace readiness skills and business etiquette.

To help youth learn to manage money, DYCD has developed several critical linkages. Three bank and ATM networks provide fee-free ATM transactions to participating youth. In addition, participants are provided access to a Visa-branded card with fee-free store transactions, online card activity information, an end-of-programs earnings statement and the option of direct deposit. In the summer of 2015, there was a 65 percent increase in direct deposit use with 7,839 youth choosing to take advantage of the direct deposit option.2 Furthermore, 1,770 youth signed up for savings account and 5,800 set a savings goal average of $760.3 These opportunities to open savings accounts and directly deposit earnings into those accounts provide real-life lessons in budgeting and financial transactions that are invaluable for youth.

IMPACT OF SYEP
SYEP also has other important impacts both for the participants as well as the communities in which they live. A recent study from NYU’s Steinhart School of Culture, Education and Human Development found that participation in SYEP increases school attendance by about two additional school days.4 For students with lower school attendance rates (less than 95%), this increase was closer to four additional school days.5 The same study also found that among students 16 and older, participation in SYEP was associated with an increased likelihood that a student would take and pass the English and Math Regents Exams.6

SYEP helps make communities safer by providing youth with safe and productive opportunities during the summer. Above all, participation in summer employment programs has been associated with decreased risk of mortality,7 compared to youth who were not involved in these types of programs. Additionally, participation in summer employment programs is associated with decreased risk of being involved in violent crime or dangerous behavior,8 and decreased risk of incarceration.

2 Id.
3 Id.
5 Id.
6 Id.
SYEP also helps make communities more prosperous. The income earned by youth is often spent in the community, usually in businesses based near a participant’s worksite or home, or contributed to household expenses, positively benefitting communities in which participants live.

Additionally, the youth often work in non-profit and community-based organizations, government offices and local businesses, and with educational and social service providers. Their work helps organizations provide vital services to the community including child care and food assistance, allowing these worksites to better serve the community.

Notably, many youth serve as camp counselors through SYEP. This means that not only will failing to restore the 34,000 middle school summer programming slots be detrimental to the children who would have otherwise gone to summer camp, but the failure will also be detrimental to the success of SYEP this summer.

**UNMET NEED FOR SYEP**

Given these benefits it is not surprising that historically, SYEP always receives many more applications than job opportunities available. This past summer, 131,897 youth applied for SYEP, but the program was only able to enroll 54,263 youth (41% of applicants). As has often been stated, getting an SYEP slot is literally winning the lottery.

While we are grateful that the City Council’s commitment to SYEP helped to increase access (only 47,126 youth could participate in the summer of 2014), this trend is typical, with annual applications ranging from the 120,000-140,000 and participation ranging from 28,000-50,000.

**BUDGET ASKS**

Notably, the City’s Preliminary Budget failed to adjust SYEP funding to accommodate the increased minimum wage from January 2016, failed to baseline the $21 million added by the City Council in the FY16 budget, and failed to add any additional capacity to the system. This is very disappointing.

The current City budget for SYEP for the upcoming summer (FY17) only includes $35.9 million from the City and $15.8 million from the state. This would only enable 33,383 youth to participate. (Note that if NYC received the same amount of private funding and federal Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funding as last year, the City would have enough funding for 38,289 youth to participate).

We are urging the Administration to baseline funding to support 100,000 slots at a total of $131.5 million in city funding. This would represent an increase of $95.6 million in city funds for the summer of 2016 (FY 17)

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9 NYC Department of Youth and Community Development. *Annual Summary SYEP, 2015.*

10 Id.
As a partner in the Campaign for Summer Jobs, we look forward to working with the City Council to urge the Mayor to take this important step, and ensure every SYEP applicant can participate.

If the Administration does not baseline additional funding for SYEP in the Executive Budget, we hope that the City Council will be able to work with the administration to add funding to the Adopted Budget. At a minimum, we hope the budget will ensure the same number of youth can be served this summer with the January 2016 minimum wage increase, but we hope to continue expanding the program and will be looking to reach 60,000 children this summer.

To reach 60,000 children this summer we would need to add a total of $33.6 million to restore the slots added by the City Council last year, fund the minimum wage increase and add 6,000 slots. These 60,000 slots would be a step in the right direction toward reaching 100,000 slots by FY 19 and would be a manageable increase for providers should the additional summer slots not be announced until the budget is adopted in June. (While we strongly support 100,000 slots of SYEP, if the funding is not announced in the Executive Budget and is instead announced in June with only weeks for providers to prepare, realistically they could only accommodate 60,000 youth this summer.)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
To strengthen and expand SYEP, CCC respectfully submits the following additional recommendations:

1) Urge the Mayor to restore the 34,000 middle school summer programming slots
   - Mayor de Blasio did not include in his preliminary budget funding for summer programs for 34,000 middle school students, as was the case in the last budget cycle as well. Without this funding, middle schoolers will not have access to the summer programming they need, parents will be left without productive and safe places to take their children and the slots that were allocated for youth in SYEP to serve as counselors will no longer exist. This will diminish the capacity of SYEP to serve youth, as these placements will no longer be available. Furthermore, funding this program as an addition to the adopted budget in June leaves parents thinking they will be forced to find other placements for their children or take unnecessary time off work to care for children. Restoring these slots will remain a critical priority for CCC in the coming weeks and months ahead.

2) Integrate IDNYC into the photo ID verification process for youth who have difficulty providing photo IDs.
   - Many youth have trouble fulfilling the photo ID requirement. Providers report that youth—especially younger youth—do not have junior high school IDs, or report that the youth lost school photo IDs. IDNYC could be a good alternative for youth who do not have photo IDs, but the current timeframes do not match. Currently you accepted into SYEP have five days to submit this documentation, but it takes longer than that to receive an ID through IDNYC. We suggest that DYCD work with IDNYC to coordinate the photo ID process.
3) **Continue to maintain and expand SYEP for youth with disabilities and vulnerable youth**

- CCC applauds DYCD’s continued commitment to enrolling students with disabilities and vulnerable youth in SYEP. SYEP is an important way to engage youth and to connect them with opportunities for career exploration and academic and social growth. In the summer of 2015, 2,962 youth with disabilities\textsuperscript{11} and 2,078 vulnerable youth – including runaway and homeless youth, justice-involved youth, and youth receiving foster care and preventive services – participated in SYEP.\textsuperscript{12} CCC believes that SYEP is a valuable tool in the City and State’s efforts to ensure that all youth gain valuable competencies that prepare them for future work and education.

**EVIDENCE OF NEED**

The case for expansion can most effectively be made by hearing stories from youth. CCC’s Youth Action Program is an after-school program for high school students, which teaches youth how to engage in fact-based advocacy. After completing our Youth Action course, youth are eligible to become Youth Action Members (YAMS). YAMS develop their own youth-led advocacy projects and participate in CCC’s advocacy.

Following is the testimony of one of our Youth Action Members, Baldino B. Baldeo:

Young teens that are in high school and able to obtain working papers will often be very anxious to get a job to make their own money. SYEP is a safe and secure way for teens to do this. In addition to making some money over the summer, they can also get great work experience. Government agencies, hospitals, summer camps, non-profits and small businesses are just some of the job sites available through SYEP. Working in these types of jobs teaches young people how to have a good work ethic, such as being punctual, working with others, and acting responsibly. It also allows youth to manage their own money. SYEP helps young people build their resumes, making it easier for them to get other jobs in the future. Finally, they can also get an idea of whether they would like to pursue a particular career.

A few years ago, my sister was fortunate to be accepted into SYEP, and from that experience she found her passion in working with kids. It helped her to choose the right major in college and she is working toward a career in this field. In addition, she now has professional references and work experience to put on her resume. Unlike my sister, a very good friend of mine applied to SYEP 3 years in a row but never got picked in the lottery. She is graduating this year and has no work experience and no idea what she wants to do for a career. If she had been able to be a part of SYEP, she would at least have the work experience needed in order to apply for jobs in college. And there is the possibility it could have helped her decide what she wants to study.

Right now I’m in 11\textsuperscript{th} grade and would love to apply to SYEP but I’m extremely nervous that I won’t be able to get in because of how few slots are available. Having a summer job is a great way for youth to use our time productively and can help us with the shaping of our futures. For these reasons, increased funding for SYEP is an investment better than any stock or bond.

\textsuperscript{11} Id.
\textsuperscript{12} Id.
that’s available. If the quote “the children are the future” is true, then this investment is a crucial way to secure a great future.

Baldino B. Baldeo

B. Baldeo

CONCLUSION
In closing, CCC believes DYCD’s Summer Youth Employment Program is an invaluable resource for youth. We urge the administration and the City Council to work together to ensure SYEP is able to serve more youth at the higher minimum wage this coming summer.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.